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SOUL AS PARAPHRASE: THE FORMALISM

AND MINORITY OF PRAYER

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KIMBERLY MATHESON

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ABSTRACT

Philosophical and theological treatments of Christian prayer regularly overlook its formal stakes. As a type of limit-speech, prayer can be thought alongside the class of logical dilemmas generated whenever an element of a total set refers to the very totality of which it is a part. These dilemmas are grouped together in what Graham Priest calls the "inclosure schema" and, moreover, exhibit a non-self-identical structure that is also the hallmark of robust metaphysical materialisms (i.e., the structure by which matter constitutively fails to coincide with itself). This dissertation sketches an immanent materialist account of Christian prayer by bringing these two things together: (1) the formal inclosure paradox in which prayer participates and (2) the non-self-identity that characterizes materialist ontologies.

The dissertation begins with an Introduction that briefly sketches the gaps in the literature and the challenges facing a materialist account of prayer. Chapter 1, "God and Inclosure," then introduces Graham Priest's schematic for limit paradoxes and shows how Anselm and Pseudo-Dionysius's accounts of prayer fit this schema. Chapter 2, "Form-of-Life in Prayer," outlines a rather different approach to inclosure represented by Giorgio Agamben. Prayer is here treated as a devotional practice that scales life into an indivisible whole and inhabits the site of time's failure to coincide with itself. In this way, prayer resists the biopolitical excesses risked by inclosure, answers certain Foucauldian critiques of Christian devotion, and challenges theories of prayer that understand it to be primarily a mental or dialogic practice. Chapter 3, "Prayer as Quantum Chamber," puts prayer in conversation with François Laruelle's particle collider—a

prepared space in which the world takes on a minimal appearance and registers the effects of the real. On this reading, prayer is like a physicist's construction of a state vector; it gathers up a disciple's material occasions in order to present them to a kind of immanent vision. Finally, the project concludes with a brief fourth chapter that articulates a jointly Agambenian and Laruellian reading of the Lord's Prayer.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In his opening remarks at a conference on "Absence and Negativity" held in Jerusalem in 1986, Jacques Derrida finally broached a topic pressed upon him by commenters: the affinity (or, as he protested, the lack thereof) between deconstruction and Christian apophatics.[1] Derrida strolled through readings of Pseudo-Dionysius, Meister Eckhart, and Martin Heidegger until a list of divergences appeared: *différance* cannot be another name for the Christian God because *différance* is horizontally anterior rather than vertically transcendent, only quasi-real rather than hyper-real, an immanent feature of grammar rather than a numinous depth in being. Derrida then gathered these divergences around a formal distinction between the two camps: unlike deconstruction, negative theology *prays*. Positing no transcendent divine who could be addressed, feeling no metaphysical imperatives to satisfy, and refusing the fantasy of linguistic stability secured through liturgical performance, deconstruction's resistance to prayer set it definitively apart from the early Christian theology with which so many of Derrida's readers saw a resemblance. If critics required some differentiating characteristic to distinguish apophatic thought from deconstruction, wrote Derrida, they need look no further than prayer.

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[1] Jacques Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," in *Derrida and Negative Theology* (ed. Harold G. Coward and Toby A. Foshay; essay trans. Ken Frieden; Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1992), 73–142.

It is curious, then, that one of Derrida's most ardent admirers identifies prayer as a defining trait of deconstruction. John Caputo's 1997 book *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* ventriloquizes imagined Derridean invocations while attempting to comment systematically on the religious themes of Derrida's work. Describing all of deconstruction as a hope in "a certain messianic promise of the impossible," Caputo depicts Derrida as a prayerful disciple, fervently praying "*viens!*" and "*oui, oui*" toward this in-coming impossibility.[2] While *Prayers and Tears* is, without doubt, a blatant misreading of Derrida in religious directions, its juxtaposition with Derrida's lecture nevertheless exemplifies the motivating provocation for this dissertation project.[3] How can prayer be malleable enough to dissociate deconstruction from negative theology (Derrida) *and* to represent the most pertinent formal feature they share in common (Caputo)? What determines prayer's place as the formal expression of the differ(a/e)nce between these two thinkers? And how can such an important expression so quickly alter its allegiance? What makes prayer such an easy illustrative grab for Derrida and still so readily available to Caputo as a way of bringing Derrida to his knees?

This wrestle between master and disciple, in other words, performs something more than a simple misunderstanding between two deconstructive thinkers; it also performs the theoretical underdetermination of prayer within their writings. For Derrida and Caputo, prayer serves as illustration or stylistic affect rather than an object in its own right. They use Christian invocations to demonstrate deconstructive arguments, passively manipulating a kind of prayer which never

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[2] John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), xix.

[3] For a cogent critique of Caputo as erroneously theologizing Derrida, see Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008).

offers any theoretical pushback of its own. All availability and no resistance, prayer is presented as either fully explicable from within the Christian tradition or a purely pragmatic expression of more essential ontological commitments. Nor is this sort of underdetermined treatment of prayer limited to Derrida and Caputo; it is evident, in fact, in most academic approaches to Christian devotions. In religious studies, for instance, when prayer is not avoided altogether as a theoretical object, its felt indeterminacy is subjected to compensatory and over-determining quasi-scientific methods (anthropology, psychology, etc.) or hyper-specified historical lenses. These methods are no doubt crucial for illuminating the devotional practices of specific traditions at particular moments in time, but they remain far less useful for taking a stance on the theoretical stakes of prayer writ large.

Judeo-Christian forms of prayer have received some explicitly theoretical attention in phenomenology via figures like Chrétien, Levinas, and Marion, but their brief treatment of the topic also leaves much to be desired. It must be noted that later scholars who forward these particular discussions have done so in a largely theological rather than philosophical idiom, lending evidence to Janicaud's critique of Marion et al. as theologians masquerading in phenomenological disguise.[4] More to the point, there is reason to believe that phenomenology may not be an ideal lens for prayer in the first place; because phenomenology proper can only address topics with phenomenal content, it struggles to account for what the believer understands herself to be

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[4] As examples of more recent phenomenological approaches to prayer, see Bruce Ellis Benson and Norman Wirzba, eds., *The Phenomenology of Prayer* (New York: Fordham, 2005) and Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man* (trans. Mark Raftery-Skehan; New York: Fordham, 2004). For Janicaud's famous critique of the "theological turn" in phenomenology, see Dominique Janicaud, "The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology" in *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn"* (ed. Dominique Janicaud and Jean-Francois Courtine; trans. Bernard G. Prusak; New York: Fordham, 2000), 16–103.

doing in prayer (i.e., talking with a phenomenologically-unavailable God) and finds itself overly dominated by ethical questions. Although phenomenology is the most "theoretical" of all the treatments of prayer in the literature, close investigation reveals that the theoretical stakes belong, in the end, more to the phenomenological method itself rather than to any particular religious phenomenon that comes under its gaze.

Even within theology, where Christian prayer has received its most thorough treatment, prayer remains notably underdetermined and usually serves as a transparent container for an author's theological priors. If one is deeply invested in the Trinity, prayer becomes a way to take up the posture of the Son before the Father and to be incorporated into the inner communicative life of the triune divine. If another is anxious about the adequacy of language for approaching God, prayer is leveraged as a way to stabilize human speech and grant nearer access to heaven than constative predication allows. And if the writer is coming from the ethical motivations of liberation theology, prayer is now one more illustration of the revolutionary posture of the liberated rising up from his knees.[5] Although any and all of these approaches have clear theological warrant and meaningfully locate prayer within the religious praxis of their authors, the sheer plurality of interpretations speaks once again to the underdetermination of the object in question. It seems that prayer is so broad and so available for use to *any* purpose because, in part, it has been given no theoretical or ontological stakes of its own to anchor it. Prayer is what enters philosophy, religious studies, and theology to illustrate theoretical stakes that have already been uncovered. One kneels, so to speak, only after the thinking has been done.

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[5] For a helpful overview of prayer within Christian theology, see Ashley Cocksworth, *Prayer: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2018).

If prayer could thus be described as endemically underdetermined in religious studies, philosophy, and even theology, this seems to be the result of two primary factors. First, prayer has not yet been provided an adequate method, and we might make this a question of prayer's "minority." Prayer is importantly *minimal*—a piece of religious life and practice, part of a larger whole, and usually considered unthinkable outside of that whole. Isolated and left to itself, prayer looks like so many acontextual and purely pragmatic crumbs of a theory/praxis antinomy. As a result, prayer is either magnified to the size and resolution of a proper academic object or else dismissed as so many practical pieties; it either finds itself inflated with importance in a metaphysical ontology, grafted onto the ontotheological bulk of God, or else it is dismissed as a pragmatic expression of naïve belief *in* that metaphysical picture. What prayer requires instead, if it is ever to have theoretical stakes of its own rather than deriving its theoretical stakes from an already-theoretical religious or ontological picture, is a lens adapted to the fine grain of minority. Prayer demands a method that leaves it in its minimality, grants it dignity without inflating it commensurate with the stakes of a larger Christian worldview, be it traditionally Platonic or critically postcolonial. Prayer deserves a theory that thinks in terms of immanence, self-inherence, and minority rather than requiring every immanence to be coupled with transcendence, every self-identity to be extended beyond itself, and every minority to self-dispossess. One major aim of this dissertation is to see what happens when prayer is viewed through just such a theoretical lens.

But prayer finds itself underdetermined for a second reason, as well. Even more pertinent than its lack of adequate method may be its embarrassment as an object of academic inquiry.

Prayer finds itself pressured by a forcefully secular brand of shame. Assuming (as religious stud-ies often does) that there's nothing theoretical at stake in prayer beyond an expression of one's underlying theological commitments, prayer is quickly colored with all the naivety of religious affiliation and theistic investments. What sense could be made of Christian prayer, after all, fol-lowing the death of the Christian God? What theoretical interest could one possibly muster in spiritual invocations after Derrida nailed shut the Nietzschean coffin? To think with or alongside Christian prayer—rather than "from above" prayer in the guise of the transcendent academic ob-server of a reified anthropological object—is to refuse a certain secularity and to risk miring one-self in theistic affiliations and naïve practices. One risks showing too much religious skin, so to speak, letting slip a view into the closet or the bedroom, revealing too much of knees and arms and the erotics of religious desire. To take prayer as a site of earnest theoretical investigation be-trays too much heat and investment, entirely the wrong demeanor for academic neutrality. Re-gardless of the fact that postsecular theory knows academic neutrality to be its own kind of pro-vincial posturing, we still squirm under the artless simplicity of theologians speaking a touch too earnestly about prayer. Such a project flushes the cheeks. But flushed cheeks, circuitous lan-guage, a simultaneous metaphysical inflation and pragmatic denigration—don't these also read as symptoms? Academic thought stammers at, blushes over, and finally dismisses prayer, sug-gesting that, contrary to certain protestations, there is in fact a great deal to see here.

For my purposes, what there is to see will depend on examining the formal stakes that at-tend Christian prayer. Prayer is located at the very limits of language, ritually marking the site of humankind's distance from God. Because it is a form of limit-speech, prayer can be thought

alongside the class of logical dilemmas generated whenever an element of a total set refers to the very totality of which it is a part. These paradoxes are grouped together in what Graham Priest calls the "inclosure schema" and, for our purposes, designate a situation in which prayer is simultaneously within and without the set it describes, privy to a transcendent perspective while also trapped in closure.[6] The precise details of this dilemma will be spelled out over the course of what follows; for now it is sufficient to note that it is this illusion of transcendence-within-finitude that made liturgical speech so appealing as a logical operator for many early Christian (especially apophatic) thinkers. Its appeal for this dissertation project, however, is the resemblance between inclosure paradoxes and contemporary French philosophies of immanence. Indeed, a formalist investigation of prayer allows us to think theologically about the hallmark of robust metaphysical materialisms—namely, the structure of non-self-identity by which matter constitutively fails to coincide with itself.

In this way, this dissertation corrects for prayer's neglect in the contemporary philosophy of religion. Prayer is written off both because it seems on its face to require a metaphysical transcendence, à la traditional Christian ontology, and because it seems too pragmatic a devotional object to be worth philosophical investigation. Prayer is theologically inflated and philosophically dismissed, both over-broad and under-theorized, simultaneously too big to handle and too minor to be worth handling in the first place. It knows too little thought of its own and bears the weight of secular shames it did not earn. And all this, moreover, while reflecting key features of one of the twenty-first century's most consequential formalist projects. Prayer, it seems to me, is

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[6] See Graham Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

amply worth rethinking. This dissertation takes up that task while also contending, however, that prayer's dignity need not derive from sweeping metaphysical or theological claims and that there are theoretical stakes already evident in basic acts of personal, devotional prayer. One of my aims, then, is to think prayer in its minority as semi-detachable from religious systems and certain theological prioris. Only *semi*-detachable, of course—it would be obviously nonsensical to discuss Christian devotions without an eye to the disciplinary regimes of Western Euro-Christianity that conditioned the bodily postures and conceptual locutions that color its practice. All the same, however, wherever I can jettison bloated metaphysical claims and ontologies, I will do so. Prayer is not wholly independent from its conditioning religious tradition, but neither ought it be crushed by the full weight of the tradition writ large.

The nature of this project involves me in (at least) three areas of study or thought: the down-to-earth pragmatics of religious devotion, theorizations of radical immanence in contemporary French philosophy, and conversations about the imbrication of Christian metaphysics with Western sovereignty. I'll treat these in turn, figuring each as an adjectivally inflected question of method: Why *Christian* prayer? Why *continental* philosophy? Why *political* theology?

A first objection one might raise to the project as outlined above regards its simultaneous restriction and breadth. If I'm willing to countenance something as laughably unwieldy as Christian prayer writ large, why must it be specifically *Christian*? Isn't there something suspicious about limiting my topic only as far as the boundaries of a tradition that already knows global dominance? By the same token, wouldn't I be better served by an archive with a finer grain? Why not historically locate prayer in the particulars of 17th century France or the antebellum

United States, for instance? Regarding the breadth of "Christian prayer," I aim to calibrate my object to the aperture of the lens through which it will be viewed; a certain breadth seems to me to be required in order to comport with the level of abstraction entailed by taking Agamben and Laruelle as my primary thinkers. For the purposes of this project, the stakes of prayer lie at the level of things like kneeling, closing eyes, venturing speech toward a deity beyond the world, and taking up the formal language of the Lord's Prayer—all behaviors and operations and texts available across the entirety of Christendom. To narrow any further would be to risk distorting the resolution of the project. More importantly, however, I wish to skirt the overdetermination of prayer that characterizes so much of its academic discussion. Together with Laruelle I worry about the deadening effects of an object's capture in worldly effectivity, and alongside Agamben I wish to exercise a certain suspension of prayer's determinate historical particularities in order to make prayer more available for theoretical use. Uncovering theoretical and formal stakes can sometimes require ease with higher levels of abstraction than religious studies tends to be comfortable.

Regarding the raw Christianity of prayer as outlined here, I've set the parameters thus because of Christianity's entanglement with the history of philosophy—an imbrication that I not only find theoretically useful but that I also take as my object, in some sense. Many early Christian theologians and twentieth century logicians, though sitting at nearly opposite ends of the history of the West, can be drawn together on one specific issue: language's self-displacement at its own limits. Gödel and Tarski, for instance, discovered in the early twentieth century that any total system of sufficient semantic richness will always be in excess of itself. Any language that is

robust enough for self-reference yields either contradiction or the impossibility of its own clo-sure. Though only formalized in logical terms in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this is the same problem that plagued early Christian apophaticians some fifteen hundred years earlier; language's inability to name the All results in an infinite process of approximating God through apophatic negations and cataphatic re-sayings, spinning out an almost Russellian series of as-cending sayings in an attempt to solve the infelicities of previous linguistic iterations. For the theologians, however, language's apophatic self-undermining quality was a tool to be leveraged; it appeared to them a fortuitous discovery that could aid one's contemplative reaching for God rather than a sign of logic gone awry or a threat to the stable grounding of objective scientific inquiry. And just as early Christianity employed the transcendence of God to tame the potentially destabilizing force of these paradoxes, every era of modern philosophy (up to and including its post-structuralist and deconstructive veins) can be shown to opportunistically capitalize on mechanisms of transcendence in order to domesticate either the paradoxes themselves or render itself sovereign over every other kind of thought—or, at least, so run the Laruellian and Agam-benian critiques. Christianity and Western philosophy attempt in similar ways to get a handle on the paradoxes that arise at the limits of language and thought, and each is so characterized by the other that it would seem perverse to try to avoid the Christianity implicit in contemporary discus-sions of transcendence.

Precisely because Western thought and Christianity have each been determined by the other for centuries, it is the tangle between them that may be the most pertinent object for this project. By taking up residence within Christianity—and specifically within one of the devotion-

al operations of Christianity most pertinent to language and transcendence—I am choosing to preserve the tangle between Christianity and philosophy in order to suspend its authority and examine it as one more object among others. This project, in other words, is less concerned with Christianity or philosophy alone than it is with a joint problematic that concerns them both: the act of transcend*ing* at the limits of language and the non-inclosure or non-self-coincidence that is the structure of every transcendence. Christian prayer gives this site theological expression in the same way that set theory gives it mathematical expression and the way that the invariant structure of philosophy as a discipline gives it a more symptomatic expression still.[7]

This brings me to my second question of method: why *continental* philosophy? If the nature of transcendence is clarified through the formalisms of twentieth century logicians, why not center this project in analytic thought? Why set up shop within the legacy of Hegel, Heidegger, and Derrida rather than Kant, Frege, and Wittgenstein? First, following Paul Livingston, it is evident that both the analytic and continental traditions wrestle with nearly identical questions about the function of language and the non-self-identity of every sufficiently rich formal system.[8] Although these questions may achieve greater clarity at certain moments in analytic history they are not exclusively the domain of analytic thought. Given, then, that there are continental resources for continuing to think the question, the continental tradition is to be preferred for my

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[7] Kierkegaard might seem to be an obvious conversation partner for this imbrication of Christianity and continental philosophy, especially given his love of paradox and the importance of prayer to his project. Given my other parameters, I've chosen to use different thinkers for the conversation I'm here imagining, but it is worth noting that Laruelle explicitly situates himself in a Kierkegaardian legacy. See Francois Laruelle, *Christo-Fiction: The Ruins of Athens and Jerusalem* (trans. Robin Mackay; New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 66.

[8] See Paul M. Livingston, *Philosophy and the Vision of Language* (New York: Routledge, 2008) and *The Politics of Logic: Badiou, Wittgenstein, and the Consequences of Formalism* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

purposes because it prioritizes hermeneutic methods and thus makes for an easier conversation partner with the similarly-hermeneutic priorities of theology.

Continental philosophy also houses a particular conversation about transcendence and immanence that I intend to engage. I count myself among those theologians wanting to determine what religion looks like after the death of God and whether there remains a meaningful religious project without transcendence. My topic and chosen conversation partners already reflect those larger stakes. The place of prayer within Christianity is, of course, deeply tied to transcendence—so deeply, in fact, that Derrida could leverage prayer as a readily available difference between deconstruction and apophatic theology. Prayer would seem, on its face, to be one of the most fundamentally transcendent practices available in Western Christendom, given its dialogic presupposition of a God and its obvious attempts to rise above the everyday (whether in mystical or merely pious directions). This project takes that seemingly-transcendent object, however, and couples it with two philosophers committed to immanence. Agamben commits himself to the view that every instance of transcendence is genealogically revealed to be one side of an illusion used to fuel biopolitical advance, and that all these illusions are collapsible back to a fundamental identity at the level of the real (what he sometimes calls the *arche*). Laruelle's immanent bona fides are even more overt; he diagnoses all of philosophy, including its most trenchantly anti-metaphysical subfields, as mired in transcendence by virtue of philosophy's claim to be the authoritative discipline of the real. Indeed, Laruelle's commitment to immanence is more dogged and ruthless than any other I've yet seen. Taken together, Agamben and Laruelle frame a gauntlet of immanence through which I want to pass prayer in order to see what's left

standing on the other side. For the purposes of this project, then, I prefer continental philosophy to analytic because I want to cash in on its hermeneutic approach and because questions of transcendence are here more resonant with religious notions of transcendence—both reasons naturally facilitating a cross-over with theology.

I recognize, of course, that I am not the first on the scene with the idea of combining continental resources with theological questions in the name of deflating Christian metaphysical presumptions. That constellation of concerns has a long history and is well underway in what seems, in many ways, to be the liveliest corner of the contemporary theological academy—political theology. The use of Agamben in this project is already a nod to political-theological conversations. Not only is Agamben frequently discussed in political theology as it is practiced in the United States (and, for that reason, not always discussed sanguinely given Agamben's seeming infelicities on the topic of race), but Agamben seems quite willing to lend himself in political-theological directions. Several of his writings diagnose the boundary between politics and theology as a disciplinary illusion put forward by the ever-divisive and categorizing techniques of biopower (thus allying Agamben with several strains of postsecular critique, as well) and he regularly passes through a Christian theological archive en route to the political and philosophical critiques at the center of his Homo Sacer project.[9] Laruelle, too, exhibits his own kind of political savvy (though far less common a touchstone in political theology), occasionally cashing out his project on behalf of "victims" or "ordinary man."

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[9] See, for instance, Giorgio Agamben, "In Praise of Profanation," in *Profanations* (trans. Jeff Fort; New York: Zone Books, 2015), 73–92; *The Kingdom and the Glory* (trans. Lorenzo Chiesa; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life* (trans. Adam Kotsko; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); *Opus Dei: An Archaeology of Duty* (trans. Adam Kotsko; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

The larger theological stakes of this project, however, do not reside solely with political theology. It should be emphasized that this will be, at bottom, a straightforward *theology* in every earnest, plain-faced meaning of the term. Sometimes that theology will have critical teeth and sometimes that theology will require a jaunt through more straightforwardly philosophical stakes. At root, however, I aim to write a theology of prayer in a fairly traditional vein: one that takes up a Christian archive in hope of producing a theory of prayer that has meaning and use for a believer. This theological bent can be further described as a series of assumptions: I assume there is something theoretically at stake in prayer, that religion has something to offer thought rather than being primarily an object of postsecular critique or an engine for producing liberal ethical subjects, that Christian belief has its own internal rigor and rational warrant, and that it is not only possible but worthwhile to grant theoretical dignity to a devotional posture typically considered pedestrian.

This is not a theology in the sense of either an attention-seeking demand for the dignity of religion or a symptomatic anxiety veiled (thinly) in the argument that one's theological object deserves more philosophical attention. The task, as I see it, is simply to get a handle on what someone does when they pray, which seems to me already to bear considerable theoretical stakes—stakes that are, importantly, tied to the very minority of prayer. In this sense, to give way to the temptation to petulantly demand philosophical prestige would be to miss the point. The hope, at the end of this project, is that through this Rube Goldberg machine of twentieth century logic, contemporary French philosophy, fifth century Christian apophatics, and a shameless look at something as prosaic as prayer, a robust theory will emerge on the other end—a theory which

countenances prayer as a free-standing matrix for thought, a religious operation that conjugates religious materials and postures, but in a suspensive gesture that underdetermines the effectivity and biopolitical capture of the world.

To that end, this project proceeds across three main chapters. The first, "God and Inclosure," lays out the paradoxes of formal self-reference with the help of Graham Priest, using Gödel's incompleteness theorems as a strictly mathematical illustration of the inclosure schema. With the spare clarity of mathematical formalism under our belt, the chapter then proceeds to investigate the respective roles of prayer in Anselm and Pseudo-Dionysius in order to lend further warrant to claiming prayer as a kind of religious formalism. Anselm notably *prays* his ontological argument, proving the legitimacy of my claim that Christian prayer possesses formal stakes. Pseudo-Dionysius, for his part, uses prayer as a technique of stabilizing the cracks and seams in his project, which are themselves a function of his own entanglement with the limits of language. Both thinkers understood prayer to be a kind of iterative transcendence which, within a metaphysical worldview, seemed a feature rather than a bug because the illusion of repeated extension beyond each finite statement leant the impression that one was, in fact, making progress toward God. However, a deeper logical investigation of their respective treatises punctures this illusion. If iterative transcendence cannot solve the dilemma faced by both Anselm and Pseudo-Dionysius, what then remains for their model of prayer?

Chapter two, "Form-of-Life in Prayer," outlines a rather different approach to inclosure represented by Giorgio Agamben. Agamben, too, is a deeply formalist thinker, though his attention is occupied primarily by the structures of language and of sovereignty. Where Anselm and

Pseudo-Dionysius are elaborated in chapter one in terms of inclosure, Agamben is introduced as a thinker of non-self-identity, someone who represents the possibility of theorizing prayer as a species of immanence rather than iterative transcendence. This chapter thus begins to articulate a theology of prayer in conversation with two of Agamben's works, in particular: *The Highest Poverty* and *The Time That Remains*. After a broad introduction to Agamben's ontological project, each book is treated in turn. Prayer is here sketched as a devotional practice that scales life into an indivisible whole and inhabits the site of time's failure to coincide with itself. To pray on this model is to inhabit a posture that dwells in the world's non-coincidence in the right way and that, rather than responding to externally-imposed religious imperatives, is in fact generative of an outward-facing messianic life. In this way, prayer resists the biopolitical excesses risked by inclosure, answers certain Foucauldian critiques of Christian devotion, and challenges theories of prayer that understand it to be primarily a mental or dialogic practice.

Chapter three, "Prayer as Quantum Chamber," introduces this project's third and final thinker, François Laruelle, in order to return to immanence in a more overtly philosophical idiom and to extend the theological implications of prayer as a form of suspension. The chapter introduces Laruelle's non-philosophy in two "passes," first in general terms and then again with the aid of two formal analogues—Priest's inclosure schema and quantum physics. With the Laruellean picture clear, I then discuss prayer as a kind of particle collider—a prepared space in which the world takes on a minimal appearance and registers the effects of the real. On this reading, prayer is like the physicist's construction of a state vector; it gathers up the prayer's material occasions in order to present them to a certain kind of immanent vision (what Laruelle calls vision-

in-One). This is a vision that traces both the undulatory effects of the real (rather than the reified, stabilized, and overdetermined objects of the world) and that seeks out the "real a prioris" or invariants that reveal the world's resistance to the real. Prayer here is a practice of constant non-worldliness whose whole task, like that of the photographer, is simply to reassume the stance of vision-in-One and to do so on the mere occasion of particular objects or events.

Finally, this dissertation project concludes with a brief fourth chapter. Here, I articulate a jointly Agambenian and Laruellean reading of the Lord's Prayer in order to put the theology constructed over the previous two chapters to the test. I begin (à la Agamben) by looking to this prayer's relationship with the temporality of the imminent kingdom of God. Then (à la Laruelle) I examine the Lord's Prayer in the context of the decidedly linear, non-reciprocal logics of Matthew 5–6 and argue that the prayer's treatment of debt provides the a prioris that prayer, like non-philosophy, draws out of the world. Through these two thinkers and across these five verses, the Lord's Prayer is shown to be paradigmatic not only of subsequent Christian devotions but of the very theology forwarded in this dissertation.

There is, in the end, a great deal theoretically at stake in prayer, though it will require a certain shamelessness to see it. Christian prayer has typically not been approached with that shamelessness and as a result remains theoretically underdetermined in contemporary thought, including theology. More's the pity, too, given that prayer is exactly the sort of minor, immanent, pragmatic project most conducive to undercutting metaphysical bloat and seeing what remains for religion in a postsecular age. I wish to hang my hat on the wager that there remains a robust project for Christian theology and devotional practice. Artless theologian though I am, it seems

to me that Derrida was exactly right: to highlight the fault lines between all these different disci-

plines and forms of thought—indeed, to schematize, encapsulate, and displace them all—we

need look no further than prayer.

CHAPTER TWO

GOD AND INCLOSURE: THE TRANSCENDENT UTILITY OF PRAYER

Introduction: Anselm

The *Proslogion* of St. Anselm of Canterbury gifted Western thought with one of the most famous

logical proofs in human history. In the same gesture, though somewhat less well recognized, it

also bequeathed to commentators one of the most momentous prayers. The entire *Proslogion* is

addressed to God in the second person such that, by the time Anselm arrives at his famous one-

stop argument for God's existence, the argument is in fact *prayed* to the very divinity in

question. This entanglement of logical speech and prayerful speech is what concerns us in this

opening chapter, for Anselm introduces us not only to a hybrid logico-prayerful genre but,

through it, to a specific paradox that concerns Christian prayer quite directly: that is, the

conjunction of language with that which is ineluctably beyond it. Nor is this dilemma unique to

Anselm alone. The *Proslogion* embodies just one iteration of a common paradox that finds itself

repeated across entire swaths of Western thought, stretching from classical Christian theology all

the way into twentieth century mathematics. This chapter will take a first sampling of that

dilemma in the form of Graham Priest's "inclosure schema" and explore its implications for the

jointly dilemma-ridden and prayerfully-wrought treatises of Pseudo-Dionysius and St. Anselm.

Together, these writers show how prayer is often leveraged for transcendent purposes to stabilize

the inclosure paradoxes that haunt Christian theology.

The reason for such an exploration finds its first motivation in the uncomfortable proximity between rational proof and faithful forms of speech in the *Proslogion*—a proximity so uncomfortable (to modern sensibilities, at least) that much of the Anselmian literature prefers to extract the ontological proof as if it were pure logical content, distinct from the prayerful form in which it was originally offered.[1] Naturally, however, the two are inextricable. Anselm's logic *is* a prayer, and it calls forth further prayer as the treatise proceeds. "We believe that thou art a being than which nothing greater can be conceived," he writes. "So truly … dost thou exist, O Lord, my God, that thou canst not be conceived not to exist."[2] The proximity of prayer to proof in the *Proslogion* motivates this chapter by asking why anyone might choose to *pray* a logical proof in the first place.[3] This puzzle is compounded by another: the ontological proof is only a small portion of a much larger text and it arrives surprisingly early, bursting forth full-grown already in chapter two. If Anselm has so handily proved God's existence within the first few pages of the treatise, what does he spend the rest of the text doing? What of the remaining twenty-four

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[1] There are, of course, a handful of exceptions. Examples of those attentive to the prayerful form of Anselm's argument include Marilyn McCord Adams, "Praying the Proslogion: Anselm's Theological Method," in *The Rationality of Belief and the Plurality of Faith* (ed. Thomas D. Senor; Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), 13–39; Yves Cattin, "La Prière de S. Anselme dans le 'Proslogion'" *Revue des Sciences et théologiques* 72.3 (1988), 373–96; William Franke, *A Philosophy of the Unsayable* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), 260–61. For a look at Anselm's *Proslogion* in rhetorical and phenomenological terms, see Terence Sweeney, "Holy Rhetoric: Anselm's Prayers and the Phenomenology of Divine Compassion," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 81.5 (2020): 447–65. For a general introduction to the ontological argument, see Brian Davies, "Anselm and the Ontological Argument," in *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm* (eds. Brian Davies and Brian Leftow; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 157–78.

[2] St. Anselm, *Proslogion*, in *St. Anselm: Basic Writings* (trans. S.N. Deane; Chicago, Illinois: Open Court, 1962), 53, 55.

[3] Anselm's choice of form must surely be, in part, a function of the various addressees he has in mind for this text. Though God is the most explicit audience for the treatise, Anselm is acutely aware of the various monks who are eavesdropping around the edges. Prayer, in this sense, serves the double function of both piety and publicity.

chapters? Here, too, prayer is the formal house in which the treatise proceeds, shepherding along a curious emotional wrestle juxtaposed with its logical work. Anselm may have proved God's existence but he struggles to navigate the implications that follow, and both the proof and its implications run along track laid by prayer.

At first, the treatise proceeds smoothly as a contented meditation on divine attributes. Having comfortably proved God's existence, Anselm thinks, he can now proceed to meditate on God's qualities. Anselm's prayer thus continues blithely, introducing topics in the form of puzzles that are quickly smoothed out in a comfortable meditation on divine perfection. "How art thou sensible, if thou art not a body?" Anselm asks at the opening of one chapter. "How art thou compassionate, and, at the same time, passionless?" he begins another.[4] Anselm's prayer is now less about propelling heavy-hitting logical argument and more a conceit for introducing a series of divine attributes in quick succession. By the middle of the treatise, however, a problem appears. Though Anselm remains confident about the soundness of the ontological argument that grounds his meditation, it seems that the proof has not been as affectively satisfying as he had hoped. As if suddenly seized by doubt, chapter fourteen opens with a pointed question—still in second-person address, but now addressed to his own soul rather than to God: "Hast thou found what thou didst seek, my soul?"[5] The answer, it seems, is yes, but a rather complicated yes. He goes on: "But, if thou hast found him, why is it that thou dost not feel thou hast found him?"[6]

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[4] Ibid., 57, 59.

[5] Ibid., 66.

[6] Ibid., 67.

Anselm's puzzle circles around an affective rather than logical question: since he has conceptually attained God, after some fashion, why doesn't he *feel* the proximity to God that his intellectual work should have granted? Having searched his soul and found his affects wanting, Anselm immediately resumes his prayer and poses directly to God the question that his soul seemed unable to answer: "Why, O Lord, our God, does not my soul feel thee, if it hath found thee?"[7] There follows a chapter of remarkable pathos, as the previously-assured Anselm alternates between confusion and despair.

For our purposes, it is at the center of this pathos that we encounter Anselm's true logical dilemma and begin to witness the real traction afforded him by prayer. Over the course of chapter fourteen, Anselm comes to see that the difficulties of approaching God reside not simply in human finitude and fallenness, as he had imagined in chapter one, but that the other side of the coin proves equally devastating: not only Anselm's own fallenness problematizes his search, but God's unmatchable transcendence. "Is the eye of the soul darkened by its infirmity, or dazzled by thy glory?" he wonders. The answer, naturally, is both: "Surely it is *both* darkened in itself, and dazzled by thee. Doubtless it is *both* obscured by its own insignificance, and overwhelmed by thy infinity. Truly, it is *both* contracted by its own narrowness and overcome by thy greatness."[8] It is thus in chapter fourteen, not chapter two, that Anselm comes face to face with God's inaccessibility, because it is only in chapter fourteen that Anselm grapples with divine

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., emphasis added.

transcendence in its own right and, what's more, in consequences that are as emotionally fraught for this earnest disciple as they are logically ticklish for his famously precise mind.

As a result, Anselm is forced to revise his description of God. Still writing in prayerful tones, he concludes: "Therefore, O Lord, thou art not only that than which a greater cannot be conceived, but thou art a being greater than can be conceived."[9] God is not just the maximum point of human thought, but beyond human thought entirely, and so Anselm must start his search for God all over again.[10] Thinking he had obtained a conceptual approximation of the divine, Anselm learns that he was fundamentally in error; confident that he had secured God with a faithfully-rendered and worshipfully-offered proof of divine existence, Anselm instead feels God slip through his fingers. Prayer, then, is not only the rhetorical home for his logical moves but also becomes the therapeutic technique through which he works through his anxieties and disappointments. What had presented itself at first as an innocent logical investigation promising happy results has now devolved into a project shot through with misunderstanding and conceptual impossibility, set back on its heels and returned to its very beginning steps. The God Anselm sought does not coincide with the God he found, and through all the seeking and finding and the gap between the two, prayer comes flooding.

It is important to recognize that Anselm is not simply mildly dejected by God's inconceivability; he is gripped by far more existential stakes: "Lord my God, my creator and renewer," he writes, "speak to the desire of my soul, what thou art other than it hath seen, that it

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[9] Ibid., 68.

[10] As Yves Cattin shows, this is evident in the parallel themes, vocabulary, and logical structure of chapters one and eighteen of the *Proslogion*. See Cattin, "La Prière de S. Anselme dans le 'Proslogion'," 387.

may clearly see what it desires. It strains to see thee more; and sees nothing beyond this which it hath seen, except darkness."[11] For someone so confident in their logic to come to such pathos is arresting. But what, precisely, *is* Anselm's predicament here? Why does his treatise run aground on the non-coincidence of his two conceptions of divinity? And what sort of problem could not only grind to a halt one of the most famous logical arguments in Western thought but also rend it through and through with such pathos? Logical speech and prayerful speech thus find themselves in notable proximity in the *Proslogion,* to be sure, but it is not simply their proximity that interests us—it is the specific paradox that demands prayer as both its form of expression and its emotional balm. Through Anselm, we glimpse a storied theological dilemma, a classical Christian model for prayer, and—as hinted by Anselm's tears—that model's frustrations.

The Inclosure Schema

Anselm's dilemma is not unique to him, nor to medieval Christian theologians, nor even to metaphysical traditions writ large, but to anyone working at the limits of thought, conception, and expression. Put simply: one cannot speak the inexpressible or conceive the inconceivable, and any attempt to do so runs into paradox. This is Anselm's ultimate burden: to describe an indescribable God and to conceive an inconceivable deity. His pathos isn't simple disappointment, then, but the dread of a looming paradox. Indeed, Anselm's plight is so intractable that it finds itself repeated in a variety of guises all across the history of Western thought. Graham Priest, in his book *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, translates these paradoxes into formal logic, shows them to be endemic to the history of philosophy, and argues for the

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[11] Anselm, *Proslogion*, 68.

failure of every attempt at their resolution in classic logical terms. The end result of this investigation is the metaphysical posture for which Priest has become known: dialetheism, or the ascription of truth to both sides of an antinomy.[12]

Our interest, however, lies not with dialetheism but with the formal machinery Priest generates along the way: a schematization of the paradoxes, like Anselm's, that arise at the limits of thought. The purpose of this section, then, is to lay out Priest's formalism (known as the "inclosure schema") and illustrate its relevance to Christian theology and especially prayer. The schema will then perform a clarifying function in this and subsequent chapters, helping us keep our footing through a number of different writers and eras, including Anselm and Pseudo-Dionysius (on the Neoplatonic end of the spectrum) and, in subsequent chapters, Agamben and Laruelle. Nor is this application of inclosure to Christian theology a distortion of Priest's own method or aims. IAs we will see, Anselm is only one of the Christian theologians to appear in Priest's catalogue of inclosure paradoxes. In what follows, then, I begin first by laying out the inclosure schema and illustrating its operation through the examples of St. Anselm and Kurt Gödel, before briefly discussing its relevance to the philosophy of language through the work of Paul Livingston. Following sections will then illustrate the paradox in Pseudo-Dionysius in order to show the relevance of the schema to a theology of Christian prayer.

Priest's first description of the inclosure schema is blessedly straightforward: in each of the paradoxes generated at the limits of thought, he writes, "there is a totality (of all things

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[12] Priest defines dialetheism as an "approach … which takes the paradoxical contradictions to be exactly what they appear to be. The limits of thought … are truly contradictory objects." Graham Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 169.

expressible, describable, etc.) and an appropriate operation that generates an object that is both

within and without the totality."[13] The object's manifestation within the totality Priest calls

"Closure" and its manifestation outside the totality he calls "Transcendence." In each case, this

simultaneous closure-and-transcendence is generated by "some form of self-reference," usually

in the shape of some system's attempt to reflect on itself or a theory's self-application.[14] Though

the precise details become clearer as Priest's book proceeds, this is the schema in its most

general form, and its articulation allows Priest to take stock of a sweeping gamut of Western

intellectual history.[15]

Because Christianity incubated substantial corners of Western thought—especially in the

shape of a thought concerned with its own limitation vis-à-vis the divine—Priest traverses

theological ground in his first chapter. One of his earliest illustrations of the inclosure schema is

the fifteenth-century philosopher Nicholas of Cusa, for whom God is infinite and utterly

incomprehensible to the finite categories of human thought. The obvious result, of course, is that

"God is not only beyond comprehension, but facts about God are beyond expression."[16] This

fulfills the condition of Transcendence: God utterly transcends any and all comprehension or

speech. However, "this does not stop Cusanus expressing (and presumably comprehending)

various facts about God … Even to claim that God is incomprehensible is to express a certain

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[13] Ibid., 3–4.

[14] Ibid., 4.

[15] Though, it should be noted, these paradoxes are not limited to Western thought alone. They are also operative in Eastern thought, though dealt with rather differently and to illuminating effect. See Graham Priest, *The Fifth Corner of Four: An Essay on Buddhist Metaphysics and the Catuṣkoṭi* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[16] Ibid., 22.

fact about God. Hence we have closure."[17] The brevity of this summary ought not undermine its force or its illustrative value. There exists, for Nicholas of Cusa, a certain totality (of all expressible things) and a commitment to the notion that God must be beyond them. Paradoxically, however, he *expresses* the quality of God's inexpressibility which should, by definition, remain inexpressible. This self-referential move (by which the expressible realm reflects on itself in the form of reflecting on its own limitation in God) generates paradox— simultaneous Transcendence and Closure or, in this case, a God who both is and is not expressible within language.

Anselm, too, makes an appearance in Priest's early examples of inclosure. He begins by giving a reduced version of Anselm's ontological argument, which famously rests upon the Neoplatonic premise that existence is greater than nonexistence. Priest rightly notes that there are "many ticklish issues" with this argument,[18] but his stakes lie less with the ontological proof and instead with the limits of cognition invoked by Anselm later in the *Proslogion*. Citing Anselm's description of God as "something greater than can be thought," Priest succinctly summarizes the inclosure paradox at work here, as well: "The argument shows that God is not in the set of things that can be conceived (Transcendence). Yet Anselm obviously is conceiving God in putting forward the argument (Closure)."[19] Between Nicholas of Cusa and St. Anselm, then, Priest

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[17] Ibid., 22–23.

[18] Not least of which is that Anselm himself protests against this interpretation in his reply to Gaunilo. For an especially helpful and detailed overview of this exchange, see chapter five of Sandra Visser and Thomas Williams, *Anselm* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 73–94.

[19] Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, 58.

provides two examples of theologically oriented thinkers who express facts about the inexpressible, conceive the quality of divine inconceivability, or otherwise think about that which cannot be thought in any way. The result is simultaneous transcendence and closure, and hence that specific form of paradox named inclosure.

With the introduction of classical Christian claims, however, there also looms the specter of a classical Christian solution: what of the role of analogy in thinking the limits of thought? One might object, in other words: has Nicholas of Cusa *really* expressed the inexpressible or has Anselm *really* conceived the inconceivable, or have they perhaps merely approached by resemblance something that remains beyond them? This is precisely Anselm's own rejoinder to the risk of paradox in his argument, of which he was intimately aware. Our concepts don't apply literally to God, argues Anselm, but only analogically: "For often we speak of things which we do not express with precision as they are; but by another expression we indicate that we are unwilling or unable to express with precision, as when we speak in riddles. And often we see a thing, not precisely as it is in itself, but through a likeness or image."[20] Anselm's description of God as inconceivable is thus only analogical, he would argue, a term that approximates God in a way instructive to humankind but without purporting to describe God in actuality.[21] Priest, however, is not convinced: "This solution cannot be sustained. For in the claim that God is

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[20] St. Anselm, *Monologion*, in *St. Anselm: Basic Writings* (trans. S.N. Deane; Chicago, Illinois: Open Court, 1962), 175.

[21] It is worth noting, of course, that Anselm's notion of analogy is far more technically precise than simple "analogical reasoning." Analogy, in the middle ages, refers to a category of terms whose meanings are *related* rather than identical (univocal) or different (equivocal). The finer details of medieval linguistics, however, have negligible impact on my purposes here.

inconceivable 'inconceivable' must have its literal sense, or the whole force of the claim is lost."[22] An even stronger version of this rebuttal occurs in Priest's later clarification of Kant: as with Anselm, the problem isn't "our lack of *epistemic* access" to something ineffable but rather "a lack of *conceptual* access."[23] And since any meaningful statement demands the application of human concepts, an inconceivable God cannot be spoken in language with any degree of sense whatsoever. In short: "if the claim φ makes no sense, then the claim that it is as if φ makes no sense either."[24] The dilemma persists, the paradox remains, and Priest has thus articulated a succinct formula for the kind of logical quandary Anselm and his Christian compatriots consistently encounter in their attempt to think and speak about a divinity beyond all conception.

But there remains yet more precision in store. Priest's presentation of Transcendence and Closure, together with his exemplary instances in Nicholas of Cusa and Anselm (among many others), serve only as a first introductory pass at the inclosure schema, described verbally in order to familiarize readers with its logical moves and implications. In the latter half of the book, Priest makes his argument one turn more rigorous by arranging the inclosure schema in a diagram. This formalization comes in two steps—a first logical formalization drawn from Bertrand Russell and a second version, now diagrammed, with some generalized additions of Priest's own. We'll begin with the first:[25]

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[22] Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, 58.

[23] Ibid., 81.

[24] Ibid., 83.

[25] Ibid., 129. I owe deep thanks to Joseph M. Spencer for many discussions about the inclosure schema and its applicability to French continental thought. Many of the ideas in this section were developed in conversation with him.

(1) $\Omega = \{y; \varphi(y)\}$ exists

(2) If x is a subset of Ω: (a) $\delta(x) \notin x$

and (b) $\delta(x) \in \Omega$

The schema is here composed of two conditions ([1] and [2]), the second of which is followed by

two outcomes ([a] and [b]). Priest calls the first condition simply "Existence." It states that there

exists some set (Ω) whose elements (y) are all characterized by a certain property (φ). It is the set

of all y's such that some property holds of them, and the claim of condition (1) is simply that the

set exists. Thus, for instance, Ω might be the set of all grey-haired cats. The cats (y) are all

characterized by gray fur (φ) and the point of Condition 1 is simply to name the set that will be

the domain for the rest of the formalism. Given a set Ω definable in terms of some universal

property within the set, the rest of the formalism follows.

Condition 2 then draws a subset within Ω and calls that subset x. Once any such subset is

drawn, there follow two consequences, both of which are the result of the same function, δ. A

word on this function is in order. Here Priest recalls an earlier discussion of "generators," which

he defines as mathematical operators that, when applied to an object over and over again,

produce an entire sequence of objects of the same kind. Examples of generators include "adding

one" or "taking half of an object" or "forming the thought of an object,"[26] generating the

sequences {0, 1, 2, 3…} or {2, 1, ½, ¼…} or {cat, thinking about a cat, thinking about thinking

about a cat…} and so on. δ is a specific *kind* of generator called a "diagonalizer," so-called to

invoke Cantor's method for proving different cardinalities of infinity by moving diagonally

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[26] Ibid., 26.

through a table of patterned numerical rows.[27] The mathematical particulars, however, are not important for Priest's purposes. Instead, he explains that δ simply names "any function … that satisfies the schema."[28] Though this may sound opportunistically circular at first blush, he goes on to clarify: "A diagonalizer need not be defined literally by diagonalization; but, as we shall see, it is always defined systematically to ensure that the result of applying it to any set cannot be identical with any member of that set."[29] In other words, a diagonalizer is simply a generator that results in objects that are not identical with any member of the original set.[30] δ thus represents a whole class of generators that use the elements of a set to transgress the set's own boundaries. As Priest puts it, a diagonalizer is any function with the capacity to "tear through" the limits of a defined totality.[31]

When such a diagonalizing function is applied to the subset x, it produces the schema's first result: $\delta(x) \notin x$, or, in other words, when the function δ is applied to x, the result is not an element of x itself. In many ways, this merely recapitulates the very definition of a diagonalizer as that which produces something beyond the set on which it operates. With diagonalization,

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[27] See Cantor's 1874 paper, "On a Property of the Set of Real Algebraic Numbers" as well as his 1891 paper, "On An Elementary Question in the Theory of Manifolds," in *From Kant to Hilbert: A Source Book in the Foundations of Mathematics*, ed. William Ewald (New York: Oxford, 1996), 2:839–43, 920–22. The end result of this method was a clear demonstration that the set of real numbers, despite being infinite, is 'larger' than the likewise-infinite set of natural numbers. For a preliminary treatment of this and related proofs with an eye toward theological implications, see Adam S. Miller, *Badiou, Marion and St. Paul: Immanent Grace* (New York: Continuum, 2008).

[28] Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, 130.

[29] Ibid.

[30] So, for instance, Cantor's diagonalizing generator applies the rule "move diagonally through a table of patterned numerical rows" to generate entirely novel numerical sequences that are not identical with any other sequence in the original table.

[31] Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, 233.

Priest names an operation that is generative rather than subtractive or extractive. The second

outcome [δ(x) ∈ Ω] then says, also rather obviously, that the result of δ's operation on x will

remain an element of the total set Ω. This, too, follows quite tidily from the conditions laid out at

the beginning. x was only a subset of omega. If an operation generates elements beyond x, the

only place it can go is 'outside' the subset, so to speak, into the larger set from which it was

initially gathered. This is why Priest refers to the two outcomes (a) and (b) as Transcendence and

Closure, respectively: operating on the subset yields an element that *transcends* the subset but

yet remains *enclosed* within the total set.[32]

At this point, readers might notice, nothing paradoxical has yet occurred; everything

operates as it should, self-consistent and without contradiction. Difficulty crops up only once the

diagonalizer is applied *to Ω itself*. Because every set possesses itself as one of its own subsets, δ

can also be applied to Ω with the contradictory outcomes foreshadowed by Anselm and Cusanus:

"For (a) and (b) applied to Ω entail that δ(Ω) ∉ Ω and δ(Ω) ∈ Ω."[33] When applied to its own

limits, the operator on Ω produces an element that both is and is not an element of Ω. Here, then,

is the general schematic of the paradox that characterizes every thinker and logical dilemma

catalogued across the book. Given a total set, some one of its subsets, and a diagonalizing

function, inclosure paradox lurks in the wings. All that remains is for a moment of self-

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[32] It's worth noting that this is oversimplified to a certain degree. Depending on how x and Ω are defined, δ is capable of generating elements some of which belong to x and Ω and some of which do not. (If, for instance, Ω is the set of natural numbers between 1 and 100, x is the set of even numbers between 1 and 100, and δ is +50.) However, for Christian theological purposes, this simplified schematic applies quite nicely because Ω functions as the most total of totalities—namely, God.

[33] Ibid., 129.

referential application of δ to the limits of a totality before the paradox can waltz onto center stage with its contradictory outcomes. Diagonalizing operations are all well and good, logically speaking, until we arrive at the margins.

All this is illustrated visually a little later in the book when Priest moves on to his second general presentation of the inclosure schema, now in a diagram, as follows (figure 1):[34]
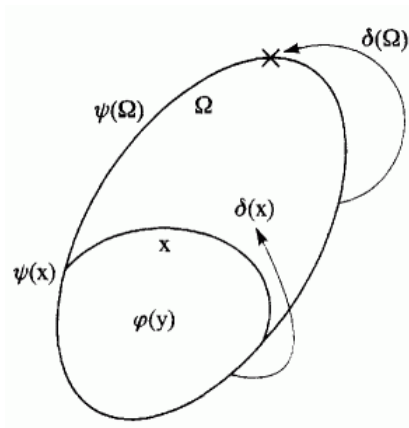
Figure 1. Inclosure Schema.

Here Priest extends the formalism just slightly with the addition of a second property (ψ) that characterizes Ω alongside φ. This second property, he explains, allows the inclosure schema to have slightly broader application, but apart from this extending addition, the schema remains the same.[35] $\psi(x)$ and $\psi(\Omega)$ designate the universality of this new property ψ, which holds for both Ω and its subset. From there, the rest of the schema proceeds as we have already seen. We have,

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[34] Ibid., 156.

[35] ψ allows the schema to take account of the paradoxes of absolute infinity as well as the paradoxes of iterability and conceivability but, for our purposes, this can be ignored. Priest summarizes the addition this way: "The main difference between the Inclosure Schema and Russell's is that in the Inclosure Schema the diagonalizer is guaranteed to function only on a sub-family of the power set of Ω, viz., those sets that satisfy ψ." Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, 133–34.

once again, the totality Ω and its elements y such that φ, gathered into a subset x. When the diagonalizer is applied to x, it generates an object that transcends the subset but remains within the total domain. When, however, δ is applied to Ω itself, it results in a contradictory object that must be somehow both inside and outside of the domain of Ω. Acknowledging that "this is somewhat difficult to depict," Priest explains that he has "done so by taking δ(Ω) to be a spot on the boundary of Ω."[36] With that, the inclosure schema arrives at its final form, allowing Priest to spend the second half of his book showing how twentieth century mathematics and philosophy of language is also shot through with paradoxes of inclosure in the terms diagrammed here.

My purposes, however, lie a different way than cataloging limit-thinking in twentieth century logic and philosophy. My stakes lie with the inclosure schema itself, the general usefulness of its formalism and, more specifically, what it allows us to see about the role of prayer in the theo-logic of two of Christianity's most celebrated thinkers. By strictly formalizing the inclosure paradox, Priest (like Russell before him) has done us the service of abstracting out a general pattern relevant to a wide swath of theology and philosophy; indeed, all of the major thinkers and case studies in this dissertation interact with it in some way or other. In this chapter, the inclosure schema illustrates precisely what causes paradox in Anselm and, as we will see in the following section, maps the related dilemmas of Pseudo-Dionysius. More pointedly, a diagram such as this allows us to isolate the precise cause of a limit paradox (a certain totality, the drawing of subsets on that totality, a diagonalizing operator…) rather than ascribing it to accidental contingencies (particularities of the English language, Neoplatonic metaphysics, set

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[36] Ibid., 156.

theoretical axioms, and so on). This level of formal precision keeps the logical forest in view despite the contextual trees.

And no aspect of this logical forest is more central to the generation of paradoxes than the moment of self-reference [$\delta(\Omega)$]. Self-reference and its flirtation with paradox has been a sticky wicket in logic for quite some time.[37] The ever-classic Liar Paradox, for example ("this sentence is not true"), relies at its core on a sentence's ability to refer to itself with the use of the pronoun "this." Another example might be a picture that contains a copy of itself, creating a theoretically infinite regress of photos within photos that never 'bottoms out' in a completed polaroid one could hold in one's hand. In the inclosure schema, self-reference is formalized as $\delta(\Omega)$, where Ω appears a second time as its own subset in the operation of the diagonalizer—and as we have seen, it is only at this point of self-reference (when δ is applied to Ω itself) that paradox occurs. In many ways, then, self-reference is the logical linchpin of inclosure: only when a totality attempts to speak itself are we properly at the paradoxical limits of thought.

Self-reference spells trouble for systems of various sorts (whether those systems are formal/mathematical, linguistic, political, etc.), because each is unable to describe what it is that ultimately legitimates it or that regulates its procedures and operations. To describe its own legitimacy in this way would require the system in question to refer to itself, leading directly into the paradoxes of self-reference. As a result, speech at the limits of thought cannot justify its own

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[37] Indeed, Russell believed that all the logical paradoxes could be traced back to some form of self-referentiality: "In all the above contradictions … there is a common characteristic, which we may describe as self-reference or reflexiveness … In each contradiction something is said about *all* cases of some kind, and from what is said a new case seems to be generated, which both is and is not of the same kind as the cases of which *all* were concerned in what was said." Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell, *Principia Mathematica* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1910), 1:61–2.

operation; totalities and formal systems and the frameworks they give for thought cannot explain their own rules in any consistent way. There appears, then, a gap between a system's operation and its grounding justification. What's more, this gap can never close itself (because to do so would always displace the system one step further with another iteration of self-reference). Because totalizing systemic self-referral yields contradiction, descriptive or justifying forms of self-referral are also barred.

The natural question then becomes: what about some *other* language? If a formal system cannot talk about itself without falling into contradiction, why not appoint some external language in which to discuss the system as a whole? This, in fact, has been a regular technique for grappling with inclosure paradoxes, but it raises tricky issues of its own. Most immediately: if talking about one system requires a metalanguage, in what language can one talk about the metalanguage? Even if another language were designated for that express purpose, some third language would be required to talk about the second, and then some fourth to talk about the third, and so on. A ramified series of metalanguages quickly becomes an endless regress of linguistic reference such that, far from avoiding the paradox, this solution "merely relocates it."[38]

These issues were brought out with particular force by Kurt Gödel's incompleteness theorems.[39] At the time of these theorems' publication, twentieth century logicians were attempting to put mathematics on a more rigorous footing, trying to correct for the self-referential contradictions that plagued basic mathematical notions. One solution, forwarded by

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[38] Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, 154.

[39] The following discussion relies heavily on Francesco Berto, *There's Something About Gödel: The Complete Guide to the Incompleteness Theorem* (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

the mathematician David Hilbert, was essentially a metalanguage of exactly the sort just described. Hoping to put mathematics on an unassailable logical foundation, Hilbert suggested constructing an artificial language in which to talk about arithmetic. Because he believed that mathematics had been too corrupted by natural language, this artificial system would consist of pure linguistic symbols lacking any reference to things like 'meaning' or 'truth.' Once these signs were manipulated according to precise rules, he believed, arithmetic could be generated from a completely transparent procedure without relying on either natural-language concepts or mathematical notions (numbers, sets, etc.). In essence, this would function as a higher-order formal system in which to talk about the basic axioms of mathematics.

Unfortunately, the problem turned out to be neither a function of natural language corruptions nor logical ambiguity in arithmetic notions. In response to Hilbert's program, Gödel showed that self-reference need not be a logical infelicity or a kind of semantic trick depending on external contextual factors, but that it was possible to build self-referential constructions within Hilbert's artificial formal system, as well. By inventing a procedure for assigning unique numbers to features of a formal system, Gödel demonstrated that the natural numbers alone could encode self-referential formulations in arithmetic systems. This resulted in the famous "incompleteness theorems" which together say that: provided a formal system of sufficient complexity (which Hilbert's system certainly was), it is possible to generate a sentence within that system that says *of itself* that it is not provable.[40] The most straightforward example of such

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[40] "Sufficient complexity" here simply means any system from which one can construct the basic truths of arithmetic.

a Gödel sentence is the statement "this theorem is not provable"—meaning, not provable in the system in question.[41] As in the case of the Liar paradox, this statement is obviously self-referential (though, unlike the Liar, this statement is concerned with provability rather than truth/falsity). Additionally, shadows of totality lurk in the reference since the system is speaking about itself as a whole. This Gödelian sentence quickly undoes the system's claim to either soundness or completeness: if the theorem *is* provable, then the sentence is false and the system is unsound (because it proves something false) but if the theorem is *not* provable, then the sentence is true and the system is incomplete (because it has generated a formula on which it cannot 'make up its mind,' so to speak).

At stake in Gödel's theorems was thus the simultaneous soundness and consistency of formalized metalanguages like the one proposed by Hilbert. Just like the mathematical system it purported to formalize, if the metalanguage were sound (i.e., producing only true statements), it could not prove it, and if it could not prove it (i.e., never terminating in a decision on whether or not such-and-such a theorem belonged to the system) then the entire metalanguage was doomed to be incomplete. Forced to choose between soundness and completion, the twentieth century logical project of putting mathematics on a firm foundation was forced to admit that there was no such solid footing available—at least not in the terms they had initially supposed. Speaking more broadly, Gödel's theorems also revealed in their own way the same contradiction that plagues bearers of inclosure paradox. Any system (of thought, numbering, speech, calculation,

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[41] Though it is important to keep in mind that this is a semantic translation of a mathematically-encoded theorem. For a wonderfully detailed and yet accessible introduction to the mathematics of the incompleteness theorems, see again Berto, *There's Something About Gödel*.

conception, description, etc.) that refers to itself transcends the totality which it has just

purported to close by encapsulating it in reference. Total systems with self-referential

capabilities, therefore, are plagued by a kind of non-coincidence: the "self" spoken of never

coincides with the "self" that does the speaking. Moreover, this dilemma plagues *every* system

that purports to speak of itself—including the secondary metalanguages brought in to smooth

over the non-coincidence of the first.

If mathematics is ultimately not safe from inclosure contradiction, neither is language,

because natural languages are rent with the same operations and problems: robust enough for

both self-reference and the encoding of totalities, but therefore unable to speak their own ground.

Language itself is thus one of the systems rendered problematic by inclosure paradoxes and

Gödel's incompleteness theorems.[42] As Paul Livingston explains, "'Natural' languages such as

English bear within themselves exactly the resources of self-reference, reflexivity, and total

expressive power that Gödel's theorems turn on in the case of 'formal' languages."[43] And as he

then goes on to show in *The Politics of Logic*, natural languages also force a choice between

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[42] This is not, however, an uncontested claim. Francesco Berto, for instance, is nervous about extending Gödel in extra-mathematical directions: the incompleteness theorems do "not entail that any *non*-mathematical … incompleteness has been established … Gödel's Theorem … is a result in mathematical logic, and difficult to sell abroad in non-mathematical contexts." *There's Something About Gödel*, 139. As he helpfully explains earlier, very particular conditions must be met in order to apply Gödel's theorems to another formalized theory: the theory in question "has to be a real formal system," it "must be sufficiently strong" and, speaking technically, it must be "omega-consistent"; see pp. 112–13.

[43] Paul M. Livingston, *The Politics of Logic: Badiou, Wittgenstein, and the Consequences of Formalism* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 20, 35. As he goes on to show, the inclosure paradoxes that also plague language have important political consequences. The book is titled *The Politics of Logic* because it purports to study "the very structure of logic itself in its inherently 'political' dimension" (8). My own project will examine related political consequences in chapter four.

systematic consistency and completeness.[44] Just like mathematical sets, language groups multiple elements into singular units. The multiple of leaves, bark, branches, and chlorophyll is classed as a "tree" in the same way that the multiple of body, upbringing, habits, tastes, and eye color becomes an "I." Language gathers pluralities under singular names, totalizing for the sake of linguistic reference things which in reality bear fuzzier boundaries. A difficulty naturally arises, therefore, when language purports to speak of itself. To construct any sentence of the form "language is such-and-such" is to be both enclosed *within* language (since I'm using English to write this sentence) and transcending *beyond* language (by purporting to have some outside view of what "language" is as a whole). "Language's naming of itself thus invokes a radical paradox of non-closure at the limits of its nominating power."[45] By signifying the total system of language within that system itself, we find ourselves yet again at inclosure.

This lack of self-identity or even what we might call the "non-coincidence" of a system with itself is, in some ways, what is at stake in every instance of the inclosure schema. As we saw with Gödel and with Livingston and in the simultaneous transcendence and closure that occurs at the limits of thought, in each case a given system is unable to fully coincide with itself. Once a reflexive gesture has been made with respect to a certain totality, the whole (Ω) is shown to exist both inside and outside itself, and therefore to lack the self-identity that would allow it to speak of itself consistently and, therefore, to legitimate itself or explain its own operations. As a result, certain formal metamathematical projects have no (consistent) proofs for their proving,

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[44] See also Livingston's earlier book, *Philosophy and the Vision of Language* (New York: Routledge, 2008), which explores the same basic linguistic structure with more emphasis on analytic philosophy.

[45] Livingston, *The Politics of Logic*, 24.

just as language has no (consistent) articulable grounds for its speaking.[46] Most pertinent to my project, however, is that the same problem plagues classical Christian theology: speech about and worship of the divine have no (consistent) ground for their speaking and worshiping. The question of this dissertation project is how the precision of the inclosure schema might help us develop a theory of prayer, since prayer is situated at the limits of language and is consequently riven with the same logical dilemmas. Prayer's position—the way it teeters right on the limits of language and thought—is key to the theology of prayer developed in subsequent chapters.

For the moment, however, we need simply to watch it teeter. Having sketched the limits of thought and their peculiarly paradoxical character, now we need to position prayer on them and see how the chips fall. We begin first with Pseudo-Dionysius, followed by a return to Anselm and a fuller exploration of the logico-prayerful gesture that characterizes the *Proslogion*. Though Priest has already briefly illustrated the way that the inclosure schema is reflected in the concerns of classical Christian theology (by way of Cusanus and Anselm), the application of inclosure to language puts an even finer point on the matter, as exemplified by Pseudo-Dionysius. Nervous about applying predicates to God and the appropriateness of using finite language to name the infinite, Pseudo-Dionysius takes us straight to the heart of the inclosure schema, language, and what any of this might have to do with prayer.

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[46] It is useful to remember, however, that this is not immediately cause for alarm. Dialetheism is, in part, precisely a recommendation that we not lose our heads in the face of contradiction. In the same way that there need be nothing inherently alarming about an infinite regress of metalanguages or materialist causes, it may simply be the case that two mutually exclusive claims are true. Part of Priest's project, I take it, is to undercut some of the metaphysical alarm that occurs when the world is shown to work in ways inconsistent with modern Enlightenment assumptions.

Pseudo-Dionysius and Prayer Around the Edges

Early Christian theologians wrestled for centuries over the appropriate comportment of limited creatures to a purportedly infinite creator. The question of comportment pressed with special force because the ground of being was not something merely to be thought but something to be worshiped, not just accounted for but praised. Much early Christian writing bears the scars of the resulting metaphysical trauma, which marks Christian prayer as much as it marked early Christian ontology more broadly: limited and trapped within language, the creatures are nevertheless enjoined to reach for a God beyond all limitation and every grammar. This is the pathos that animates Augustine and Anselm and Aquinas, to take just a handful of theologians at the very top of the alphabetical list. As we will see in this section, it is also the concern that animates Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, the father of apophatic theology and a writer who reflected with special care on the status of language before the divine. Though his dilemmas are closely related to those of Anselm—and concern prayer with equal intensity—Dionysius gives an especially systematic precision to the paradoxes provoked by speech about God. For this reason, Dionysius will serve as our illustration for how inclosure paradoxes might be used to schematize prayer.

Judging by his heavy-handed Neoplatonism, Pseudo-Dionysius is widely thought to be a student of Proclus writing in the late 5th or early 6th century. He wrote under a pseudonym drawn from Acts 17:34, in the guise of one "Dionysius the Areopagite," a prestigious convert of St. Paul. Usually credited as the father of negative theology, Dionysius's theological project splits into two tidy halves: a cataphatic half (represented in *The Divine Names*) and an apophatic half

(represented in *The Mystical Theology*).[47] Both texts deal together with the Neoplatonic puzzle of how the One can outstrip all thought, categories, and language while still leaving traces of itself in the cosmos.[48] Worshipers are taught, across both texts, how to comport themselves devotionally to this puzzle. They must process through scripturally-sanctioned "names" for God, first contemplating those names positively and then progressively negating them in recognition of their inadequacy to the divine. Charles Stang well describes this program as arranged in "a strict cyclical order," "a progressive affirmation … of the names most like the divine to those most unlike followed by a regressive negation … of the names most unlike the divine to those most like."[49] At the peak of the circle lies the contemplation of the entirely dissimilar names, while the valley of the circle hosts the negation of even negation itself, representing what Denys Turner calls "the collapse of our affirmation and denials into disorder."[50] Each side of the cataphatic/apophatic cycle presupposes the other and keeps the contemplative circle in motion, perpetually straining against the limitations of language in order "to solicit a certain event, namely deifying union with God."[51]

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[47] I have yet to find definitions of apophatics and cataphatics more winning than Denys Turner's: "'Apophaticism' is the name of that theology which is done against the background of human ignorance of the nature of God … It is the conception of theology as a strategy and practice of unknowing … The cataphatic is, we might say, the verbose element in theology, … the effort to express something about God, and in that straining to speak, theology uses as many voices as it can … In its cataphatic mode, theology is, we might say, a kind of verbal riot, an anarchy of discourse." Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 9–10.

[48] Charles M. Stang, *Apophasis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite: 'No Longer I'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 121.

[49] Ibid., 117.

[50] Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 22.

[51] Stang, *Apophasis and Pseudonymity*, 136.

Already, we should feel familiar problems looming. Both sides of Pseudo-Dionysius's theology concern the application of predicates or linguistic operations to God—a situation rife, as we know, for inclosure contradictions—and Dionysius himself is explicit about the fact that he is working at the very limits of expressibility by attempting to find a way for language to speak its own (divine) ground. Indeed, *The Divine Names* makes clear that Dionysius's project fits the inclosure schema quite precisely. In what follows, then, I will offer a brief commentary on the *Divine Names*, show how this treatise fits the inclosure schema, and use the clarity of Priest's formalism to more precisely situate the role of prayer in Dionysius's writings. Because the task of apophatic theology is to render language usable for worship, Pseudo-Dionysius joins Anselm in exemplifying the uncomfortable proximity between prayer and inclosure contradiction in the Christian theological tradition.

The whole of the Dionysian picture is helpfully distilled in the very opening lines of *The Divine Names*, naming both a dilemma (transcendence) and proposing a solution (scripture): "The inscrutable One is out of the reach of every rational process. Nor can any words come up to the inexpressible Good." As a result, Dionysius writes, "*we* must not dare to apply words or conceptions to this hidden transcendent God. We can use only what *scripture* has disclosed."[52] Divine transcendence poses an immediate difficulty for anyone who would hope to praise God, as scripture commands: God is beyond all language and conception, both of which are necessary components of the praise this same God enjoins on the creatures. Nor, as Eric Perl points out, is

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[52] Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (trans. Colm Luibheid; New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 49–50, emphasis added.

divine transcendence some merely arbitrary premise; it has strict Neoplatonic roots and a hefty philosophical pedigree which would seem only to tie Dionysius's hands further.[53] In scripture, however, Dionysius thinks he has found a way forward. The descriptions of God employed in the bible come pre-approved for divine application because in them God has already deigned to reveal Godself in language, thereby crossing the ontological gap and licensing Pseudo-Dionysius's theological enterprise.

Having clarified the scriptural warrant for his treatise (chapter one) and having then introduced his main topic (divine unity and differentiation, chapter two), Dionysius is ready in chapter three to begin in earnest. The launching of *The Divine Names*, however, does not go as smoothly as he might have hoped, and it's in this rough take-off that we find the text's first mention of prayer. Dionysius begins by introducing the first name he intends to contemplate in this chapter: "For a start, then, let us look, if you will, at the most important name, 'Good,' which shows forth all the processions of God." Rather than proceeding as announced, however, Dionysius seems to remember something just in the nick of time. The very next line reads: "But we should really begin with an invocation of the Trinity, the source and, indeed, the superior of what is good."[54] This false start is notable not only as the text's first mention of prayer ("invocation"), but also for the way that prayer shows up as a doubled beginning: readers were meant to "start" with God's goodness only to learn, immediately, that "we should *really* begin" somewhere else. Prayer first appears in *The Divine Names*, then, not as a sanguine, confident

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[53] See Eric D. Perl, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2007).

[54] Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, 68.

invocation but rather something more like a stutter, in which Dionysius proposes a topic only to catch himself on the brink of impiety. As soon as he wagers an appropriate starting place and a predicate that can be safely applied to God, he sees another, *better* starting place, and prayer comes in to cover over his logical near-miss. Prayer thus emerges in the text first and foremost as Pseudo-Dionysius's quick save after a theological slip.

In some sense, this stuttering beginning is exactly what we might expect for a treatise about a God beyond all linguistic capture. Any predicative starting point will fail to reach God no matter how well-considered it had seemed in the abstract. Wagering one starting point, Dionysius immediately sees other, further-reaching starting points before it; as soon as he touches down on the actual terrain, he can see other, better trailheads than the one he'd selected. And yet it is noteworthy that Dionysius doesn't simply propose another topic or predicate as his starting point, but a different form of speech altogether: prayer rather than exposition now strikes him as the most appropriate posture for the limits of speech. Prayer first shows up, then, as an immediate beyond-getting, a "realer" beginning than the logical move Dionysius had first proposed for himself. Nor are these two different beginnings on equal footing. The first reads like an easy-going invitation from Dionysius to his readers ("let us start") but the second is immediately normative ("we should really begin").[55] Invoking the Trinity is not just an

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[55] The drama of this moment is of course due, in part, to Colm Luibheid's English translation, but the same move resides in the original Greek text, as well. The first verb, ἐπισκεψώμεθα ("let us pass in review"), is an aorist subjunctive with hortatory force; the second, ἐπικαλεσάμενοι ("calling on"), is an aorist participle, here again with imperatival force drawn from its dependence on the primary verb. Regardless of how large a break one chooses to ascribe to the distinction between the verb and the participle, the sheer existence of the participle indicates a supplementary quality to the act of calling on the Trinity in prayer. It is not enough for Dionysius to simply review the name "Good," in other words; this beginning must be supplemented with invocations. An alternate translation of these opening lines reads: "And first of all, if it like thee, let us consider the highest Name, even 'Goodness,' by which all the Emanations of God are conjointly revealed. And let us begin with an invocation of the Trinity, the

alternative opening for the chapter but rather the one with which we ought to have begun in the first place. Thus, the very first time Pseudo-Dionysius attempts to apply scripturally sanctioned predicates to God, he immediately sees another beginning—a better and, indeed, more appropriate route he *should* have taken—and seeks to smooth over his halting first step through prayer.

Practitioners of divine contemplation should begin with prayer, according to Dionysius, because the Trinity is the true "source and … superior of what is good."[56] In order to properly comport with the Goodness under investigation, then, readers must first be shaped by the Trinity that is its cause. It is not enough, it now turns out, for God to name Godself "good" in scripture. Even divine self-reference does not adequately bridge the gap between creator and creature. We must instead "be uplifted to [the Trinity] and be shaped by it so as to learn of those good gifts."[57] It is not enough, in other words, to rely on scripture; it turns out that we also require help understanding the names found there, as well. Once again, a further step has appeared without warning. In this call to prayer, Dionysius thus admits that human beings cannot comport to the Good unless some transcendence beyond them makes the first move and rescues them from their limitation. Ontological chasms open up right where Dionysius had hoped for sure footing, such that *The Divine Names* already starts to read less like a surefire contemplative program and more

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Which, as It surpasseth Goodness, and is the Source of all goodness, doth reveal all conjoined together Its own good providences." See C.E. Rolt, *Dionysius the Areopagite: On the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1920), https://www.ccel.org/ccel/rolt/dionysius.html.

[56] Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, 68.

[57] Ibid.

like a distress signal pitched heavenward. Chapter three gives the sense of a worshipper poised at the very limits of his conceptual and linguistic resources, and prayer is both the better beginning and the first flare sent off in the balancing act at the limits of thought.

Prayer should do the job, thinks Dionysius, because of the specific ontological place occupied by the Trinity. As the Neoplatonic One dressed up in Christian terms, "the Trinity is present to all things, though all things are not present to it." Divinity's infinite nearness—its presence "to all things"—offers Pseudo-Dionysius a ray of hope: "If we invoke it with prayers that are holy, … then we are surely present to it!"[58] But, alas, matters are not so simple. It wasn't just speaking of God as Good that created problems; invoking God as Trinity proves just as sticky. Dionysius now realizes yet another misstep in even his explanation of the Trinity's proximity: "Even to speak of it as 'present in everything' is inaccurate since this does not yet convey the fact that it infinitely transcends everything and yet gathers everything within it."[59] Dionysius's solution for this inaccuracy? "So let us stretch ourselves prayerfully upward."[60] Responding once again to the linguistic and logical dilemmas of trying to apply language to God, Dionysius must retract what he just said, forestall further misunderstandings, and ultimately fall back—for the second time in as many paragraphs—on prayer. Indeed, so consistent will this

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[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

pattern be that Pseudo-Dionysius now proposes it as a general rule: "we must begin with a prayer before everything we do, but especially when we are about to talk of God."[61]

Prayer thus seems to play a role similar to scripture for Pseudo-Dionysius—a divine gift that puts human beings on surer footing in their logically contradictory attempts to speak God in language. Every time Dionysius takes a linguistic misstep in this passage, he absolves himself of his predicative error through prayer. After wagering a first (seemingly all-inclusive) name, he immediately sees a prayerful beginning he *should* have taken instead; after explaining how prayer can launch worshippers on an ascent to the Trinity, he then has to massage the inaccuracies of his explanation; and after stuttering through this first real attempt to launch his project, he sums up the page by stating that the difficulty of limit-speech ("talk of God") calls for "a prayer" in every case. Scripture alone, it seems, has not provided the logical cover he had hoped, and prayer serves as a second-string reserve to help Pseudo-Dionysius navigate the difficulties of inclosure. Chapter three thus acts as the purported beginning to the project of *The Divine Names*, but it is instead shot through with stutters and false steps, ultimately displacing the announced discussion of God's "goodness" into the next chapter altogether.[62]

The dilemma that troubles chapter three of *The Divine Names* only intensifies as the text proceeds and is forced all the more pointedly thanks to Pseudo-Dionysius's Christian

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[61] Ibid. Here, Pseudo-Dionysius seems to echo *Timaeus* 27c–d.

[62] It's telling that this is the chapter—already shot through with the non-coincidence of language about God—where Pseudo-Dionysius first roleplays his pseudonymous character in detail. Chapter three offers readers the first mention of the 'teacher' Hierotheus, his imaginary text "*Elements of Theology*," and talk of being instructed by Paul. The non-coincidence of language that Dionysius attempts to suture through prayer is the very same non-coincidence that allows him to split his subjectivity in two. For more on the relationship between Dionysian pseudonymity and the non-coincidence of language, see Charles Stang, *Apophasis and Pseudonymity*.

commitments—both practically (since orthoprax Christians are enjoined to speak to and about

God who is beyond language) and cosmologically (since the Christian God is beyond all finitude

and yet somehow also immanent to creation). This latter, cosmological commitment becomes

especially pronounced in later chapters. Although Pseudo-Dionysius grows more comfortable

exploring various predicates for God, the resulting logical picture continues to look rather

precarious. Since the divine One is the cause of all creation and present to everything, Dionysius

reasons, it ought to be predicable by names drawn from anywhere in the created order, and yet he

is nervous about the converse implication that anything in the created order can justifiably be

said to describe God. Explaining the first half of this ontological picture, he writes:

> The One may be called the underlying element of all things. And if you take away the
> One, there will survive neither whole nor part nor anything else in creation … So all
> things are rightly ascribed to God since it is by him and in him and for him that all things
> exist, are co-ordered, remain, hold together, are completed, and are returned. You will
> find nothing in the world which is not in the One, by which the transcendent Godhead is
> named.[63]

That last sentence is especially telling, both for its translation of Neoplatonic philosophy into

Christian terms ("One" is just another name for "the transcendent Godhead") and for its carefully

one-sided description of the One's immediacy to creation. Dionysius states outright that

everything in the world is in the One, but he takes great care to avoid reversing the direction and

asserting that the One must be fully in the world. This is the same nervousness displayed just a

moment ago in his explanation that "the Trinity is present to all things, though all things are not

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[63] Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, 128–29. For more on the obviously Plotinian precedents behind passages
like this, see Perl, *Theophany*, 17–33.

present to it."[64] Pseudo-Dionysius wants to assert the immediacy of creator to creation, but he is manifestly uneasy about the implications of the converse, despite the fact that God's full immediacy to the world would seem to demand a reciprocal immediacy of the world to God.[65]

His avoidance, however, is not ironclad. Though Pseudo-Dionysius may prefer to never baldly state the world's saturation with divinity, the logic of his project nevertheless makes statements like the following unavoidable: God "is the creative source, middle, and end of all things. That is why scripture applies to the truly Preexistent the numerous attributes associated with every kind of being … *He is all things* since he is the Cause of all things … Therefore every attribute may be predicated of him."[66] The Christian God is not just the Neoplatonic cause of all things but is, as a result, fully immanent to them. Dionysius needs this ontological feature in order to justify the attribution of biblical predicates to God. If God were not fully in the world, in some sense, then how could it ever be appropriate to describe him as a king or father or shepherd? Whether Dionysius likes it or not, the One's immediate presence to all things entails that all things become points saturated with divinity. And yet Dionysius clearly does *not* like it— at least not in respect to the logical consistency of his own project.

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[64] Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, 68.

[65] Once again, Denys Turner puts the matter beautifully: "[Dionysius] sees that the relation of distance between God and creatures must be asymmetrical. Creatures may be more or less 'like' God. But there cannot be any respect at all in which God is 'like' any creature. Creatures may be nearer or further away from God ontologically; but there cannot be any degrees of proximity in which God stands to different creatures … The only way we have of giving expression to *both* is the way [Dionysius] does it, in characteristic paradox, in the *Divine Names*: 'The Trinity is present to all things, though not all things are present to it.'" Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 32.

[66] Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, 101, emphasis added.

But Pseudo-Dionysius's nervousness notwithstanding, his dialectic of apophasis and cataphasis is designed to navigate precisely this tension between God's simultaneous immanence to and absolute transcendence of creation. As Turner explains:

> Christian orthodoxy imposes upon [Pseudo-Dionysius] the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, which … can allow of no degrees of distance between creatures and God. On the other hand, the manifest facts of our differentiated, hierarchically ordered theological language, … require him to find a basis for those facts in an *ontological* hierarchy.[67]

Consequently, the only thing that will do is to strain theological speech to its utmost, using both of what Dionysius calls "'dissimilar' and 'similar' similarities" arranged in an ascending (cataphatic) and descending (apophatic) scale.[68] Since God is immanent to creation, Dionysius can comfortably work within the boundaries of language (God is king, father, and shepherd); and since God is also absolutely transcendent to creation, Dionysius must also transcend linguistic boundaries (through negation, the negation of negation, and then contemplative silence). And anywhere this paradoxically-fraught balancing act seems to stall on its own logical infelicities, Pseudo-Dionysius turns to prayer.

Indeed, prayer is never far behind each step of *The Divine Names*, though it shows up in two guises: supplications when Pseudo-Dionysius feels the logical tensions of his project, and praise when he feels its success. As the text gains traction following the third and fourth chapters, new names are introduced as requisites for divine adoration. Much like Anselm praying his topical introductions, Dionysius also progresses through the contents of his treatise in

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[67] Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 31.

[68] Ibid., 32.

worshipful terms. Nearly every chapter in *The Divine Names* opens with some mention of either

prayer or praise, but Dionysius's confidence in these forms of speech varies wildly. This

sequence begins at a distance from actual praise, with Pseudo-Dionysius merely "wish[ing]" to

praise at the opening of chapter five.[69] In the course of chapters six and seven, he extends an

invitation for readers to join him, shifting from the singular "I" to the plural "let us" (ὑμνῶμεν)

that inaugurates praise in the next two chapters.[70] Chapters eight and nine represent a step

backward, however, as he retreats to an analytical third person comment about the titles by

which "theologians praise" the deity in scripture, until praise drops entirely from focus at the

opening of the ninth chapter.[71] Perhaps recognizing this lapse, chapter ten lurches back toward

praise and, for the first time, makes it something the *text* does rather than Pseudo-Dionysius

himself ("it is time now for this treatise of mine to celebrate"). Still picking up steam, the next

two chapters maintain this liturgical posture, now deliberately invoking "hymns" with

imperatival force ("we should now sing," "we all must offer up a hymn").[72] *The Divine Names*

follows a trajectory toward more overt and performative praise, reaching a confident hymnic

quality toward the end, but only by betraying odd moments of silence along the way (chapters

eight and nine).

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[69] Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, 96.

[70] Ibid., 103, 105.

[71] Ibid., 110, 115.

[72] Ibid., 119, 121, 126.

Zigzagging in this fashion, Pseudo-Dionysius eventually arrives at a more full-throated

praise in the second half of his treatise than in the first, but even this hymn confronts its own

limits in chapter thirteen. This final chapter of the treatise not only fails to mention praise in its

opening line, despite the clear precedent of the preceding eight chapters, but it also explicitly

walks back the ground Pseudo-Dionysius has been able to gain in the interim: "Our unique song

of praise must be for the single complete deity," he insists, and yet we can only "*prepare* to sing

this truth."[73] Here Dionysius displays a reticence that stands out against the confidence he's

achieved in divine naming since chapter ten. Furthermore, this preparation to sing the deity's

unity never comes to full expression in *The Divine Names*. In the last two paragraphs of the

treatise, Pseudo-Dionysius includes a self-deprecating summary in which he admits to having

"fallen wretchedly short" of his theological predecessors and worries about the errors and

imperfections in his text.[74]

As he had in the introduction, Dionysius fills this important transitional moment with the

help of two prayers. Just when praise fails and Pseudo-Dionysius must face up to the slippage of

language despite his best efforts to liturgically secure it, prayer becomes his secondary suture

once again. Crucially, however, neither of the prayers at the close of the last chapter is addressed

to God. The first is addressed instead to the reader ("I ask you to be charitable, to correct my

unwished-for ignorance") followed immediately by a prayer with no addressee whatsoever

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[73] Ibid., 129, emphasis added.

[74] Ibid., 130.

("May what I do and what I speak be pleasing to God").[75] Much like the way that Anselm turns

from God to address his own soul at a moment of crucial doubt, Pseudo-Dionysius also seems

now to hold back, perhaps nervous after all about approaching the divine in language, scriptural

warrant notwithstanding. Dionysus thus ends up walking back the one move that has been the

whole burden of his project—namely, connecting language to God. Anxious at the close about

everything he has just wagered, he retreats into one final prayer addressed nowhere.

Here, however, readers might justifiably feel sympathy. Pseudo-Dionysius is right to be

nervous about the viability of his project in the face of an impossible linguistic dilemma.

Predicating anything of a supra-transcendent divine is rife with paradox, and even negating

specific predicates remains a linguistic operation in some sense. What's more, Dionysius betrays

his worries that his jointly cataphatic-and-apophatic solution cannot solve the dilemma, because

anxiety continues to bubble up through the seams and fissures in his writing. Prayer is

Dionysius's attempt to suture those gaps. Like scripture, prayer is a divine gift that gives

worshippers surer footing as they negotiate the risky paradoxes that arise with predication of

God. In its more ecstatic guise as praise, divine invocation moves the whole treatise along and

smooths over the gaps and transitions between chapters. And when Dionysius feels less ecstatic

and more anxious, prayer is how he transcends his own project to solicit divine aid and reflect on

the project as a whole. Unfortunately for Pseudo-Dionysius, however, prayer (like scripture) is as

linguistic and predicative as the dilemma to which he tries to apply it. Even divine sanction

cannot solve the logical problems that arise whenever language is applied to something beyond

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[75] Ibid., 130–31.

its own limits. As a result, finite predicates can only occasion an infinitely-receding referential horizon; earnest beginnings become stuttering impieties, attempts at explanatory precision turn into conceptual blunders, and Pseudo-Dionysius ends precisely where he began: with a prayer that, somehow, this dance of transcendence and closure might somehow be adequate for reaching God.

Having seen the familiar paradoxes lurking all through *The Divine Names*, it should thus come as no surprise that Pseudo-Dionysius's theological project finds itself stalled on the horns of inclosure quite precisely. Indeed, mapping the Dionysian project onto Priest's formalism gives helpful precision to the apophatic/cataphatic picture and, by extension, the place of prayer within it. Returning to the inclosure schema, then, we have:

(1) $\Omega = \{y; \varphi(y)\}$ exists

(2) If x is a subset of Ω: (a) $\delta(x) \notin x$

and (b) $\delta(x) \in \Omega$

Here, Ω designates the Dionysian God, the divine ground that encloses all created things y.[76] The term y, then, here serves as a variable satisfied by all created things, while φ serves as a function that selects for (or is satisfied by) an object's participation or grounding in divinity. $\Omega = \{y; \varphi(y)\}$ therefore simply states that God is that which grounds all created things.[77] Given creation

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[76] This is already a familiar corollary of Christian theology: God's transcendence of creation serves as an outer bound for the set of created things.

[77] I've returned here to the simpler, Russellian version of the inclosure schema. Pseudo-Dionysius's project doesn't require the additional property ψ in order to generate the paradox. If one were to insist on reintroducing ψ to the Dionysian picture, however, the more expanded schema would still hold. φ would instead become something like a predicate of being, such that the elements of creation both exist (φ) and are saturated with the divine (ψ). Given,

as a set defined by God's transcendence of it, it is then possible to gather its elements into various subsets (x). And because the world is divinely saturated, so too is every gathering of the world's elements; if all y have God as their ground, so too do all x.

Where claim (1) thus details Pseudo-Dionysius's ontological picture, claim (2) details the way his theological project hinges on the operations of language and especially praise. Indeed, praise and prayer together serve as Dionysian diagonalizers. When one speaks about or praises any element of the created order, the operation is not itself reducible to the original element [$\delta(x) \notin x$]. (For instance, to use the metaphor of shepherd or candlestick or laboring woman in a worshipful speech-act does not mean that the worshipful speech-act is itself the same thing as a shepherd, candlestick, or laboring woman.) However, the speaking of the metaphor *does* remain grounded in God, because all language remains within the order of creation [$\delta(x) \in \Omega$]. Praising elements of creation is not reducible to those elements (transcendence), but nor does it escape the order of created things (closure).

Naturally, the difficulty arises when speech or praise is applied to the divine ground of creation (Ω): the result is that what I say of God both does [$\delta(\Omega) \in \Omega$] and does not [$\delta(\Omega) \notin \Omega$] belong to God. This, at bottom, is the paradoxical bind of Pseudo-Dionysius's project despite his every attempt to avoid it. For Dionysius, God is not a being among beings and is, therefore, properly ineffable. But if that is true, then it ought to be impossible to say anything whatsoever about the divine because to do so entails predication (God *is* so-and-so). Even to say that God is

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however, that claim (1) already asserts existence and being is not, strictly speaking, a predicate, I've found it preferable to work with the reduced schema for simplicity's sake.

only analogically *like* such-and-such cannot avoid predicating being of the divine because the metaphorical "like" is still preceded by the existential "is." Though Dionysius hastens to deny that language can ever truly capture God in any degree, he performatively contradicts his own ontological picture; language must be able to capture God to some extent, because otherwise what are we even talking about? When Pseudo-Dionysius speaks of the divine in any of the finite elements of the world, the resulting description or praise both does and does not belong to God, and both does and does not remain enclosed within the world as divinely saturated.[78]

Dionysius could avoid the paradox simply by falling silent, of course, but this is famously not his response. Apophaticism is not the only side of his project and even if it were, *The Divine Names* is an oddly voluble way of negating speech. Dionysius feels empowered to wager predicates of God because, he thinks, it wasn't his idea. God has already spoken about Godself in scripture and so long as humankind sticks close to the sorts of language already divinely sanctioned, there is some possibility for inviting the divine to break through our linguistic limitations. Offloading the logical problem onto scripture, however, fails to solve the paradox. Whether divinely sanctioned or not, scripture is still disclosed in words and concepts adapted to the finitude of the human mind. If the divine is truly and properly ineffable, it can find no true referent in such finitude. Pseudo-Dionysius's recourse to analogy is similarly ineffective because God's absolute transcendence and incomprehensibility must have their full, literal force for the claim to make sense. And Dionysius's further insistence on the worshipful dimension of his

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[78] For a related (though less strictly formalized) critique of the paradox at the heart of *The Divine Names*, see Ed Watson, "The Sacred Fire: Wittgenstein, Pseudo-Denys, and Transparency to the Divine," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 82.2 (2021): 136–54.

language (as opposed to its raw logical import) also fails to resolve the core dilemma. By proposing to talk about the limits of the inexpressible in any degree, Pseudo-Dionysius lands himself in a paradox by which everything he says of God both does and does not apply.

Priest's formalism thus clarifies this predicament in two primary ways. First, it illuminates both why Dionysius is so drawn to scripture and why scripture fails to adequately forestall the logical dilemma. Any true solution to the inclosure paradox must address its root cause—$\delta(\Omega)$, the application of language to God. In this regard, it is clear why Pseudo-Dionysius is so insistent on scriptural warrant: in scripture, God applies language to Godself, thus seeming to sanction $\delta(\Omega)$ despite all the logical infelicities to which it gives rise. Far from resolving the paradox, however, this move merely gives it divine warrant. Rather than stopping the paradox from occurring, putting $\delta(\Omega)$ in the mouth of God simply lets Dionysius off the hook—the paradox becomes God's fault, not his. The only real 'solution' that remains, then, is the one Pseudo-Dionysius takes: to embrace the paradox, indeed, to liturgize it. The second clarification offered by Priest, then, is to showcase how tidily the apophatic and cataphatic dimensions of negative theology follow from the basic dilemma. The two halves of Pseudo-Dionysius's project can be directly correlated with the paradoxical antinomies of the inclosure schema. At one pole, Dionysius cataphatically proliferates names for God drawn from the elements of creation (closure) while, at the other, he apophatically negates all predication in an effort to surpass the created order (transcendence). Given that there is no true solution to the paradox lurking at the heart of his project, Pseudo-Dionysius liturgically processes back and forth between the horns of the dilemma instead.

Of course, it is important to acknowledge that *solving* the paradox was never Dionysius's aim. Instead, he puts the dilemma to (as he imagines) good use, liturgizing it as the unavoidably contradictory path of every ascent toward God. As Charles Stang helpfully puts it:

> The contemplative program that Dionysius recommends, in which we affirm and negate the divine names in perpetuity, is not offered as a discourse that aims to solve problems that arise when creatures speak of the uncreated. On the contrary, Dionysius draws attention to such insoluble problems precisely so that his readers might make *use* of the problems inherent in language in their efforts to invite the divine to break through language.[79]

Denys Turner also understands Pseudo-Dionysius to be deliberately cashing in on the paradoxical qualities of his own linguistic project, writing "'self-subverting' utterance[s]" in order to court paradox all the way to divine union.[80] "These opaque utterances … are deliberately paradoxical," he writes, because paradox is "the natural medium of a theological language which is subject to the *twin* pressures … of the cataphatic and the apophatic." Theological language for Dionysius thus "naturally, spontaneously and *rightly* takes the form of paradox."[81]

Pseudo-Dionysius may be relatively accepting of paradox, in other words, because he sees something useful in it: the possibility of gradually ratcheting oneself closer to God through every turn of the oscillation between transcendence and closure. By constantly moving back and forth between the horns of the dilemma, the cyclical contemplative program hopes to wheel the worshiper toward divinity. Invoking this ascent, Dionysius opens his *Mystical Theology* with exactly the sort of prayer to the trinity anticipated in chapter three of *The Divine Names*:

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[79] Stang, *Apophasis and Pseudonymity*, 155.

[80] Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 21.

[81] Ibid., 22, emphasis added.

"Trinity!! Higher than any being, any divinity, any goodness! … Lead us up beyond unknowing and light, up to the farthest, highest peak."[82] And the method for this climb? "We should posit and ascribe to [God] all the affirmations we make in regard to beings" and then "we should negate all these affirmations, since [God] surpasses all being."[83] Closure and transcendence together set Pseudo-Dionysius on the path to the mountaintops of Christian contemplation.

But if inclosure paradox is the machinery that propels the Dionysian ascent, prayer is the handrail that ensures he doesn't go tumbling down the cliff face. Prayer hovers around the edges of *The Divine Names* as a kind of rhetorical antechamber where Dionysius can retreat to smooth out the logical infelicities of his project and work through his pious anxieties. Prayer is one more species of the very diagonalizer that produces paradox in the first place—yet another linguistic operation applied to something beyond language—and when logical infelicities begin to seep through, prayer is his first instinct for suturing over the gaps. From his near-miss stuttering opening in chapter three to the invocations that keep Dionysius moving through the text, prayer is his recourse when paradox threatens the consistency of the project. Prayer is thus both a species of the diagonalizing operation that speaks God in language, producing paradox, and also a way of keeping one's footing when the divine horizon recedes and God remains permanently beyond one's grasp.

In this way, Pseudo-Dionysius returns us to where we began; like Anselm, Dionysius also betrays logical infelicities, affective anxieties, and symptomatic slips that motivate his turn to

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[82] Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology*, in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (trans. Colm Luibheid; New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 135.

[83] Ibid., 136.

prayer. Both authors wrestle with the objective reality of divine inexpressibility, and both authors are furthermore convinced that prayer is the appropriate comportment to that reality. Jointly riven by inclosure, prayer functions for each as something like a metalanguage to help navigate their respective paradoxes at the limits of thought. What possibilities for contemporary thought and contemporary discipleship might lurk in their joint conviction that prayer is the disciple's best response to inclosure? It is time, finally, to draw together Anselm, Pseudo-Dionysius, and the inclosure schema to see what all this might mean for prayer writ large.

Conclusion: Prayer as Metalanguage

The Divine Names and the *Proslogion* are riven by related dilemmas and turn to prayer for a shared reason: prayer seems to promise a recourse for stabilizing the paradox that arises whenever one speaks to or about God. In chapter fourteen of the *Proslogion*, as we noted, Anselm comes to see that the real problem running through his attempted proof-prayer is not merely human fallenness but something more like inclosure: God is so far beyond human conception that every time Anselm takes a step closer to God, the horizon recedes. Prayer, for Anselm, thus functions precisely as it does for Pseudo-Dionysius: it is the rhetorical justification for launching the project, its opening move, a therapeutic couch for wrestling with pious anxieties, and a worshipful failsafe when logic gets dicey. Each author talks about something that he acknowledges is beyond speech, and each then takes prayer to be a way of petitioning a transcendence that can rescue him from the resulting transcendence-and-closure of his treatise.

We might say, then, that prayer functions for both Anselm and Pseudo-Dionysius as something like a metalanguage—a different register of speech that can talk about a system from

outside of it, thus avoiding the systemic self-reference that produces paradox. If inclosure threatens the internal logic of their writing, prayer seems to each to form a kind of liturgical 'outside' where they can stand on stable footing. It is in this sense that Yves Cattin describes prayer as what "carr[ies] the search and set[s] it in motion" and what also shows up "to check the results of the reflection." Prayer both "verifies speculation and … attests to the validity of its results."[84] Unfortunately, metalanguages are no ultimate solution to inclosure paradoxes; they merely displace the problem to the next level 'up.' It is no surprise, then, that both Anselm and Pseudo-Dionysius are also plagued by a kind of infinite regress in their pursuit of God. Like the inclosure schema's constantly receding horizon of self-reflective capacities, each step Godward sees the divine withdraw one step further out of reach. Like all metalanguages, prayer for these authors can only endlessly generate more prayers, each level entailing another 'higher' level at which to speak or pray about the former, and so on ad infinitum. No matter how many times a given system takes a snapshot of itself, the camera remains perpetually outside the frame.

Crucially, however, inclosure contradictions, metalanguages, and even theological recourse to transcendence are not *problems* (though the last may feel unsatisfying to modern sensibilities). Although Anselm and Pseudo-Dionysius write treatises that grapple with thorny logical issues, these are not the marks of defective projects. On the contrary, Dionysius and Anselm are united in their commitment that they have stumbled on something objective about the world and its divine ground. What's more, the consequences of this truth are no more cause for alarm than is the paradox that generates them. Their initial prayers may generate an endless

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[84] Cattin, "La Prière de S. Anselme," 388.

cycle of infinitely more prayers, but this can only register as a good thing in a Christian worldview—an approximation of a heaven of endless prayer and praise. The dilemma of a constantly-receding horizon is, for each author, simply part and parcel of working toward an infinite God. Neither sees cause here for ditching his project, but only the inevitable result of trying to cross an ontological gap he knew would be insuperable from the get-go. Indeed, each oscillation between transcendence and closure may even appear as a kind of encouraging progress; horizons can only be seen to recede if you've made some headway across the desert.

The structure of inclosure is not, then, a subjective logical problem in either text but instead an objective *problematic*. Pseudo-Dionysius and Anselm share the intuition that inclosure is something true about the world and about the divine rather than a symptomatic flaw in their writing. Non-self-identity is the inevitable result of any language that attempts to speak to or about its own divine ground, and such speech can only manage to displace itself in an infinite series of speech-acts aimed toward God. Furthermore, contemporary philosophy has only borne out their intuition—the world really does seem, on centuries of investigation, to be riven through with gaps that can never be closed and total systems that can never achieve stable self-reference without, at the same time, self-displacement. As the application of Priest's inclosure schema to *The Divine Names* and the *Proslogion* has already begun to make clear, there are resources in twentieth and twenty-first century thought that can sharpen and clarify the central issue around which classical Christian theology so often circles: the conjunction of language with what lies beyond it.

Indeed, a host of thinkers since Pseudo-Dionysius and Anselm have given considerable thought to the characteristics of logical systems, natural languages, and other symbolically rich objects with self-reflective capabilities. The implications, too, range widely, allowing us to think the relationship between the real and the ideal, the particular and the universal, and the way that representations interact with, shape, and transform material life. The structure of being, the vicissitudes of language, the formation of human consciousness, the constitution of political entities—all hinge on the way that systems and languages and even persons never coincide with themselves, never forming stable, self-identical grounds for later predication and reference. These are the implications that lie buried in the questions animating Anselm and Dionysius, and they are questions to which contemporary thought can offer helpful frames. In the next two chapters, I turn my attention to two thinkers (Agamben and Laruelle) who do just that.

If Pseudo-Dionysius and Anselm are thus genuinely onto something, and if contemporary thinkers like Priest, Agamben, and Laruelle can help us articulate it, what remains to be thought for our purposes is a deeper investigation of *why prayer* appears as both authors' response to the paradoxes of inclosure. That is, why might systemic non-coincidence call forth a certain devotional comportment? Prayer is thus more than a textual and liturgical failsafe that prevents looking paradoxes square in the face. There is something much stronger running through the thought of these two theologians: each is reaching after an objective structure, a genuine logical dilemma that passes through much of Western history, and both together suggest prayer as the appropriate response. Prayer, then, is not just a kind of hail-Mary, or mere logical desperation made liturgically respectable. Prayer presents itself in *Proslogion* and *The Divine Names* as the

ideal response to the unavoidable non-self-identity that characterizes language, thought, and being at their limits. Our question, going forward, is *why*.

The stakes of this question, too, are high. Non-coincidence touches down everywhere total structures interact with particulars—where form meets matter and ideals meet historical reality. This is the stage on which Dionysius and Anselm situate prayer as a key player and on which they themselves work out deeply existential questions. In this way, they prompt us to grapple with prayer as the proper human comportment to the fact of inclosure, while contemporary thought holds out the hope of especially acute resources for the reckoning. That comportment and that reckoning are the subject of the next two chapters.

CHAPTER THREE

FORM-OF-LIFE IN PRAYER: AGAMBEN

Over the course of his career, Giorgio Agamben has proven deeply invested in points of contact

between formal apparatuses and material particulars. Whether those apparatuses are linguistic

(the focus of his early career, which centered on Stilnovist poetry) or legal and political (the

concerns of his later *Homo Sacer* project), Agamben is unusually attuned to the non-coincidence

that arises every time a formal structure seeks to take account of itself as ground for its

application to human life. This interest alone would qualify Agamben as a ready conversation

partner for the paradoxes that plague Anselmian and Dionysian accounts of prayer, but Agamben

is more relevant still given his massive investment in Christian theology. Though problems of

inclosure crop up in the Trinitarian and Christological controversies, Pilate's place in the creeds,

and the abdication of Pope Benedict XVI (to name just a few of his theological interests),

Agamben nonetheless locates especially salutary responses to inclosure in the writings of St.

Paul and the monastic norms of thirteenth-century Franciscans.[1] Indeed, Agamben comes closest

to illustrating what he means by a "form-of-life" in the lineaments of the prayerful regime of

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[1] Agamben's investments in Christian theology are most evident, in addition to the two main books that will be discussed in this chapter, in volumes such as *The Kingdom and the Glory* (trans. Lorenzo Chiesa; Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2011) and a series of shorter books and essays including *The Church and the Kingdom* (trans. Leland de la Durantaye; London: Seagull Books, 2012), *Pilate and Jesus* (trans. Adam Kotsko; Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2015), *The Mystery of Evil: Benedict XVI and the End of Days* (trans. Adam Kotsko; Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2017), and *The Kingdom and the Garden* (trans. Adam Kotsko; London: Seagull Books, 2020).

cenobitic communities and in the messianic temporality of 1 Corinthians that, for our purposes, also encompasses the time a disciple spends on his knees.

This chapter thus begins to articulate a theology of prayer in conversation with two of Agamben's works, in particular: *The Highest Poverty* and *The Time That Remains*. After a broad introduction to Agamben's ontological project, each book will be treated in turn. Prayer is here sketched as a form-of-life that scales life into an indivisible whole and inhabits the site of time's failure to coincide with itself. To pray on this model is to inhabit a posture that dwells in the world's non-coincidence in the right way and that, rather than responding to externally-imposed religious imperatives, is in fact generative of an outward-facing messianic life. In this way, prayer resists the biopolitical excesses risked by inclosure, answers certain Foucauldian critiques of Christian devotion, and challenges theories of prayer that understand it to be primarily a mental or dialogic practice.

Introduction: Agamben's Formalist Picture

Agamben is a thinker of inclosure. Even in his early work on language, which commentators have occasionally seen as somewhat unrelated to the structural precision of the political project that follows in the early 1990s, Agamben grapples with the same formalist dilemmas that interest Graham Priest.[2] This is put most succinctly, perhaps, in a 1984 essay entitled "The Idea of Language." The main dilemma, as Agamben summarizes it, is that "Human beings can reveal

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[2] For an especially helpful account of Agamben's career that is sensitive to the discontinuities and developments across his various projects, see Adam Kotsko, *Agamben's Philosophical Trajectory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).

beings through language but cannot reveal language itself."[3] Language cannot point to itself as a whole because to do so necessarily entails a gap between the language being spoken about (*langue*) and the language in which one does the speaking (*parole*). It is this failure of language to coincide with itself that Priest identifies as a species of inclosure and that Agamben describes as a structure of constant openness: "All human speech and knowledge has at its root and foundation an openness that infinitely transcends it."[4] That "openness," we can now see after chapter one, is the openness of non-self-identity, the way that language cannot point to its own ground in any stable fashion. Agamben agrees fundamentally: human beings are unavoidably caught in language, but language's "foundation is unsayable." Unable to speak its own ground, language can only transcend itself in every attempt, such that "a final and absolute metalanguage does not exist."[5]

So far, so familiar. Where Agamben goes one step further, however, is his career-long attention to the effect of linguistic non-coincidence on the human. The untotalizable structure of language is more than a linguistic dilemma because language overwrites human beings who, due to their immersion in language, are also rendered irreparably in excess of themselves. Anything whose way of being in the world is mediated by language (and hence, from a human point of

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[3] Giorgio Agamben, "The Idea of Language," in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy* (trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen; Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1999), 40.

[4] Ibid., 41. Agamben's philosophical lineage through Heidegger is especially on display here.

[5] Ibid., 43. Agamben draws on formalist terms elsewhere in his writing, as well—usually the language of set theory. See Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community* (trans. Michael Hardt; Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 9; and *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen; Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1998), 21–25.

view, the whole world) is non-self-identical. Language for Agamben is thus a power of scission

that writes itself onto ontology, making the world and everything in it non-coincident as a result.

Toward the end of his career, in *Use of Bodies* (the capstone book of the thirty-year

Homo Sacer project), Agamben articulates this with particular clarity.[6] In a chapter entitled

"Ontological Apparatus," Agamben argues that the notion of being is nothing more than the

shadow of language as it overwrites humans and mediates their relationship to the world.

Language operates by a "structure of subjectivation/presupposition" in which every use of

language presupposes actually-existing referents in the world.[7] Playing on Aristotle's word for

"subject" (*hypokeimenon*, "that which lies under"), Agamben explains: "the articulation worked

by language always pre-sup-poses a relation of predication … or of inherence … with respect to

a subject, an existent that lies-under-and-at-the-base."[8] Language, in other words, assumes

reference such that speaking or writing carry with them the specter of a connection between

words and things. To say "guitar" or "snow" is to employ a signifier that assumes its own

allusion to six-stringed musical instruments or precipitation that occasionally descends from the

sky on cold winter days. Agamben's point is not to doubt the reality of guitars and snowflakes,

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[6] Though, it should be noted, Agamben's concern regarding the ontological effects of language show up from the very beginning of his work. He writes in *Stanzas* (1977), for instance: "The originary nucleus of signification is neither in the signifier nor in the signified, neither in writing nor in the voice, but in the fold of the presence on which they were established: the *logos*, which characterizes the human as *zoon logon echon* … The human is precisely this fracture of presence, which opens a world and over which language holds itself." See Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture* (trans. Ronald L. Martinez; Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 156.

[7] Giorgio Agamben, *The Use of Bodies* (trans. Adam Kotsko; Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2015), 117.

[8] Ibid., 115, 117.

but rather to point to the illusions about beings that are, at bottom, nothing more than a shadow cast by language.

To explain this further, Agamben turns to Benveniste and the distinction between the "is" of predication and the "is" of existence. The verb "to be," he writes, exhibits a "promiscuity between [its] two meanings." One meaning is "purely logico-grammatical" and serves to attach subjects to predicates (e.g., the window *is* open) while the other serves "a lexical function, which expresses the existence and reality of something" (e.g., the window *is*).[9] According to Agamben, it is the former, logico-grammatical function of the copula that is in fact responsible for the latter sense that language can name a thing's fundamental existence in the world. "This presuppositional power is so strong that we imagine the non-linguistic as something unsayable and non-relational that we seek in some way to grasp as such, without noticing that what we seek to grasp in this way is only the shadow of language."[10] Being is simply what is "pre-sup-posed … as what lies under every predication."[11] As a result, things are from the very beginning "divided into an existentive being … and a predicative being" such that "the task of thought will then be that of reassembling into a unity what thought—language—has presupposed and divided."[12] In other words, if there appears to be an insuperable gap between words and things

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[9] Ibid., 117–18.

[10] Ibid., 119.

[11] Ibid., 118.

[12] Ibid., 119. Strikingly, this will also be *precisely* the task of thought as articulated by Laruelle in chapter three.

(that is, between predicates and subjects), Agamben argues that this is the result of a presuppositional structure necessarily included in every moment of language.

The world, in short, is rendered non-self-identical in language in the same way as are human beings: language makes statements *about* things and thus casts the lexical shadow of a thing's existence. In the same way that human subjectivity is formed by repeatedly saying "I am" over and over again until the mind begins to reflect on the conscious unity implied by such a term, the shadow of being is cast by language saying "it is" over and over again until the specter of a being's fundamental existence is raised for consideration.[13] The world, as a result, is subsequently overlaid with a division between the raw existence of things and the predicates one uses to single out individual existents. Language splits the world "into … something laying-at-the-base (the being named or indicated of a singular existent, insofar as it is not said of a subject but is a presupposition for every discourse) and that which is said on the presupposition of it."[14] The ontological split between existence and essence—between the unspeakable ground on the basis of which we speak and the speaking that appears to supervene on such a ground—is in fact simply a function of language. Language thus creates an ontological division merely by presupposing one in the course of linguistic use.

It is no exaggeration to say that *this* structure—presupposition, and thus non-coincidence—is the beating heart of Agamben's thought as a whole. Most famously, this pattern

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[13] For a continental philosophical account of non-coincidence as it structures human subjectivity and emergence of mind, see Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* (trans. Sebastian Rand; New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

[14] Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 131–2.

acquires political stakes in the *Homo Sacer* series that occupied roughly thirty years of

Agamben's career and launched him to prominence in the United States following 9/11. On

Agamben's telling, as a political order supervenes on already-linguistic human subjects,

presupposition comes into play once more. Just as language brought with it certain assumptions

necessary to its operation, law also presupposes the conditions under which it can function. For

laws to apply in a certain domain (a specific city or nation, for instance), they must presumably

not apply outside that domain (absent citizenship or residence in a certain zip code). In the same

way, Agamben explains, for the law *as such* to apply to human life writ large, it must presuppose

a realm of human life that is not inherently governed by law—a kind of state of nature or

imagined pre-legal sphere where humans operated anomically. "Just as language presupposes the

nonlinguistic as that with which it must maintain itself in a virtual relation … so that it may later

denote it in actual speech, so the law presupposes the nonjuridical (for example, mere violence in

the form of the state of nature) as that with which it maintains itself."[15] This imagined state of

nature he calls (following Aristotle) *zoē*, raw biological life, "the simple fact of living common

to all living beings."[16] By imagining a kind of 'outside' to better justify its application to all the

cases 'inside' its jurisdiction, the law in fact calls such an outside into being. Just as language

split the world through its presupposition of nonlinguistic being, the law splits life through its

presupposition of nonjuridical existence.

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[15] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 20–21.

[16] Ibid., 1. *Zoē* here is distinguished from *bios*, the qualified life proper to human beings in a state of civilization under the law.

In the law's case, however, this split doesn't simply create a certain non-coincidence (life's division into both juridical and nonjuridical forms, or *bios* and *zoē*);[17] the split also attempts to respond to the non-coincidence that already characterizes the world. By supposing a state of nature or raw animal existence (*zoē*), the law pretends to have already excluded the paradoxical, anomic element that would otherwise trouble its stable application to human society. *Zoē*, we might say, is presupposed in order to create the illusion of a self-identical object (*bios*) for the law's application. This is, of course, only illusory—life is always already and irreparably in excess of itself—but by creating and excepting *zoē* from the legal order, Agamben explains, the law in this way "tries to found and maintain its own coherence."[18] Or, as he says a few pages later, "The law has a regulative character and is a 'rule' not because it commands and proscribes, but because it must first of all create the sphere of its own reference in real life and *make that reference regular*."[19] *Zoē* is thus little more than the presupposed exception that grounds the fantasizable consistency of the legal regime.

Faced with the non-coincidence of human subjects, law attempts to impose consistency in order to ground its own applicability. It tries to cancel humans' self-excess and make them coincide with themselves as discrete, capturable objects with no remainder that might escape the

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[17] Agamben's use of the *zoē/bios* distinction has drawn fire from those who do not find evidence for such a stringent opposition between the two terms in Aristotle. See, for instance, James Gordon Finlayson, "'Bare Life' and Politics in Agamben's Reading of Aristotle," *The Review of Politics* 72 (2010): 97–126. For a moderate defense of Agamben along the lines that he does not, in fact, rely on such "a hard-and-fast distinction" as many readers assume, see Kotsko, *Agamben's Philosophical Trajectory*, 82–3.

[18] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 21.

[19] Ibid., 26.

law's total application. Of course, as irreparably non-self-identical, human beings cannot be

captured in this way and so the juridical apparatus chases down its impossible aim through

iterative and ever more invasive divisions of life. In this way, "law" for Agamben has reference

not only to the particular rules and regulations that prescribe human behavior, but also to a

regulatory power that lies behind these laws and oversees their application to human life.

Agamben's name for this regulatory principle is sovereignty, and it guarantees the law's capture

of life in the form of presupposing an exception. What's more, sovereignty is also responsible for

drawing this presupposed-anomic situation right into the heart of law in what Carl Schmitt

famously termed a "state of exception" (or state of emergency), in which specific legal norms are

suspended while the law's sovereign force nevertheless remains in play. In Agamben's view, the

state of exception represents sovereignty's attempt to resolve non-coincidence. Because the non-

self-identity of beings-under-the-law raises the specter of sovereignty's limits, sovereignty

responds by suspending the law (predicates) in order to isolate things in their bare life (existents).

Placed outside the mediating protection of legal norms, things are exposed to sovereignty in all

its brute and excessive force.[20] Agamben's corpus is littered with the resulting figures of "bare

life" produced by the state's exceptional powers: Tiananmen square, *homo sacer*, the

Musselmann, refugee camps, and so on.

In this way, the state of exception forms a paradigm for the dark underside of every

formal apparatus of power as the means by which an apparatus attempts to tame the constitutive

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[20] Agamben devoted an entire book to the state of exception. See Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (trans. Kevin Attell; Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

non-coincidence of the world. The anthropogenic event of language creates this non-coincidence in the first place by producing the illusion of things' being, thereby enacting a split between words and things that troubles language's self-referential account of itself as a totality. The law, too, applies itself to human life to produce political *bios* but, in the inability of *bios* to be totalizable by law, presupposes *zoē* as its proper sphere of (excepted) reference and enacts states of exception in an attempt to isolate a kind of life that is fully capturable. Apparatuses of power presuppose their spheres of reference and thus yield further non-self-identical structures (the gap between words and things, and between law and life) only to be confronted with the necessity of re-suturing them in the name of grounding coherent totalities. On Agamben's account, then, power is faced with solving an insoluble problem of its own making. Nor does the ultimate futility of the task afford any protection; impossible tasks all too often justify impossible means, resulting in biopolitical atrocities.

Because these problems are baked into the formal apparatuses under consideration—written into the structures of the law, the state, and even language—Agamben does not turn to legal rights, state protections, or political movements as solutions. Instead, Agamben forwards another option that he calls the "messianic." Messianicity is a kind of embrace-of or dwelling-in non-coincidence that tries neither to suture it nor to force it into coherence, but that also does not consist in perpetuating the world's non-self-identity through an infinite series of displacements and deferrals (a la deconstruction). Sovereignty, recall, chases the constant withdrawal of human essence by stripping life of its predicates, reducing it to bare life in an attempt to somehow grasp the totality that it has both written onto human life and barred itself from ever attaining. Chasing

what it has, in fact, only illusorily presupposed, sovereignty keeps stripping away the predicates of human life to try to reach their fundament. In the process, however, the juridical order ends up *producing* an approximation of raw animal existence by violently reducing human beings to the level of their animality—a bare biological existence stripped of all the predicates that make human life properly human.[21] The messianic, by contrast, occurs solely at the level of predicates. It inaugurates a kind of life where predicates cannot be stripped away from human life because messianicity signals the recognition that, in fact, predicates are *all we have*. As a result, messianic life dwells in right relation to predicates, recognizing and living in light of the fact that there is no "being" at bottom to chase after, that being simply *is* the language game played by beings. In this new relationship to predicates and the objects that they characterize, one lives a life that repels sovereign encroachments by refusing to sustain the fantasy of an isolable fundament at the base of life.

It is for this reason that the notion of "use" will be central to Agamben's articulation of messianicity. The messianic plays *in* language, we might say, rather than grasping after its referents. Messianic life stops chasing the shadows created by formal apparatuses and instead turns its attention to the given things: material, predicates, and existence (rather than: ideals, subjects, and essence), treating these as elements free for use rather than means for grasping an illusory fundament. Because there is nothing else underneath the world to be reached for *through*

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[21] It is worth drilling down on this point since the difference between *zoē* and bare life is often misconstrued in the literature. There is, in fact, a fine-grained distinction between the two. *Zoē* is the fantasy illusorily presupposed by the biopolitical apparatus as the ground of its function, while bare life is what is produced by the apparatus as its end result. We might say that *zoē* is something more like an input for the machine whereas bare life is its output, the bloody mass produced as *zoē*'s simulacrum.

things and their predicates, messianic life relates to these things directly; and because the world is irreparably in excess of itself (such that things and predicates are always non-self-identical), messianic life is content to dwell in this non-coincidence rather than attempting to cancel it in a proprietary gesture.

Another name for the messianic, then, is a kind of untotalizable non-coincidence that Agamben calls "form-of-life." The syntagm is hyphenated in order to express that there is no distance between "life" and its "form." On the contrary, life only *is* its form; life is as life does, with no isolable lived base on which form could subsequently supervene. Because the messianic gives up the fantasy of some origin or fundament that can be reduced out from the messy particularities of life, it inaugurates an indistinction between form and content in a way that resists biopolitical divisions. This messianic form-of-life is what grants Agamben his relative optimism in the face of biopower (vis-à-vis someone like Foucault, for instance), and it is this messianic option that we will concretize over the course of this chapter through the example of Christian prayer.

In each of these realms just discussed—language, ontology, and law—Agamben is thrice-over revealed to be a thinker of non-coincidence. His writings are littered with paradoxical elements that are both inside and outside the operation of some apparatus, each one used to found the consistency of the apparatus's totality. Thus, performatives grammatically suture words to things and thus guarantee language, the sovereign exists both within and without the law in order to govern its application, and bare life serves as the exception on which normal life is based, thus grounding the social order by existing both within and without it. At the same time,

however, each of these elements also troubles the totality in question by their paradoxical

position with respect to it. It is for this reason that Paul Livingston can say, commenting on

Agamben, that "the paradoxical structure of sovereignty … is thus in fact formally identical to

the Russell paradox."[22] Language—Agamben's ur-apparatus—"is precisely *exceptional*" in the

same way:

> Language is the place of the 'permanent state of exception' in which signification is
> always, paradoxically, outside itself in its reference to the totality in which it takes place,
> and inside itself in its capacity for self-reference, both at and beyond the boundary of
> sense that its own movement incessantly draws.[23]

Between the regularity of these paradoxical elements within his writing and the priority he grants

to language for inaugurating the non-self-identity that overwrites the whole world, Agamben can

clearly be classed as a thinker of inclosure and the consequences of formal dilemmas like those

laid out in chapter one.

Indeed, in some sense, Agamben's entire project can be described as tracing the

operations of inclosure across Western history. Over and over, he finds an identical structure

underlying the story of power in the West: paradoxical elements stand 'outside' the totalities they

attempt to coherently ground but are also 'inside' the same totalities as what guarantees the

apparatus's relationship with the elements it governs. As these apparatuses operate, they write

divisions onto the very substances they hope to capture—divisions between the language being

spoken about and the language doing the speaking, or between the legal order being constituted

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[22] Paul M. Livingston, *The Politics of Logic: Badiou, Wittgenstein, and the Consequences of Formalism* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 42.

[23] Ibid., 242.

and the sovereign doing the constituting, or the predicate being described and the being's essence

on the basis of which one can supposedly wager descriptions in the first place. The several

dualities that characterize Western thought are thus, for Agamben, merely the shadow cast by the

paradoxical place of these foundational elements. Essence and existence, subject and predicate,

form and matter, animal life and political life—these are simply the necessary illusions produced

by the apparatuses of human language, society, and thought. And the ur-apparatus—the one that

precedes the others and that writes non-self-identity inescapably onto ontology itself—is

language. Language is responsible for the foundational human split that is quasi-originary for

everything that follows in Agamben's account. This split is what the sovereign aims to stabilize

through the exception and what the messiah aims to redeem as form-of-life. Where the sovereign

attempts to stabilize this non-coincidence by iteratively re-totalizing its sphere of application in

increasingly invasive encroachments, the messiah refuses every attempt at ownership,

totalization, or suturing of the non-coincidence of human life.

     With this summary of Agamben's overall project in hand, we can now ask where it

touches down in the particulars of prayer. Despite being a philosopher by training and despite his

reception in the United States being a function primarily of his political thought, Agamben's

attention is drawn with unusual regularity to Christian theology. Focusing specifically on his

comments on messianicity and the temporality of Christian life, I propose to draw out of these

theological investments an Agambenian theory of prayer—that is, an account of what a disciple

does when she prays and how prayer operates with respect to life, time, and the apparatuses that

govern both. Imagined as a species of the messianic, prayer can be understood as a response to

the non-self-identity of the world and a way of resisting the world's capture via biopolitical

division. Agamben gives us the terms to articulate both what prayer is straining toward (form-of-

life) as well as what it so often (and tragically) collapses into (à la the disciplinary enforcements

outlined by Foucault). Despite its biopolitical risks, prayer has the potential to be a technique for

playing at the level of form and predicate, a way of dwelling in the potentiality that leaks through

the non-coincidence of the world and its objects, and a refusal of every sovereign encroachment.

It is to this Agambenian theory of prayer that I now turn by looking at two of his most

pronouncedly theological works: *The Highest Poverty* and *The Time That Remains*.

Prayer as Form-of-Life: *The Highest Poverty*

In no book or essay does Agamben come as close to concretizing form-of-life as he does in *The

Highest Poverty*. This may strike readers as puzzling, given that the book is dedicated to the

cenobitic life of the thirteenth century Franciscan order. What in a medieval religious movement

could possibly be illuminating about contemporary life, and how could monastic *regulae*

possibly intervene pragmatically in a viciously biopolitical modernity? What interests Agamben

about cenoby, however, is the way Franciscanism aims to escape juridical governance. "What is

in question, for the order as for its founder," he writes, "is the *abdicatio omnis iuris* ('abdication

of every right'), that is, the possibility of a human existence beyond the law."[24] This too,

however, may strike readers as odd: isn't monastic life in fact the *most* juridically ordered kind

of life rather than the least? What are cenobitic rules if not legal prescriptions of the most

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[24] Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life* (trans. Adam Kotsko; Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2013), 110.

invasive and biopolitical sort? This, however, is Agamben's central intention: to distinguish monastic rule from juridical normativity and to show how the early Franciscan movement began to approximate the messianic. For our purposes, moreover, Agamben's investment in thirteenth century monasticism is yet more crucial still because of the entanglement between cenobitic life and prayer. Prayer was the temporal rhythm of the monastery and the posture through which the Franciscans staked their resistance to ecclesiastical control.[25] In *The Highest Poverty*, then, we find clues for what an Agambenian theology of prayer might look like because it is in monasticism that Agamben finds a concrete example of form-of-life.

Indeed, the Preface opens with a frank admission of this very aim: "The object of this study is the attempt … to construct a form-of-life, that is to say, a life that is linked so closely to its form that it proves to be inseparable from it."[26] Agamben's syntagma requires hyphens between "form" and "life" because the life it articulates cannot be stripped of its formal predicates and categories in an attempt to isolate the biological base that is presupposed as its fundament. Toward this end, the monastic archive proves surprisingly fertile because cenoby concerns the imbrication of life and form quite precisely: the monastery is structured by a detailed and complex "rule" without this rule capturing life, as we might have expected. Although readers are primed to understand a monastic rule as the equivalent of a legal code or formal apparatus—something that seems to supervene *on* and apply *to* the life in question—

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[25] As Agamben explains, the church made liturgy a separate sphere from day-to-day life and appointed the priest as its sole proprietor. The monks, however, refused this separation, and hence their prioritization of prayer and reading over sacrament and mass. See *Highest Poverty*, 83.

[26] Ibid., xi.

when Agamben investigates Franciscanism, he finds nothing so transcendent. Instead, he finds

that, in the "reciprocal tension" between monastic rule and life, "something new and unheard-of,

that is, a form of life, has persistently approached its very realization and has just as persistently

missed it."[27] It remains, however, a mere "approach" and a "persistent … miss" because the

Franciscans never actually achieved their aim. Though they gestured conceptually in the

direction of messianic life and even approximated it in their prioritization of use over ownership,

the messianic potential of thirteenth century cenoby was, for Agamben, eventually recaptured in

the ecclesiastical and juridical terms of the day. As a result, however, in both the approach and

the near-miss of this praying community lies a model for prayer in both its guises: an immanent

form-of-life *and* its misfire into biopolitical transcendence.

It is clear, furthermore, that the novel relationship Agamben identifies between life and

rule in the monastery is, in fact, their complete fusion. Monastic life, he explains, concerns life as

a whole rather than individual actions or behaviors; the monk commits himself not to a series of

discrete commands but instead to an entire way of life. The monks "reclaim[ed] a *life* and not a

rule," "as if they did not want to read and interpret the Gospel, but only live it."[28] As a result of

staking life *in its entirety* on the cenobitic rule, not only did the rule fail to operate like a law but

in fact dissolved the very possibility of legal normativity taking hold through monastic

imperatives. Agamben explains: "A norm that does not refer to single acts and events, but to the

entire existence of an individual, … is no longer easily recognizable as a law, just as a life that is

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[27] Ibid., xii.

[28] Ibid., 93–4.

founded in its totality in the form of a rule is no longer truly life."[29] "The common life, by identifying itself with the rule without remainder, abolishes and cancels it."[30] With no gap remaining between the law and what it governs, the law in fact disappears *in* what is governed. Laws, Agamben implies, draw their identity from the sliver of transcendence that allows them to supervene *on* life. Absent that gap, legal normativity disappears.

And the mechanism of this fusion, at least where the Franciscans were concerned, centrally involves prayer: "the practice of meditation, temporal scansion, and incessant prayer" are the means by which "the rule … can coincide … with the monk's entire life."[31] Every hour of the day corresponded to a monastic "Offic[e] of prayer and psalmody" until the whole of their life became, in effect, "a single great prayer."[32] Agamben, in fact, takes this one step further, going so far as to define the monk himself as nothing more than this prayerful timekeeping: "The cenobite is, in this sense, first of all a total hourly scansion of existence, in which every moment has its corresponding Office."[33] In Agamben's ontology, being is as being does and there is no 'essence' at the root of the monk that can be separately predicated as 'prayerful' or 'timekeeping.' There is only a particular human body marking the hours via devotional postures and contemplative silences. This is a human life formally defined by its content and behaviors

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[29] Ibid., 26.

[30] Ibid., 7.

[31] Ibid., 26.

[32] Ibid., 19, 22.

[33] Ibid., 21.

and nothing more. Scripture and prayer "can thus accompany and articulate from the inside the entire day of the monk and become inseparable from his every gesture and his every activity."[34]

Thus, when Agamben describes the kind of prayer that begins to hint at form-of-life, he describes a kind of prayer that simply *is* life rather than supervening *on* life, a prayer that simply *is* time rather than taking place *in* time. For prayer to be a salutary form-of-life rather than the disciplinary capture of unfortunately operationalized bodies, according to Agamben, prayer must be considered as what generates an indivisible whole. This generativity is crucial. The reason form and life are inseparable in Agamben's notion of the messianic is because life *is nothing other than* its formal modes of living, in the same way that language is nothing more than its use or a human being is nothing other than an aggregation of its actions, experiences, habits, and memories. Life is simply living; any other conception, from Agamben's perspective, would depend on dangerously reifying some "life" as a fundament which is, for him, the very definition of biopolitics. In order for prayer to avoid being yet another disciplinary capture of human life in the service of biopower, then, prayer must be conceived as what *generates* an entire life rather than something that punctuates a preexisting "life" in accordance with juridical prescription. The monastic prayer-life that so interests Agamben approaches a form-of-life because the entirety of cenobitic life is generated *by* the iterations of prayer that structure morning, mealtime, night, and Sabbath. Getting on one's knees, saying grace, counting rosary beads—these are the load-bearing points on which the disciple's entire life hangs. Prayer, on this model, is something like a heartbeat or the occasional bursts of flame that propel a hot air balloon. Like a heartbeat, prayer

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[34] Ibid., 25.

is a momentary punctuation of time surrounded by a staid temporal flow (similar to blood

between beats or valve closures), but it is what keeps the disciple's devotional circulatory system

in motion. And like the flame in a hot air balloon, though prayer only fires in brief moments, it is

these occasional bursts that generate the momentum and lift of the whole. Agamben would thus

have us reverse our sense of what takes place in cenobitic life and with it, I suggest, our sense of

what takes place in prayer. "The common life is not the object that the rule must constitute and

govern," he writes. "On the contrary … it is the rule that seems to be born from 'cenoby.'"[35]

Here no formal imperative governs life and produces prayer; rather, the praying gives rise to its

formal articulation.

Christian prayer writ large has the potential to scan and formalize the contemporary

disciple's life in much the same way as monastic prayer did for the Franciscans. Invocations at

the start of the day, blessings at mealtimes, special hours of devotional worship, attending mass,

kneeling at one's bedside before sleep—a whole life is constructed out of these moments. Once

we shift our theoretical attention to the scale of an entire Christian life and not just discrete

moments of praying, something closer to what Agamben is describing comes into view. Thus, he

explains, "it is not a matter so much of applying a form (or norm) to life, but of *living* according

to that form, that is of a life that, in its sequence, makes itself that very form, coincides with it."[36]

Rather than the sovereignty of a norm applying *to* a life, Agamben is after the immanence of an

indistinguishable life-and-form together, so indistinguishable that they can never be separated

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[35] Ibid., 58.

[36] Ibid., 99.

and one can never transcendently apply itself *to* the other. Life and form can be radically flattened, in this way, because the form in question is simply that which emerges out of life's modes. Christian prayer has the potential to be something similar: a life and not a rule, a form that generates and structures and indifferentiates a kind of messianic life, rather than a life submitted to a code of discrete Christian observances.

Prayer's generativity is crucial, in other words, because of what, precisely, is being generated. Prayer is an apparatus wherein life generates its own form. In prayer, life produces a schematic of itself. It takes a political event memorialized in vigil or the duration of a day and contracts it, re-presenting its key structural moments and compiling them into a picture that cannot be differentiated from the very life they represent precisely *because* this picture is generated in the living of that life. In the same way that a map schematizes terrain or engineering blueprints outline the structure of a building, what emerges out of prayer is also a formal picture—a contracted, summative representation of key structures—except that, in prayer, it's as if the soil's non-self-identity created its own map or the building generated its own blueprints in the process of being built. In this way, prayer dwells rightly in non-coincidence because it allows formal structures to emerge out of life's non-self-identity rather than imposing them from the top down in an attempt to cancel that self-excess. By allowing life's non-coincidence to be the generative fact that it is, prayer doubles life, resolving it into the form it's meant to have. The question for a theory of prayer, then, is not 'How do I pray?' or 'How often?' or 'With what words and what material objects?' but instead 'What does it mean to live a life *as* prayer, and what kind of existence follows?' Dwelling in human non-coincidence in a way that resists

illusions of metaphysical fundaments, prayer becomes a way of staking a form-of-life against the normative encroachments of biopower and an apparatus for indifferentiating form and content in such a way that sovereignty cannot use form to get a grip on what it imagines "life" to be.

Additionally, prayer's generativity makes clearer why Agamben is so insistent on the indivisible "wholeness" of messianic life. An immanent theory of prayer can scale no further than the level of life in its entirety because to scale any deeper would be to trade on those divisions of life that characterize biopolitics. In this way, *The Highest Poverty* also issues a challenge to theorists of prayer who think of prayer as taking place in discrete moments or as a series of time slices that begin when a disciple hits his knees and end when he stands up again. That scale, for Agamben, is dangerously small—not because he wishes to totalize and operationalize all of the disciple's actions into some kind of universal, but because a messianic life is so immanent to its form that sovereignty cannot transcendently penetrate life to differentiate it. Thus, when Agamben talks about life in its entirety, this is not meant as a totalizing gesture. Instead, he is after a unit of life that cannot be biopolitically sliced and diced. He speaks in terms of life as a whole because that is the smallest granularity available for a form-of-life. It is a scale of resistance rather than of totality.

Readers may nonetheless sense a dilemma here: is not the total identification of life with form almost exactly the formula of the state of exception, in which raw sovereign force saturates life precisely because the mediating influence of particular legal norms is suspended? Is this not, too, the indistinguishability of juridical form with biological life? The danger, it seems, is that, in addition to the messianic form-of-life, there lurks the possibility of *another* form of identification

between life and form, but one that cancels out life instead of canceling the force of the law.[37] As

Agamben is at pains to show over and over again, messianic form-of-life looks dangerously

similar to a sovereign exception. How, then, are we to tell the difference? The stakes are

rendered even higher with prayer because, as Foucault so cogently pointed out, Christianity

would seem to be the biopolitical apparatus par excellence, most particularly in moments where

the disciple submits the entirety of his life to examination and cashes out this surveillance as

speech. Prayer can look suspiciously like the Foucauldian confessional where one is both

confessor and judge, disciplined into self-surveillance through the apparatus of private

devotions.[38] How, then, does Agamben purport to differentiate a prayerful form-of-life, à la

cenobitic indistinction of life and law, from the indistinction of life and law that follows from

total juridical surveillance?

The crucial distinction occurs not at the level of the law (i.e., norms, precepts, and

regulations) but at the level of its *force*. As Agamben clarifies elsewhere, a state of exception is

characterized by the suspension of legal norms (the specific rules prescribed in concrete legal

documents) while the *force* of the law remains.[39] The result is a Kafkaesque world of normativity

that supervenes from every direction without ever distilling into a particular norm through which

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[37] Importantly, the state of exception does cancel the law, but only in a qualified sense; it cancels the law in that it suspends specific norms and prescriptions while nonetheless leaving the *force* of the law in effect in all its brute sovereignty. The difference can thus be boiled down to the following: where the state of exception suspends the law's efficacy, a form-of-life suspends the law's referentiality.

[38] For Foucault's account of the Christian confessional, see especially Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974–1975* (trans. Graham Burchell; New York: Picador, 2003), 167–230 and Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978* (trans. Graham Burchell; New York: Picador, 2007).

[39] See Agamben, *State of Exception*.

one could alleviate the juridical pressure.[40] In a state of exception, in other words, the full weight

of sovereignty bears down on human life without the mediating protection of the law. In the

wake of the messianic, however, something like the inverse occurs: sovereign force is suspended

while the legal norms remain (although absent their normativity), such that the norms become

objects merely of use and play rather than conduits for the sovereign capture of human life. In

fact, precisely through this visible remainder of the law, now absent its force, something else

comes into view: a form-of-life "exhibit[s] … the ceaseless void that the machine of Western

culture guards at its center."[41] By dwelling in human non-coincidence without any attempt to

escape it or totalize it, form-of-life displays what sovereignty is so keen to eliminate: the

constitutive non-self-identity of the world and the way that essence and being are nothing more

than illusions produced by use. When *law* is suspended but force remains in play, sovereignty

bears directly and totally on all of life in a biopolitical emergency. When, on the other hand, the

force of the law is suspended and its norms remain as visible tokens of their cancelled power, the

emptiness of the biopolitical machine is revealed.

     A second difference between form-of-life and state of exception is displayed especially

well by the Franciscans. According to Agamben in *The Highest Poverty*, the key difference

between monastic rule and sovereign law is that "the [cenobite] … does not obligate himself, as

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[40] Jessica Whyte puts it nicely: "Here, we may well think of 'K' in Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, who was utterly subjected to a law that was both everywhere and nowhere. Like the law that dominates K's universe, the law of abandonment is an empty and indeterminate law that remains in force but is no longer formulated in specific prohibitions or interdictions." *Catastrophe and Redemption: The Political Thought of Giorgio Agamben* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2013), 29.

[41] Agamben, *Use of Bodies*, 266.

happens in the law, to the fulfillment of individual acts … but puts into question his way of living, which is not identified with a series of actions or exhausted in them."[42] Law attempts to grasp the whole of a life by legislating a series of discrete actions. This is ultimately a lost cause, however, because—as Agamben puts so clearly in the last phrase—life is not identical to a "series of actions" nor can it be exhausted in those actions. Neither the illusory *zoē* nor the true mode of their own living that human beings ultimately are is reducible to a succession of discrete observable behaviors. Instead of submitting, then, to a never-ending run of prescriptions that aim (impossibly) at totalizing a life, the monk simply operates at the level of the whole from the get-go—his entire "way of living" is put at stake in a recognition that life is nothing more than its mode of use. In this way, it is the monk's "life that is … applied to the norm and not the norm to life."[43] Nor is this reversal mere semantics, as Agamben goes on to explain: "What is in question in the monastic rules is thus a transformation that seems to bear on the very way in which human action is conceived, so that one shifts from the level of practice and acting to that of form of life and living."[44] Practice and acting are behaviors that supervene on some presumed fundament, in which some*thing* has to be *put* into practice and some potential has to pass over to actuality. In monastic life, however, human action is not divided in this way—neither conceived in particulate terms nor as a second-order process produced by some preexisting life. An entire monastic life is produced through its imbrication with cenobitic norms, rather than cenobitic norms supervening

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[42] Agamben, *Highest Poverty*, 55.

[43] Ibid., 61.

[44] Ibid.

on a pre-existing life that can be grasped and operationalized through a series of temporal and

behavioral divisions.

This is why Agamben's own candidate in *The Highest Poverty* for a biopolitical foil to

cenobitic life is ecclesiastical liturgy; liturgy operates at the level of practice and action rather

than life and living. As the ritual underpinnings of efficacy, liturgy demands that some series of

actions be performed in order to successfully render some state or condition (of blessedness,

forgiveness, eucharistic transubstantiation, etc.). Ecclesiastical rites are structured by

imperatives, an ethical demand that something *must* be the case, what Agamben calls an

ontology of "having-to-be," where the imperatival force derives from a presupposed gulf

between essence and existence that sovereignty is trying to draw together.[45] Liturgy thus

represents, for Agamben, the drawing of human bodies into certain operative postures in order to

suture the constitutive gaps in ontology, whereas form-of-life refuses that imperative and thus

scrambles the ontological picture in which power can supervene *on* any separable fundament.

Prayer thought according to a liturgical paradigm would thus be thought as discrete moments of

worship punctuating homogeneous time, offered in obedience to a juridical God and toward the

end of suturing the non-coincidence that troubles the relationship between words and things.

Prayer thought according to a cenobitic paradigm, by contrast, is simply the form generated by

an entire life, a dwelling *in* non-coincidence that does not concern itself with the gap between

words and things and that is not offered in obedience to externally-imposed imperatives. On an

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[45] See Giorgio Agamben, *Opus Dei: An Archaeology of Duty* (trans. Adam Kotsko; Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2013).

Agambenian model, prayer (unlike liturgy) does not aim *at* particular outcomes; it is pure means

rather than a technique toward some other determinate end.

This distinction—between a totality attempted through an infinite series of discrete

actions and a whole life conceived and enacted indivisibly from its inception—not only

differentiates sovereign law from monastic form-of-life; it also begins to differentiate cenobitic

prayer from Foucauldian confession.[46] On Foucault's account of the confessional, "one must

confess everything. Nothing must be left out."[47] Each unit of confessional speech is thus, like

liturgical rites or law-abiding actions, a discrete item that must be individually produced and

extracted from the flesh. Here again we see disciplinary power seeking to enact totalizing control

through the production of an infinite series of discrete moments and doing so in a way that

supervenes on and divides a fleshy body, rather than a totality being enacted from the beginning

in a way that can never be divided. For this reason, again, prayer cannot be understood as an

obligation to fulfill individual prayerful acts—to spend a certain number of hours on one's knees,

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[46] Agamben is well aware that Foucault elaborated medieval and monastic Christianity as the laboratory of modern disciplinary techniques; see *Highest Poverty* 4, 19, 33. More broadly, Agamben owes a great debt to Foucault's account of biopolitics and they are more similar in both thought and method than they are distinct. That said, Agamben also critiques of Foucault for thinking potentiality only as an enrichment of the actual rather than thinking potentiality in its own right (see Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* [trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen; New York: Zone Books, 2002], 143–5), for failing to distinguish between the law and its force (and hence understanding sovereignty and biopower as two distinct forms of power rather than sovereignty as a dimension within every biopolitical apparatus; see Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 3–9), and for ultimately privileging genealogy over archaeology as a methodological principle (see Giorgio Agamben, *The Sacrament of Language: An Archaeology of the Oath* [trans. Adam Kotsko; Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2011], 10–11). For more on the similarities between Agamben and Foucault, as well as a useful overview of Agamben's public remarks on Foucault in interviews, see Leland de la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2009), 207–26; for a helpful summary of the differences between Agamben and Foucault as regards biopower and sovereignty, see Whyte, *Catastrophe and Redemption*, 25–35; and for a more detailed argument that Agamben is closer to Foucault than he himself seems to realize, see Tom Frost, "Agamben's Sovereign Legalization of Foucault," *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 30.3 (2010): 545–77.

[47] Foucault, *Abnormal*, 176.

to repeat the "Our Father" a set number of times, or to punctuate every Sunday with a set list of liturgical behaviors. To qualify as anything like a form-of-life, prayer must be a question, instead, of a mode of living that generates life as an indivisible whole.

It nonetheless remains the case that prayer has been a mechanism of disciplinary capture in precisely the ways Foucault warned. And in the Protestant-influenced West, in particular, the tracks for the disciplinary power of piety often run right through the disciple herself. For all that we might theorize prayer as a potential form-of-life, prayer can also be imposed on disciples as a kind of self-examination, an anxious scanning of the soul to ascertain its righteousness and purity. This is the danger to which Foucault drew our attention: the colonization of the subject as a node of (self)disciplinary power, habituated through the scrutinizing of one's interiority.[48] In this way, disciples can inadvertently draw the lines of sovereign power on their own flesh. Prayer, thus conceived, renders the disciple a node of biopower, applying to herself the conceptual impositions and normative enforcements of Christian operativity. Prayer can be a time to feel guilty, to split the self into both sinner and magistrate, to ruminate on the failure to meet Christian devotional ideals, and to withdraw into the cognitive interiority of the modern subject. Importantly, this is precisely the kind of prayer that an Agambenian model disallows. If prayer holds the potential to be a form-of-life, anxious self-scanning of this sort does not qualify for the title "prayer." Instead, on Agamben's telling, this would be the moment when prayer becomes a state of exception—the never-ending normative pressure that follows from

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[48] In fact, given that Foucault aims at giving a genealogical account for the rise of the "soul," it's possible to understand Agamben as arguing for the removal of the soul from Christianity.

transcendently applying ideals *to* life, dividing the subject into both confessor and judge. If an Agambenian model of prayer conceives of prayer as a form-of-life that resists transcendent and sovereign encroachments, that holds for the disciple herself, as well. Whether imposed by an external ecclesiastical authority or by the individual worshiper, the normative regulations of the law must gain no purchase through division—including perhaps especially the self-division that allows for a disciplinary scansion of interiority. As soon as a disciple begins to undertake self-examination, they have replaced prayer with confession.[49]

There is further reason, beyond these Foucauldian concerns, to be suspicious of interiorizing accounts of prayer—such as, for instance, accounts that conceive of prayer as a primarily mental activity. Such conceptions derive from problematic logics about what religion is.[50] Protestant accounts of prayer in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for instance, intentionally eschewed bodily techniques and devotional objects as part of Protestantism's self-definition against the Catholic church and its projection of non-Euro-Christian devotional practices as mere superstitious incantation. When Protestants advocated to make religion a matter of 'what goes on in our heads,' there were profoundly political and racialized stakes at work. As Anderson Blanton explains: "Much ink was spilled in an attempt to demarcate a clear

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[49] There is an admittedly paradoxical character to this model of prayer. Practically speaking, a certain self-examination is unavoidable, now taking the shape of imperatives such as 'Don't draw distinctions!' and 'Don't self-examine!' The task, as I understand it, is to iteratively suspend even these imperatives, *using* every confessional moment as an occasion to reenter prayer.

[50] Here I follow those who understand "secular" to concern not the relative absence of religion but rather the construction of the very category of religion. The secular is one half of a religious/secular binary that is, at root, fundamentally concerned with race and racialization. See Jared Hickman, *Black Prometheus: Race and Radicalism in the Age of Atlantic Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Peter Coviello, *Make Yourselves Gods: Mormons and the Unfinished Business of American Secularism* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

boundary between magical incantation—with all its associated material objects and fixed bodily gestures—and the contingent act of prayer to an abstract and intellectualized deity." Every time prayer is theorized following "the Protestant narrative of … progressive abstraction from the magical material thing … until it ends up being a kind of silent dialogue with an interior God," there is reason to worry about the assumptions that funded such an account.[51] Thus, when Agamben points to prayer as a form-of-life taking place on the scale of life as an indivisible whole, he also avoids importing many of the assumptions that underwrite the conception of prayer as a species of mental activity. When theologians and anthropologists evaluate prayer at too fine a scale, they risk trading on biopolitical divisions. Agamben's penchant for abstraction is thus something more than, as some commentators protest, the typical shortsightedness of a philosopher working ten thousand feet in the air, irresponsibly unmoored from historical particulars.[52] Rather, Agamben works at a certain level of abstraction in part because he is suspicious about the methodological assumptions packed in with too fine-grained a study of human life.

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[51] Anderson Blanton, "A Machine for the Production of Gods," interview by Onnesha Roychoudhuri, Social Science Research Council Forums, August 17, 2015, http://forums.ssrc.org/ndsp/2015/08/17/a-machine-for-the-production-of-gods/. For several examples of prayer that problematize this Protestant model by displacing the agency and immaterial interiority of the praying subject, see Blanton's examinations (on this same SSRC forum) of, for instance, the "praying dolls" of the late 19th century that played phonographic recordings of a child's bedtime prayer, the card system that gave access to charismatic healers in the mid-twentieth century, and Oral Roberts' famous use of television screens and radio speakers as haptic channels for healing. See also Anderson Blanton, *Hittin' the Prayer Bones: Materiality of Spirit in the Pentecostal South* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

[52] See, for instance, Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, "Bare Life on Strike: Notes on the Biopolitics of Race and Gender," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 107.1 (2008): 89–105; Leila Whitley, "The Disappearance of Race: A Critique of the Use of Agamben in Border and Migration Scholarship," *Borderlands* 16.1 (2017): 1–23.

What, then, does prayer look like apart from these traditional frameworks? Agamben

offers one further clue in *The Highest Poverty* in his discussion of use. What really sets the

Franciscans apart and marks their departure from law is, according to Agamben, their vow of

poverty: "the Franciscans never tire of confirming … the lawfulness for the brothers of making

use of goods without having any [legal] right to them."[53] Like a horse that has the "de facto use

but not property rights over the oats that it eats," so too the monastic brotherhood claims not to

own its food, clothing, and living space, but retains only their "simple de facto use."[54] In this

way, the Franciscans believed they had located a space for life that was not governed by the law.

Through the notion of use, they could articulate a sustainable subsistence that was nevertheless

also genuine poverty and thus existed beyond legal categories like ownership. This latter quality

is what draws Agamben's particular interest: by couching their form of life under the banner of

use, the Friars Minor "attempt[ed] to realize a human life and practice absolutely outside the

determinations of the law."[55] Unfortunately for the friars, however, their commitment was

immediately attacked by the intellectual elite and by the church, both of whom were leery about

the specter of cenobitic claims to a kind of anomic life on the margins of religio-governmental

sovereignty.[56] Thus, as Agamben traces the notion of use through monastic writings, he finds a

problematically defensive articulation of the concept. The Franciscans fell into the trap of

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[53] Agamben, *Highest Poverty*, 110, emphasis added.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid., 110, 116.

[56] Ibid., 136–7.

describing their relationship to use in reactionary, juridical terms—as something like "the right to have no rights."[57] The concept of use is thus left at the end of the book as a tragic near-miss, the moment the Franciscans nearly articulated a form-of-life only to be recaptured at the last minute by law.

In the end, therefore, Agamben does not give a definition and elaboration of use in *The Highest Poverty* because, in the failures of its Franciscan articulation, he has reached the limits of his monastic frame: "What is lacking in the Franciscan literature is a definition of use in itself and not only in opposition to law. The preoccupation with constructing a justification of use in juridical terms prevented them from collecting the hints of a theory of use present in the Pauline letters, in particular 1 Corinthians 7:20–31."[58] Had they looked to Paul, he hints, they would have found a way to articulate use as the mode in which "life … maintains itself in relation, not only to things, but even to itself in the mode of inappropriability."[59] But this, it seems, is the only hint that Agamben will give in *The Highest Poverty*. For any real sense of what he finds productive about use, we need to look to another book—indeed, the book where Agamben takes up the very passage he recommends in hindsight to the Franciscans.

Despite the tragedy of its juridically-recaptured ending, Franciscan cenoby nonetheless remains Agamben's most sustained and systematic example of form-of-life in concrete terms. A

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[57] Ibid., 124. Agamben later returns to the Franciscans in *Use of Bodies*, where he notes another conceptual failure: the friars conceived use as "an act of renunciation—that is … [founded] on the will of a subject" rather than "on the very nature of things." *Use of Bodies*, 80.

[58] Agamben, *Highest Poverty*, 139.

[59] Ibid., 140.

form-of-life looks like a life lived as prayer, where prayer is one technique among many for dwelling in human non-self-identity in a way that suspends the law. Prayer here takes place on the scale of life as a whole, functioning as the punctuating moments that generate the momentum and lift of Christian existence and that, by doubling life, allows life to acquire the form it's meant to have. On Agamben's model, then, prayer refuses to enact a sovereign relationship between two halves of a split subject, instead generating a life that refuses biopolitical encroachments by refusing to allow surveillance any purchase in interiority. If the Franciscans ultimately failed to realize the promise of a prayerful life, they nevertheless also connected prayer to what is, in Agamben's mind, its nearest messianic counterpart: use. It is this connection between prayer and use that we must next interrogate.

Use and the Temporality of Prayer: *The Time That Remains*

The Highest Poverty (2011) introduced readers to the messianic stakes of prayer, the notion of use as a key messianic operation, and even hinted at prayer's role as a temporal operator for monastic life (via the scansion of hours). These three themes—messianicity, use, and temporality—were all elaborated together some ten years earlier in *The Time That Remains* (2000), once again in conversation with a Christian archive. It is with this book that we can see how prayer might be understood as an apparatus of inappropriation and use, as well as a kind of temporal contraction that follows from a messianic form-of-life. In what follows, then, I will outline Agamben's treatment of use, extrapolate what this theory of use might indicate about prayer, and then turn to the temporal questions that more centrally occupy this book in order to outline how prayer contracts time in the process of schematizing life.

The Time That Remains opens with the provocative claim that Paul's letter to the Romans might be considered "the fundamental messianic text for the Western tradition."[60] Over the course of the volume, Agamben attempts to work out what Paul means by "the time of the now" (*ho nyn kairos*) and is especially fascinated by the apostle's statement in 1 Cor 7:29 that "time contracted itself" (*ho kairos synestalmenos estin*).[61] Agamben intends to comment on just the first ten words of Romans 1 on the wager that the epistle's greeting performs the very messianic structure he wishes to unpack: the "first ten words recapitulate the meaning of the text in its entirety," he writes, because "each word of the incipit contracts within itself the complete text of the Letter."[62] It is notions like contraction and recapitulation, moreover, that characterize Agamben's understanding of the messianic. Through the Epistle to the Romans, then, he explores the kinds of operations, consequences, and effects that flow from the messiah.[63] The result is some of his clearest writing about the messianic and about form-of-life—and, as a result, a discussion that can be mined for implications for an Agambenian theory of prayer.

Agamben takes his point of departure from the very passage he wished retroactively to offer to thirteenth century Franciscans: 1 Cor 7:29–32. It is, in Agamben's words, "[Paul's] most rigorous definition of messianic life" and explains for early Christians how they ought to inhabit

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[60] Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (trans. Patricia Dailey; Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2005), 1.

[61] Ibid., 2, 68.

[62] Ibid., 6.

[63] Agamben understands Paul as an emphatically Jewish thinker, such that "messiah" here should be understood in Jewish terms despite the epistle's Christian reception.

their worldly vocations in the wake of the messiah's arrival.[64] Following Jesus's advent, Paul

explains:

> Time contracted itself, the rest is, that even those having wives may be as not [*hōs mē*] having, and those weeping as not weeping, and those rejoicing as not rejoicing, and those buying as not possessing, and those using the world as not using it up. For passing away is the figure of this world.[65]

Agamben is especially captivated by the formula *hōs mē* or "as not" which he describes as a

"tensor" that "push[es] a concept's semantic field … against itself."[66] He explains: "The apostle

does not say: 'weeping *as* rejoicing' nor 'weeping as [meaning =] not weeping,' but 'weeping *as*

not weeping.' … One determinate factical condition is set in relation to itself."[67] What draws

Agamben's attention, in other words, is that the messianic event appears not to revise or

repopulate the factical conditions of the world but instead just repeats factical conditions that are

already in play. "The messianic vocation [thus] does not … have any specific content; it is

nothing but the repetition of those same … conditions *in which* or *as which* we are called."[68] The

messianic thus emerges in the non-coincidence of every vocation with itself. Rather than trying

to suture that gap closed (as does sovereignty), it displays the gap in the form of the "as not." To

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[64] Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 23.

[65] Ibid. Here I cite the English translator's rendering of Agamben's own translation of the Greek text.

[66] Ibid., 24.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid., 22–3. This discussion stems, in part, from Heidegger's 1921 lecture course on "Characteristics of Early Christian Life Experience." Agamben himself mentions Heidegger in *The Time That Remains*, 34. See also Whyte, *Catastrophe and Redemption*, 149.

weep "as not" weeping is simply to display and dwell in the failure of weeping to coincide with itself.

The upshot of this self-tensing of worldly vocations is, according to Paul, that the vocation can be freed up for use. When the apostle encourages early Christians to "make use" of their vocations (1 Cor 7:21),[69] Agamben explicitly connects this council with the "as not" formula: "To be messianic, to live in the Messiah, signifies the expropriation of each and every juridical-factical property … under the form of the *as not*. This expropriation does not, however, found a new identity; the 'new creature' is none other than the use and messianic vocation of the old."[70] Founding new identities would be the equivalent, on the level of the subject, of founding new legal regimes—both are sovereign gestures, determining and proprietary. Identities trade on predicates and govern the substances to which they are attached. The effect of the messianic, by contrast, is not to create one new identity among others, but nor is it to cancel and negate certain identities, which would also be a too-sovereign gesture. Rather than an endless proliferation of new identities or the constant battle of negating old identities, Agamben holds forth the option of the constant *use* of an old vocation. On this model, as in the early Christian community in the wake of Jesus's coming, worldly vocations still exist in their old form but their juridical force has been cancelled by the messiah's fulfillment of the law. A vocation remains to be "used" in something like the way an old passport might still be used after its expiration. The holes punched through its binding cancel the document's legal force, making it ineffective for traversing

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[69] Agamben's translation of 1 Corinthians 7:21 reads: "Art thou called being a slave? Care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather." *The Time That Remains*, 26.

[70] Ibid.

airports and international borders, but the object itself remains; it can be used as a prop for child's play, as a token of memory in a display case, even as tinder for an emergency fire in a pinch. Paul himself hints at something like this vocational use in 1 Corinthians 9, where he explains: "To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews … To those outside the law I became as one outside the law … so that I might win those outside the law" (1 Cor 9:20–21, NRSV). In the wake of the messiah, Paul makes use of an identity rather than possessing it.

This, then, is why use without ownership is another of Agamben's formulae for a form-of-life: it is a life in which objects and persons are not owned (that is, grasped and overdetermined) through predicates, but instead freed up for multiform utilization. Just as the messianic suspends every sovereign gesture that attempts to govern existence, use suspends every proprietary gesture that tries to govern objects. By using without owning, the Franciscans displayed the constitutive inappropriability of the world and thus thwarted law's fantasy of possession. Because the world is non-identical, none of its persons or objects or events can ever be locked down to a single determinate meaning or identity. A shipping container never coincides perfectly with itself *as* a shipping container, producing a gap that allows it to be repurposed as a tiny home in an exploratory housing development, just as refrigerator boxes are repurposed by children as pretend spaceships and phone books are repurposed by homeowners as door jambs. Use thus trades on the non-self-identity of every object. It is in this way, Agamben claims, "the deactivation of the law is carried out … through … use."[71] The law operates through the fantasy that objects can be made to coincide with themselves and is forever chasing down the

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[71] Ibid., 125.

suturing of that gap through its own illusory projections. By contrast, use *displays* an object's

non-self-identity by turning the object in surprising directions; it revels in the insuperability of

that same gap and, in the process, dispels the fantasies of law.

It is for this reason that Agamben's paradigmatic example of the messianic is the jarring

juxtaposition of the sobriety of law with the whimsy of childhood play:

> One day humanity will play with law just as children play with disused objects, not in order to restore them to their canonical use but to free them from it for good. What is found after the law is not a more proper and original use value that precedes the law, but a new use that is born only after it. And use, which has been contaminated by law, must also be freed from its own value. This liberation is the task of study, or of play.[72]

The non-self-identity of the world gathers a halo of potential around every being and object,

levering them free from their complete determinacy and rootedness in actuality. For Paul, the

messiah's disciples are freed to relate to both Mosaic law and their worldly vocations not as

juridical impositions (that is, as forms supervening on the substance of life to the exclusion of all

other possibilities) but as objects of use and even play. Mosaic law is still on the record books, so

to speak, but it remains simply to be studied rather than observed. After Jesus's arrival, disciples

are still gendered or married or fishermen, but these vocations and identities are to be inhabited

in the form of the "as not."

Prayer—whether for thirteenth century Franciscans or contemporary non-cenobitic

Christians—can be conceived as "use" of precisely this sort. Prayer is a use of time and body and

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[72] Agamben, *State of Exception*, 64. For more on the relationship between use and capitalism, as hinted in this quote's reference to "use value," see Agamben's essay "In Praise of Profanation," in *Profanations* (trans. Jeff Fort; New York: Zone Books, 2015), 73–92. For a fuller elaboration of Agamben's notion of play in conversation with his earlier work, see Catherine Mills: "Playing with Law: Agamben and Derrida on Postjuridical Justice," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 107.1 (2008): 15–36.

lived events in ways beyond their usual determinations in secular-capitalist Western life. In prayer, the disciple assumes a posture (kneeling, prostration, contemplative walking, craning over a rosary, etc.) that suspends certain biopolitical enforcements about the proper configuration of the human body, whether its productive operativity in the workplace, its regulative self-enhancement in exercise, or even the carefully-curated "leisure" that restores it to optimum productivity. Prayer, far from being a kind of interiorized mental activity, is more saliently a use of human flesh in directions that are not so easily commercialized. Importantly, too, prayer is the kind of messianic "as not" that plays on the non-self-coincidence of every worldly vocation. The messianic, recall, has no specific content of its own; it is simply the dwelling-in and display-of the constitutive non-self-identity of the world. In much the same way, prayer too is only a re-presentation of what is already available in a given situation. Prayer ruminates on the events of one's day or the themes of a worship service, naming people already available in one's family circle and discussing events that have already happened. At root, the content of prayer is fundamentally the content of life already lived, thoughts already pondered, and objects already encountered, but now repeated and displaced from their original worldly experience. "In this manner, [messianic vocation] revokes the factical condition and undermines it without altering its form."[73] The world's juridical capture of situations and objects is undermined not by negating or altering the form of these situations and objects, but simply by displaying their non-self-identity.

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[73] Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 24.

In prayer, then, we might say that the Christian perpetuates a use-ful orientation to the world. Here disciples reconfigure their relationship to the materials and people around them, prizing these things away from their worldly determination and orienting them in new directions. The machine-sliced loaf in the cupboard, for instance, ceases to be the alienated product of one's own purchasing power and becomes instead "daily bread" (Matt 6:11). The invocation at a funeral for yet another black man murdered by the state prizes Christian concepts and phrases away from their sentimental whiteness and reinvests them as revolutionary slogans. Even something as gruesome as the image of a torture victim (an icon of biopolitics if ever there was one) can, à la Bataille, be leveraged as a contemplative object to aid a practice of self-annihilative writing as resistance to fascist encroachments.[74] The point is thus not to celebrate specifically Christian-pious uses of prayer, but rather to theorize the interstitial turning of every object in a direction other than it would have been otherwise encountered or understood in the course of the day. Prayer, on an Agambenian model, is an apparatus for just such prizings and turnings.

Form-of-life depends on this kind of inappropriation, this suspension of sovereign force such that forms, predicates, vocations, and norms are available for use in new ways. Prayer, as a premier moment of messianization, is an apparatus that pushes every object and determination against itself, pressing on their non-self-identity in order to return them to greater potential. And prayer, then, can function as a means for coupling every object and predicate with its

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[74] See chapters 1–3 of Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

inappropriation in the "as-not." Thus, in prayer, a disciple's vocations come to signify differently. An accountant becomes "as-not" an accountant because accountancy, when prayed over as part of a disciple's review of her workday, bears something less of its secularized surveillance of the flows of capital, its theatrics of professionalism and its liturgies of nine-to-five operativity. For at least a few moments at the end of the day, an accountant can pray over her own accountancy as something offered to God, as a divine blessing after a long and grueling job hunt or an evangelical opportunity vis-à-vis her coworkers. In prayer, potential accrues around the vocation, reorienting its non-self-identity Godward in ways not easily predicted by the secular world at large.

In this way, prayer functions something like a performative statement, which suspends its constative elements in order to enact rather than merely describe a state of affairs. Agamben explains: "It is this denotative character of the *dictum* that is suspended and called into question in the very moment it becomes the object of a performative syntagma. Thus the denotative expressions 'yesterday I was in Athens' or 'I will not fight against the Trojans' cease to be such if they are preceded by the performative *I swear*."[75] In the same way, prayer suspends the usual significations of the items over which it prays. Prayer is the performative "I pray that X" that suspends the usual constative significations of "X" alone. Prayer is an apparatus of use in which the world and its actualities are reprised in directions other than their secular, juridical capture.

But Agamben has more precision yet in store in his description of a form-of-life. If "as-not" provided a verbal formula for life lived in the wake of the messianic event, Agamben goes

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[75] Agamben, *Sacrament of Language*, 55–6. See also *The Time That Remains*, 133.

on to give a kind of mathematical formalism for those who live such a life—those he calls the remnant or the "not-all." Here, he takes his point of departure from the way St. Paul rescans the divisions of Mosaic law in the wake of the messiah. Jew and Gentile are no longer clean-cut identities, in the letter to the Romans; instead, their division is parsed by another—the Pauline division between "flesh" and "spirit."[76] This, however, is not simply a new division meant to straightforwardly replace the old. Instead, Paul introduces a "remnant" or remainder on both sides of the law's cut: after Paul rescans the categories of Jew and Gentile in terms of flesh/spirit, the categories of "Gentile" and "Jew" are revealed in their inability to coincide themselves. The point of the messianic is thus not to impose a second, locatable division on the already-identifiable divisions of the law (since to do so would just be to mimic the law's sovereign operations); it is, instead, to insist on the non-self-identity of what the law has purported to separate. "No universal man, no Christian can be found in the depths of the Jew or the Greek, neither as principle nor as an end; all that is left is a remnant and the impossibility of the Jew or the Greek to coincide with himself."[77]

The failure of these categories to be self-identical also prevents them from being perfectly locatable in time and space. This impossibility then becomes the formula with which Agamben schematizes the logic of the messianic: "Messianic division introduces a remnant … into the law's overall division of the people, and Jews and non-Jews are constitutively 'not

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[76] Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 47, 50.

[77] Ibid., 52–3.

all.'"[78] Readers are clearly meant to hear echoes of Lacan's matheme for feminine sexuality, in which 'not all' of a woman comes under the phallic function while, nonetheless, no identifiable woman can be found for whom the phallic function is totally inoperative.[79] As Bruce Fink explains: "While not all of a woman is determined by the phallic function, to assert the *existence* of some part of her that rejects the phallic function would amount to claiming that something that says no to the phallic function is nevertheless subject to it, situated within the symbolic order— for to exist is to have a place within the symbolic register."[80] In other words, not-all of woman is determined by the phallic function, but you can never point to the specific part of woman's subjectivity that falls outside of it; anything that can be pointed to, grasped, or localized, is necessarily under the phallic function. In Lacan's own formal terms: phi does not apply everywhere, and yet every single object of which we grab hold falls necessarily under phi.

Mathematically speaking, the not-all operates according to the logic of omega-inconsistency, a notion of arithmetic inconsistency invented by Gödel as part of the proof of his incompleteness theorems.[81] Unlike straightforward inconsistency, which occurs when a system proves both a formula and its negation (both A and not-A), omega-inconsistency occurs when a system proves that there is "some number for which a given property or condition … holds," but

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[78] Ibid., 50. For our purposes, Agamben's discussion here also prefigures Laruelle's interest in the "non" because of his description of the remnant as the "non non-A"; ibid., 51.

[79] See Jacques Lacan's Seminar XX, *On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972–1973* (ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. Bruce Fink; New York: Norton & Company, 1998), 78–89.

[80] Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 113.

[81] Formulated in this way, Gödel could avoid resorting to the idea of "truth" in his proof.

then denies that any number within the system *is* such a number.[82] The system proves, in other words, that a certain property holds *some*where, but every locatable "where" within the system's outputs is not it.[83] Agamben's remnant functions like the unlocatable element of omega-inconsistent systems—it is that not-all that is unlocalizable, that can never be discretely identified, and yet nevertheless keeps juridical categories and vocations from coinciding with themselves. Hence, Agamben explains, we cannot understand the remnant as "a numeric remainder or portion." Instead, "the remnant is closer to being a consistency." It is "neither the all, nor a part of the all, but the impossibility for the part and the all to coincide with themselves or with each other."[84]

The reason for dwelling on this Pauline logic of the remnant—besides pointing out, once again, the formal precision lurking just under the surface of Agamben's archaeological style—is that it leads Agamben directly to the temporal questions that will prove especially illuminating with respect to prayer. Prayer, whatever else it is, is also crucially a *temporal* occupation in at least two senses—an activity whose duration uses up time, but also a form of piety that stakes a

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[82] Francesco Berto, *There's Something About Gödel: The Complete Guide to the Incompleteness Theorem* (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 97.

[83] Indeed, this logic may help explain why Agamben views Derridean deconstruction as "a thwarted messianism" (*The Time That Remains*, 103). To advocated for an endless series of deferrals in response to the ontological non-coincidence introduced by language is, from Agamben's perspective, the equivalent of running through an infinity of outputs from an omega-inconsistent system. For Agamben, the point of the "not-all" is to indicate an underlying structure of non-self-identity that must be dwelt in through a form-of-life. Derrida thus appears to him instead to be running the algorithm to no effect. For Agamben's most sustained direct engagement with Derrida, see "*Pardes*: The Writing of Potentiality" in *Potentialities* (trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen; Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1999), 205–19; for the most thorough scholarly treatment of the relationship between Agamben and Derrida, see Kevin Attell, *Giorgio Agamben: Beyond the Threshold of Deconstruction* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

[84] Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 54–5.

claim on how time is inhabited. On Agamben's reading of Paul, the messiah ushers in a new temporality that I wish to propose as a model for the time of prayer—a kind of temporal remnant that he translates as the titular "time that remains." This remainder is, crucially, not to be confused with the end of time. Neither chronological time nor apocalyptic *eschaton*, the time that remains is instead "the time that remains between these two times, when the division of time is itself divided."[85] Like the Pauline remnant that divides the categories of Jew and Gentile against themselves, messianic time is the unlocalizable not-all that prevents time from being self-identical. Just as the messianic vocation names the failure of every worldly vocation to coincide with itself, messianic time names the same failure on the terrain of temporality.

To help illustrate this temporal non-coincidence in more concrete terms, Agamben uses the work of linguist Gustave Guillaume, who argued out that, because it takes time for a speaker to arrange adjectives and complements in meaningful verbal sequence, the temporal dimension of language should be an element of linguistic study. "Every mental operation, however quick, has to be achieved in a certain time, which, while short, is no less real."[86] Whenever language forms a representation of something happening in time (and, hence, of anything), there is a second temporal element required for the construction of the syntax. As a result, time ends up being divided between the time represented in language and the time it takes for that representation to occur. To capture this self-referential difficulty, Guillaume put forward the idea of "operational time," which he defined as "the time the mind takes to realize a time-image."

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[85] Ibid., 62.

[86] Ibid., 65.

Thus, writes Agamben, "in every representation we make of time and in every discourse by means of which we define and represent time, another time is implied that is not entirely consumed by representation."[87] This other time is the temporal remainder in any representative process that cannot take itself into account. It is something like the time required for a timelapse image: the film is exposed for hours and hours, capturing a slice of diachronic time. However, in the process of rendering that diachronic stretch in its synchronic representation (the finished photo), there occurs another, briefer moment of time that the image does not represent. The time of the photo's production cannot be represented in the finished product. Once again, readers of Agamben find themselves confronted with conditions of non-coincidence like those formalized in Priest's inclosure schema. As shown with δ(Ω), when a system attempts to speak of itself as a whole, it can only displace itself like a camera that is unable to render its own processes in a photograph.

Agamben is interested in at least two things about Guillaume's "operational time." First, of course, it displays temporal non-self-identity and hence gives him a concrete example of messianic time: "Messianic time is *the time that time takes to come to an end* or, more precisely, the time we take to bring to an end, to achieve our representation of time."[88] Second, however, operational time also brings into view a new operation: contraction. "*Kairos* and *chronos* are usually opposed to each other," writes Agamben, but he wishes to challenge this conventional heuristic, explaining: "*Kairos* is not another time, but [rather] a contracted and abridged

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[87] Ibid., 66–7.

[88] Ibid., 67.

chronos."[89] Operational time, in other words, is a *contraction* of chronological time. It is the

denser, abridged temporality that resides within chronological time and brings it to its

representation. Like the polaroid camera that contracts an entire three-dimensional world into a

single image one can hold in one's hand, operational time produces a time-image that draws a

lived history into a representation, but does so in part by being itself a tighter, denser kind of

temporality that resides within *chronos*. And when, for Agamben, operational time becomes a

figure for messianic time, this contraction takes on end-of-history stakes: what is contracted in

messianic time is *both* time itself (in that operational time is short) *and* all of history (in that time

is given its representation).

  In this way, messianic time functions as something like Hegel's end of history in the

Phenomenology of Spirit: time's end manifests in a gallery of images that is both the contraction

of time (a dense, summative story of human development) but also the product of that

contraction (the very book that results, complete with its representative summaries of each

developmental stage in the history of thought).[90] Agamben, too, has in view something like the

recapitulation of history in a series of contracted images; because the present fails to coincide

completely with itself, "the entire past" can be "summarily contained, so to speak, in the

present."[91] Every object we encounter in the present is born of the past, a constellation of vast

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[89] Ibid., 68–9.

[90] See G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (trans. A.V. Miller; New York: Oxford University Press, 1977). See also Giorgio Agamben, "**Se*: Hegel's Absolute and Heidegger's *Ereignis*" in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy* (trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen; Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1999), 116–37.

[91] Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 77.

histories of production and development, every person a contracted embodiment of centuries of genetic entanglement and social habituation. It is this containment of the past within the present that, on Agamben's telling, allows the messianic to "effectuat[e] a recapitulation, a kind of summation of all things."[92]

This, Agamben explains, is why the Pauline epistles are so intent on a typological recapitulation of the Israelite tradition. Paul's writings recast the Hebrew Bible in light of the advent of Jesus, condensing all of Israelite history into *typoi* or "figures" for the messianic age.[93] Because messianic time results in the production of contracted time-images as history draws to its close, Paul finds himself tasked with rethinking the entirety of Israelite history in the light of messianic fulfillment. Thus, in 1 Corinthians 10, the non-self-identity of time enjoins Paul to "establish … [a] typological relation between every event from a past time and … messianic time" because, in the light of the messiah, "each event of the past … announces a future event and is fulfilled in it."[94] In this way, Agamben explains, messianic time is best understood not as the awaiting of a deferred *parousia* but, rather, the fulfillment of history by residing in the time that that history takes to come to a close. Of course, Agamben's stakes lie not merely with an interpretation of 1 Corinthians or with an exploration of early Christian conceptions of time. Rather, he wishes to find in the non-self-identity of time another illustration of messianicity. "The messianic," he writes, "is not just one of two terms in this typological relation, *it is the*

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[92] Ibid., 75.

[93] Ibid., 73.

[94] Ibid., 74.

relation itself."[95] Messianicity simply *is* the relation between a temporal moment and its contraction, between chronological time and *kairos*. Just as the messianic is exemplified in the non-self-identity of every vocation and every juridical category, so too messianicity manifests as the non-self-identity of time. And because it is born from the same temporal non-coincidence that gives rise to the summative images at the end of history, messianicity is also necessarily typological. The messianic is thus the constellation that arises from every being's non-self-identity, whether that constellation is a vocational form-of-life or a typological understanding of history.

For our purposes, however, the contraction and typological recapitulation that characterize operational time are of particular interest for how they model what goes on in prayer. The time of prayer, I want to contend, is the equivalent of operational time. It depends on time's non-self-identity, which is why it appears so frequently at liminal moments (e.g., the openings and closings of days, meals, worship services, and so on).[96] In prayer, disciples aim to occupy the time required to inaugurate a representation and to bring a certain temporal stretch to a close. The benediction after mass, for example, thus inhabits something like the "time that remains" between the fulfillment of the service and its complete end, in the same way that a bedtime prayer also resides in the time required to bring the day to its close in the shape of its devotional representation. Both forms of prayer, too, recapitulate the series of time over which they pray, schematizing the events of the worship or the day and reducing them into a condensed

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[95] Ibid.

[96] Notably, Agamben also bears a vested interested in liminal moments. Many of his books are organized with "Thresholds" between chapters.

image. Not only does prayer perform time's failure to coincide with itself and shape a

chronological stretch into its *kairotic* contraction; prayer is also an apparatus for constructing the

typological recapitulations born out of that non-self-identity. Here we might think of the Jewish

Kiddush that begins the Sabbath and, in addition to bringing a week-long slice of secular time to

its close, puts the Sabbath in typological connection with the seventh day of creation and the

Exodus from Egypt. In a similar way, an evangelical prayer walk around a midwestern town

stems from the impulse that chronological time is not the true temporality of spiritual life, that

there is a critical and *kairotic* moment to be seized within homogeneous time. Thus, devotees

walk the streets of their city, engaging in "spiritual warfare" via prayer, drawing typological

connections between particular buildings or traffic stops and a cosmic battle between the forces

of good and evil.[97] In both cases, prayer inhabits a different kind of temporality—a time within

time—and leverages that temporal non-coincidence such that a constellation of representations

and contracted images can crystallize.

Rather than thinking of prayer, then, as the devotional occupation of a particular moment

within homogeneous chronology, prayer is better understood as the constant opening up within

homogeneous chronology of a temporal space within which the messiah might arrive. Prayer is

the practice of forming time and life such that that their non-self-identity might resist capture. It

performs the non-self-identity of the world by exiting the illusion of homogeneous,

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[97] See Ruth Marshall, "Destroying Arguments and Captivating Thoughts: Spiritual Warfare as Global Praxis,"
Journal of Religious and Political Practice 2.1 (2016): 92–113; Elizabeth McAlister, "The Militarization of Prayer
in America: White and Native American Spiritual Warfare," *Journal of Religious and Political Practice* 2.1 (2016):
114–30.

chronological time—the illusion of its sufficiency, its inescapability, and its inevitable progress—and by putting time in relation to its own non-coincidence. In this way, prayer takes up residence in the temporal gaps, dwelling in them in such a way that it strains toward form-of-life. This is why the Franciscan life of prayer could so nearly resolve itself into a form-of-life: a life whose temporality takes the shape of prayer is a life that resides proximate to messianic time, in that unlocatable (and hence indivisible) non-place of time's non-self-identity. In this way, we might hear the directive of 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to "pray without ceasing" not as an imperative to saturate clock-time with devout operativity but, instead, to never allow any stretch of (linear) time to be without its (messianic) contraction.

The stakes of such a directive are thus, for Agamben, emphatically redemptive. For all its similarity with Hegel's gallery of images in Absolute History, it is not Hegel who is Agamben's most proximate precedent for this conception of time. That honor (as so often in Agamben's writings) falls to Walter Benjamin. In his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Benjamin takes issue with linear, homogeneous time and the modern faith in inevitable historical progress. In place of these notions, he mourns history as an unmitigated series of human disasters and argues that our only way out of this wreckage of suffering is through a different temporality, one that circles around the revolutionary potential of messianic moments found in "now-time" (*Jetztzeit*).[98] For Benjamin, as for Agamben, the past is better understood as a series of images, each "flit[ting] by" and awaiting their seizure as what brings history (and with it, the political

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[98] Indeed, all of *The Time That Remains* can be read as a shadow commentary on Benjamin's *Theses*. See especially the concluding threshold (pp. 138–45). Agamben will later return to these Benjaminian themes (the remnant, temporality, and the disaster that is history) in his *Remnants of Auschwitz*.

machine that produces unending catastrophe) to its completion. Importantly, these past images "flash up" only in specific moments in the present, when something about one's contemporary situation sheds light on a key element in the past.[99] A typological image suddenly crystallizes and some new constellation of history and politics comes into view. Far from being a rote description of past events or cultural change over time, the study of history ought to be, according to Benjamin, a search for these constellations charged with explosive, revolutionary potential. Because history is a disaster, moreover, it has the potential to be not only fulfilled by these moments of now-time, but also redeemed. In these messianic moments lies the possibility of grasping all of history and bringing it to completion, thereby redressing past atrocities by allowing them to move contemporary insurrectionists to pull the emergency brake on history.

In the theses, Benjamin quite famously relies on a series of theological images. Although the first of these is easily the most well-known, our attention might instead be drawn by the image of prayer that occurs toward the end of the essay. Theology rears its head not only in the shape of the famous dwarf of thesis 1, but also a handful of prayer beads in thesis A:

> A historian who takes this [new conception of time] as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the "time of the now" which is shot through with chips of Messianic time.[100]

Most historians, Benjamin argues, problematically conceive of time as a series of sequential moments, each strung along in a line of uniform points, and they take their task to be the

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[99] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (ed. Hannah Arendt; trans. Harry Zohn; New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 255.

[100] Ibid., 263.

cataloging of the past events that form the content of these moments. Like Benjamin, Agamben too believes there is a more accurate and potentially redemptive account of time ready to hand—an account that trades on the contraction and typological schematization of time as a way of dwelling rightly in time's non-coincidence.

In this way, Agamben gives us the means to reinvest the potential of Benjamin's metaphor and to do so in conjunction with prayer. Despite a rosary's brilliant illustrative value for both the sequentiality of most modern notions of time and the unspoken Euro-Christian roots of the Western conception of history, the beads of a rosary do not, of course, represent events; they stand in for specific prayers. Each bead is a tactile mnemonic for the Lord's Prayer or the Hail Mary, contracting these prayers into a material mnemonic, constellating Matthew 6 with Pope Pius V's liturgical innovations with, too, the millions of Catholic faithful who have stained their own rosaries with the oil of generations of palms. We might also understand the beads, then, as the summative images in the gallery at the end of history, each one the schematization that follows from a suspensive moment of prayer. Benjamin's metaphor need not only point to the beads' sequentiality, uniformity, and linearity; it can also illustrate for us the contractions represented by prayer, the typological relationships that can gather a series of images together, and the suspension of the world (economic life, nutritive life, social life, etc.) prayer enacts. In prayer, as in messianic time, events are no longer strung out like beads on a rosary; they are lived instead in the constellative grasp of the rosary as a whole, its contraction into the palm as one enters one's closet to pray, until every bead—like "every second of time"—becomes "the strait

gate through which the Messiah might enter."[101] In this way, as Benjamin says, time need no longer be mistaken as a tidy, domesticated sequence of linear events trending inevitably upward, but instead as the shrapnel shot through history at the messiah's incoming.

On an Agambenian model, then, prayer is a chamber that turns life into types, putting life in relation with its own contracted form as a way of grasping the redemptive constellations that flash up from life's non-self-identity. Prayer is a messianic contraction in exactly this sense. Time draws together, a constellation of images crystallizes, and new typological relations between events in chronological time come into view. By echoing the redemptive potential of messianic time and *Jetztzeit*, prayer enacts the redemption of the world. To pray over the events of one's day is to remove them from their teleological determinations so as to expose them to the light of potentiality. By suspending their hyper-determined status in the flow of history, objects and persons and lived events might begin to show up as Benjaminian types.

Crucially, too, the result is a kind of life that is indivisible. For Agamben, as for Benjamin, the messianic is a kind of typological relation *between* past and present, the non-locatable no-place that forms a being's or history's failure to coincide with itself. Dwelt in as such, free of sovereign pretensions to (impossibly) suture that gap, messianicity displays the world's non-coincidence and thus prevents power from drawing its own lines of division. Just as human beings have no 'essence' at bottom to be separately determined by predicates at some later stage, time also cannot be reduced out as an empty container to be separately determined by historical content. In this way, prayer scrambles the usual divisions of form and content as it

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[101] Ibid., 264, thesis B.

aims to inhabit messianic time, and thus harbors the potential to display temporal non-coincidence and render it impervious to sovereign encroachments.

For these reasons, we might conclude this chapter very nearly to where Agamben closes *The Time That Remains*. In one of the last passages from 1 Corinthians that he discusses, Agamben comments on Paul's regular reference to Jesus as simply "Jesus Messiah," explaining that Paul "does not know that Jesus *is* the Messiah, he only knows *Jesus Messiah*."[102] By employing a nominal sentence of this sort (that is, a sentence where the copula "to be" drops out), Paul uses a syntagm that avoids the illusions of essence that get ported into thought through the language of being. As a result, Agamben explains, "*Messiah* is not a predicate tacked onto the subject *Jesus*, but something that is inseparable from him … For Paul, this is faith; it is an experience of being beyond existence and essence, as much beyond subject as beyond predicate."[103] It is, in other words, an experience of being beyond the divisions and illusions of sovereignty. The messianic is the indissoluble unity of existence and essence, subject and predicate—not after the fact, but a priori.

Agambenian prayer generates a form-of-life of this sort—one that refuses to let subject and predicate be divided, that refuses to allow power's illusions to slice through the unity that life actually is. Life's failure to coincide with itself does not constitute a localizable cut, but instead resolves life into an apparatus of both potential and use. Prayer, too, is an apparatus of this sort, exposing time and objects and people to the light of potential and turning them to new

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[102] Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 127.

[103] Ibid., 128.

uses. On this model of prayer, the disciple's job is not to judge the world, nor is it to generate assent to certain doctrinal propositions, nor is it to sovereignly govern one's own flesh by forcing it into adherence with juridical norms and operative postures. Prayer, instead, is the place and time in which copulas drop out and I simply inhabit God's-hearing and my-kneeling. It is a comportment and a posture more than a propositional synthesis of subject and predicate. This, then, is "the world of faith … It is not a world of predicates, of existence and of essences, but a world of indivisible events, in which I do not judge, nor do I believe that the snow is white and the sun is warm, but I am transported and displaced in the snow's-being-white and in the sun's-being-warm."[104] In prayer, the world is as it is.

Conclusion

Chapter one examined the way paradoxes of inclosure plagued the prayers of Anselm and Pseudo-Dionysius. In Agamben's work, too, we have seen repeated echoes of the inclosure schema. Although he does so without formal notation, Agamben works on much the same model: the non-self-identity of being as written onto ontology by human language and, as a result, the failure of every being to coincide with itself. But where Anselm and Pseudo-Dionysius used prayer as a kind of meta-language to navigate inclosure, an Agambenian model of prayer negotiates the problems of non-coincidence in a different way. As a species of form-of-life, messianic prayer responds to the unavoidable non-self-identity that characterizes language, thought, and being by *dwelling in* this non-self-identity in a way that is at peace with it, that displays life and being as what they are (i.e., simply the language game of their use) rather than

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[104] Ibid., 129.

trying to suture the gap as a means of sovereign control. And where Anselm and Pseudo-Dionysius leave us with the question of why systemic non-coincidence might call forth specifically devotional comportments, Agamben answers that prayer is an appropriate posture in the face of non-coincidence because prayer is already fundamentally conditioned by the non-self-identity of the world. In other words, where Anselm and Pseudo-Dionysius saw non-self-identity as a problem and prayer as its solution, Agamben gives us non-self-identity as an ontological fact and prayer as one way of properly comporting to that fact. On this model, the time of prayer operates like operational time and aims to inject the messianic into the disciple's temporal experience. Prayer saturates the entirety of a life, is an apparatus of use and inappropriation that liberates beings from their determination in defined identities and enacts the entanglement of form and content that suspends sovereign gestures of control. Prayer of this sort is the proper comportment in the face of non-coincidence, for Agamben, because it *displays* the world's non-self-identity in a redemptive way. On an Agambenian model, then, prayer at root is neither a species of mental activity nor a conversation with deity. Prayer is more fundamentally the constant messianization of lived temporality, a way of dwelling in temporal non-coincidence and trading on the world's non-self-identity in order to expose the world to its own potential. In prayer, disciples suspend the usual predicates that govern human bodies, the use value of particular objects, and even the linearity of clock time. Prayer is thus the disciple's attempt to never let any slice of time be without its messianic contraction, to never let a day go by when linear history is not punctuated with messianic recapitulations and their revolutionary potential, and in which the non-self-identity of being is displayed and performed.

But an Agambenian model of prayer is also, as illustrated in *The Highest Poverty*, something that takes place at the scale of an entire life. Prayer is an iterative practice that resolves life into an indivisible whole where form and content can no longer be disentangled in a fruitless and ultimately horrific attempt to stabilize human non-coincidence as ground for sovereign control. In many ways, it is *this* indivisibility—this indistinction of form and life—that is Agamben's most overt challenge to the divisive tactics of power and yet, unfortunately, also one of the elements of Agamben's thought that goes largely unexplained. How, in particular, does a form-of-life coalesce as a truly indivisible whole and how can an indivisible whole also be non-self-identical? Fleshing out this notion of a radically indivisible immanence—including its relevance for prayer—turns us to yet another thinker.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRAYER AS QUANTUM CHAMBER: LARUELLE

Theorizing prayer as a species of Agambenian form-of-life leaves us with certain questions.

What does it mean that form and content cannot be separated in this kind of life? What would

such indistinction actually look like on the ground, as it were? And what makes a "form-of-life"

properly indivisible, given that "form" and "life" have separate nominative identities in

Agamben's locution, hyphens notwithstanding? This chapter contends that the thought of

François Laruelle is uncannily suited to addressing questions of this sort. Laruelle is a thinker of

identity who stakes his career on the immanence and self-inherence of reality. In his axiomatic

commitment to a certain kind of indivisibility (foreshadowed in his suggestive name for the real,

"the One"), Laruelle's thought not only resonates with Agamben's form-of-life but also, as we

will see, clarifies the nature of the immanence of "form" to "life" and vice versa. The kind of

identity aimed at by both Agamben and Laruelle is not a transcendence (however minimal)

located beyond or behind the immanent realities of life, but rather the performative fusion of the

lived materiality found in one's current situation.[1] What's more, Laruelle articulates this fusion

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[1] The resonance between Agamben and Laruelle runs much deeper than an introductory paragraph permits me to explore, encompassing a related diagnosis of binaries and doublets as sites of violence and a joint interest in operations like suspension, non-acting, and use. Especially striking is their ethical overlap, in which each talks about the relationship of witness between victim and intellectual in situations of emergency. On this last point, see Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen; New York: Zone Books, 2002) and François Laruelle, *General Theory of Victims* (trans. Jessie Hock and Alex Dubilet; Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2015). Surprisingly, this substantial overlap between the two thinkers occurs despite each coming out of very different continental legacies and without either seeming to be in conversation with the other.

with a formal precision that permits a clearer theorization of the positive project latent in prayer. Agamben's genealogical method, despite its general accessibility and frequent recourse to interesting case studies, often obscures the particulars of what "use" ultimately amounts to or what exactly one *does* in messianic time. As a result, Agamben's thought can often feel vaguely quietist. In Laruelle, however, readers will find startlingly similar diagnoses, commitments, and recommendations, but coupled with a formal precision that can help us articulate more clearly what a form-of-life *is*, ontologically speaking, and how it might be achieved in practical terms.

I will begin, then, with an introduction to Laruelle offered in two passes. In the first pass, Laruelle's thought and terminology will be presented in general terms, sketching the basic picture of his non-philosophical project. I will then pass over his project a second time, fleshing it out with the aid of the inclosure schema and quantum physics (the latter of which represents Laruelle's own formal analogue for his project). With the Laruellean picture on the table, I then turn to a theory of prayer, describing prayer as something akin to a particle collider—a prepared space in which the world takes on a minimal appearance and registers the effects of the real. Presented in this way, it becomes clear that prayer is not (à la Agamben) simply a way of exposing persons and objects to their own potential or reactualizing every object in a series of new uses. Rather, prayer is a species of the larger project of non-philosophy: a comportment to the indivisibility and immanence of the real. The task of prayer, then, is to "clone" or "reprise" worldly divisions as the indivisible One that they always already are so that the real of generic humanity can come into view. Although Agamben made clear that suspension opens a certain space of potential, what one *does* in that space turns us to Laruelle.

First Pass: General Introduction to Laruelle

Laruelle's thought is rooted in two (deceptively) simple axioms:[2]

    (1) The real is immanent and autonomous

    (2) The real is foreclosed to thought and to language

By "the real," Laruelle means reality as it is in-itself. It's the 'what there is' of the universe, prior

to and separate from every human construct, concept, or reference. The real does not tend toward

conceptualization or representation in any way. Indeed, for Laruelle, a key characteristic of the

real's immanence is that it does not tend at all. Because the real already encompasses what there

is, there is ultimately nothing else toward which it could tend in the first place. This non-

intentionality is key to both the real's immanence (axiom #1) and its foreclosure (axiom #2). As

Ian James puts it, the real is

> that which is undivided, absolutely autonomous and, of itself, entirely indifferent and
> resistant to conceptual transcendence and understanding … For if immanence (or the
> real) … is absolutely autonomous, self-sufficient and indivisible, how can the
> transcendence of philosophical conceptualization begin to think or speak about it at all?[3]

This, then, is the ground zero from which any understanding of Laruelle must begin: for

Laruelle, the real is radically self-inherent. It self-inheres so fully that it cannot form "parts" of

itself, let alone experience one of those parts withdrawing far enough outside of reality to

articulate an objective view on it. Thus, says Laruelle,

> [The real] is indivision itself, which remains immanent (to) itself and does not exit itself
> … [The] mode of which it is capable: precisely that of indivision or non-distance, non-

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[2] Although this axiomatic is articulated in virtually all of Laruelle's books, this particular articulation is adapted from François Laruelle, *Clandestine Theology: A Non-Philosopher's Confession of Faith* (trans. Andrew Sackin-Poll; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 3.

[3] Ian James, *The New French Philosophy* (Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2012), 162–3.

objectivation, non-difference, non-alienation … [Its] reality … is to be *only* 'interior' or 'inherent' (to) itself.[4]

Across his career, Laruelle's most consistent name for the real is "the One," a name that designates both scope and immanence. The real is "One" because there is only one real (and so no 'second' reality to be found) and because it is completely self-inherent (there is only ever just itself). As soon as Laruelle uses such an obviously numerical and philosophically fraught term, however, he must immediately forestall several misunderstandings. The One/real is not the result of some unifying operation, the summation of several previously-split terms into the "one-all" of philosophy, or an imagined unity imposed on the world in the mind of the philosopher.[5] Nor is it the Parmenidean One which, for Laruelle, is just another unity holding together split terms (thinking and being).[6] The One is also not ineffable, some transcendent 'thing' outside of language and history that can only be glimpsed in a kind of mystical vision.[7] Nor, again, is the One a virtual, teeming with every possible a priori object, intending ultimately toward their expression in actuality.[8] "The One," he writes,

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[4] François Laruelle, *A Biography of Ordinary Man: On Authorities and Minorities* (trans. Jessie Hock and Alex Dubilet; Medford, Mass.: Polity Press, 2018), 59.

[5] François Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy* (trans. Nicola Rubczak and Anthony Paul Smith; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 41.

[6] François Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy* (trans. Taylor Adkins; Minneapolis, Minn.: Univocal, 2013), 51.

[7] Laruelle does present vision-in-One as a kind of "ordinary mysticism" in an early work though he never takes up those terms so systematically again, and what he means by "ordinary mysticism" is quite distinct from a vision of the ineffable known from religious mystics. See Laruelle, *Biography*.

[8] For more on Laruelle's engagement with and critiques of Deleuze, see François Laruelle, "Letter to Deleuze," in *From Decision to Heresy: Experiments in Non-Standard Thought* (ed. Robin Mackay; New York: Sequence Press, 2012), 393–400. Even more helpful, however, is his later and more pointed engagement with Deleuze which can be found in his "'I, the Philosopher, Am Lying': A Reply to Deleuze," in *The Non-Philosophy Project: Essays by François Laruelle* (ed. Gabriel Alkon and Boris Gunjevic; Candor, New York: Telos Press, 2012), 39–73. For

is not an object, whether spiritual or even intellectual, which is always transcendent: it has no path of approach and does not support any pedagogy, commentary, conversion, critique, deconstruction, etc. We are here in it, we are of it, we are it. There is consequently no reduction, suspension, negation, annihilation or exclusion of an eventual given necessary—other than the One—so as to attain it.[9]

Already in that quote, readers will hear echoes of the One's indifference to every operation of thought or language. Reality is unmoved by our paths of approach, our explanations, our every intellectual construct and operation. Simply put: the real does not need our commentary. It is not defined in opposition to anything else (because it already comprises everything real) and is not altered in any way by our actions or thoughts (because everything we are and produce is already real). Just as the sun rises regardless of whether I worship it as a deity or study its surface through a telescope, the real remains fundamentally indifferent to every ontology, metaphysical system, and scientific model.[10] Laruelle also here reemphasizes that the real is not a transcendence grounding some mysticism. There is "no … negation," among other operations, that would lead us "to attain it." Laruelle's point is less that the real is unattainable (though it certainly cannot be attained) than that the very idea that it might need to be attained in the first place is a misconstrual. "We are here in it, we are of it, we are it." To say that the real cannot be attained is to conceive of it as a transcendent beyond that resists our immanent reachings. Instead, Laruelle would have us say that the real is indifferent to the very question of its own attainability.

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accessible commentary on the differences between Laruelle and Deleuze, see Alexander R. Galloway, *Laruelle: Against the Digital* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

[9] Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, 81.

[10] On indifference, see Laruelle, *Biography*, 111, 119–21.

This, then, is what constitutes Laruelle's two primary axioms and why so much machinery grows out of such minimal beginnings. Laruelle's entire project is simply to build out the ramifications of the real's self-inherence. If the One really is absolutely and radically immanent, then it bars every attempt to think it directly, equally indifferent to them all. Laruelle's point is not to claim his own adequacy to think the One, but rather to build out the vast array of consequences that follow from the One's immanence, indifference, and foreclosure.[11] The primary problem (as Laruelle sees it) is that, regardless of that foreclosure, certain discourses nevertheless ground their authority in claims to grasp the real.[12] And because no discipline of human thought has done so as comprehensively and with more confidence in its own success than philosophy, it is philosophy that draws Laruelle's most consistent criticism.

Philosophy is, for Laruelle, the paradigmatic instance of what he variously calls "the World" or "effectivity," a realm of structures, discourses, objects, and identities which are alienated from their immanent ground in the One, attempt to refuse its foreclosure, and build their self-legitimacy on illusory claims to comprehend and explicate the real. Any such worldly

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[11] One might protest that Laruelle falls afoul of his own prohibitions. Hasn't he thought the One in order to name its unthinkability? Laruelle would reject this objection as already too philosophical because it assumes the reversibility of thinking and being. Instead, it is necessary to remember that Laruelle's non-philosophy is an axiomatic approach. The One's immanence and foreclosure are *axioms*, not descriptions. See Laruelle, *Principles*, xxii. Or, in perhaps clearer terms, Glenn Wallis summarizes the situation nicely: "Laruelle's method is certainly not intended as an aid for grasping the Real. It is intended rather to help us grasp the *idealism* and the typically unacknowledged transcendence that, he claims, invariably constitutes ostensibly empirical or materialist philosophical … forms of thought *concerning* the Real." Glenn Wallis, *A Critique of Western Buddhism: Ruins of the Buddhist Real* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 131. What is important here is the prohibition against thinking the real *directly*. Laruelle will ultimately recommend a kind of non-philosophical thought which distinguishes itself by being a thought *according to* the real rather than a thought *of* the real itself.

[12] The fact that these discourses are rooted in the inherently human disciplines of thought and language seems to be why Laruelle often articulates the real as a kind of humanity. See, for instance, the dominance of "Man-in-Person" as a name for the real in *General Theory of Victims*. See also Anthony Paul Smith, *Laruelle: A Stranger Thought* (Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2016), 17.

stance is ultimately philosophical, for Laruelle, because philosophy is the prime example of a discourse that bases its authority on claims to grasp the real. This claim is carried out in two transcendent moments. No matter what type of philosophy is under consideration (whether classical Greek contemplation, Scholastic theorizing, modern Enlightenment thought, phenomenology, deconstruction, etc.), Laruelle insists that *in every case* philosophy claims to 1) divide and then 2) reunify the real. These two steps are, he thinks, invariant across all of philosophy, and it is sufficient to identify a procedure as philosophical if it makes these two moves. These moves are, moreover, always an opportunistic and parasitic attempt to turn the real into grounds for philosophy's own self-legitimation.

Philosophy begins its operations, first, by attempting to divide the real from itself. This is its founding gesture, evident already in what Laruelle calls "the axiom of Parmenides: [that] thought and being are the Same."[13] Despite his commitment to a monist ontology, Parmenides introduces a scission into the real by taking it to be simultaneously being and thinking. According to Laruelle, this scission is philosophy's founding gesture not because it originates with one of the West's earliest philosophers but, structurally speaking, because this is the division that philosophy always instantiates in order to set itself up as the authoritative discourse of the real. To justify its claims to think the real directly, philosophy distributes the One across thinking and being so as to align itself with "thinking" and the real with "being." Although

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[13] Laruelle, *Principles*, 85. Parmenides' original Greek text reads: τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι. See *The Fragments of Parmenides: A Critical Text with Introduction and Translation, the Ancient* testimonia *and a Commentary* (ed. by A.H. Coxon, trans. by Richard McKirahan; Las Vegas, Nev.: Parmenides Publishing, 2009), 58–59, with associated commentary on pp. 296–7. As in the Heideggerean inheritance generally, Laruelle regards Parmenides as the beginning of western metaphysics due especially to this line.

Laruelle burdens Parmenides with the founding instantiation of this split, he finds it further

embodied in the binaries that proliferate across the history of philosophy (e.g., form and matter,

dialectical antitheses, the ontological difference between being and beings, Cartesian dualism,

and so on. Even deconstruction's slippage between two ambiguous meanings of a single term

smacks, to Laruelle, of dualism).[14] Philosophy's transcendence here finds expression in the way

that thought and being each stand outside the other in reciprocally determined relationship.[15]

Having rendered divisions of this sort, philosophy's next move is then to reunify the split

with a correlative relation. This, too, is expressed in Parmenides' equation of thinking and being

as "the Same." Philosophy's transcendence here finds expression in the gathering of two terms

into an abstract unity that supervenes on both, the traditional "one-all." (Here again Laruelle sees

traces all across the western philosophical heritage: dialectical synthesis, Dasein as the being-

that-thinks-its-own-Being, the Cartesian ego, and so on.) Of course, all this division and

reunification can only ultimately be illusory. Indivisible in the first place, the real cannot be

divided and thus has no need of philosophical reunification. Philosophy, for Laruelle, can only

be understood as a parasitic reaction to the One's foreclosure and a discipline full of deceptive

claims to grasp and explicate the real, ultimately making such claims only in the service of its

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[14] On deconstruction as inadvertently dualistic and transcendent, see Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, chapter 6.

[15] As Andrew Sackin-Poll rather intuitively puts it in the translator's note to *Clandestine Theology*: "A difference between two terms often affects each in a reciprocal way—for example, an object *x* is bigger than *y* and, conversely, object *y* is smaller than *x*" (xix). Even traditional notions of immanence fall afoul of Laruelle's criticism because, for Laruelle, immanence is usually paired with transcendence, thus making "immanence" exist outside of, supervene on, and persist in opposition to "transcendence." This is why Laruelle describes the immanence of the One as "radical"—it is an immanence that is absolute and indifferent to the immanent/transcendent binary. To think the One as characterized by one half of that binary is to misapprehend the One through the lens of philosophy.

own self-legitimation. Anywhere other disciplines of human thought make similar claims to comprehend the One (e.g., theology or Marxism), he insists that they do so only because they have been infected by philosophy.

In this regard, Laruelle takes aim at a dilemma fundamentally identical to that of Agamben. What Laruelle identifies as the divisive-and-then-reunifying structure of philosophy, Agamben diagnoses as the structure of sovereignty: an attempt to grasp some real fundament through division, followed by the self-legitimating claim of itself as the (unifying) solution. Like philosophy, sovereignty establishes itself as the answer to a problem of its own making. It grounds itself in an exception and, in the process, creates the very excluded term that then demands simultaneous inclusion and exclusion. In this way, Agambenian sovereignty is the equivalent of philosophy, on Laruelle's account, because it creates a split fundament as the unthought shadow of its own operations, thus installing itself on a never-endingly regressive operation. Philosophy, in its thirst for a sovereignty of its own, reaches after an illusory fundament that is the unthought shadow of its own assumptions. It is a structurally paradoxical technique for power, relying on both division (in order to set itself up in correspondence with some 'thing' over which to exercise its power) and reunification (the inclusion of every externality that guarantees the totality of its reach).

Two brief examples might helpfully illustrate philosophy's invariant two-step structure (division + reunification) for Laruelle. Early in his book *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, Laruelle points to the Aristotelian formula "One qua One," noting that the "One" shows up twice in this expression—first as a subject, then as a predicate. Thus divided, the two terms are then reunified

by the "qua" that binds them together but also crosses out the One by splitting it across two grammatical roles. As a result, philosophy "affects from the exterior, in a transcendent way, the One('s)-identity," splitting the One from itself and reuniting it in a still hierarchically divided way.[16] Another illustration, even clearer, could be found in Tarski's truth schema, in which some proposition "P" is true if and only if P (famously, "it is snowing" is true if and only if it is, in fact, snowing). Here again something appears on both sides of the equivalence relation: P. On the one hand, P designates the sentence in question (making P a question of thinking, in Cartesian terms) and, on the other, P designates a condition of what is actually there in the world (being). The concept of truth divides P from itself and then reunifies it in a relationship where thinking is split from being and being is split from thinking, before ultimately reunifying the two terms through an equivalence relation.[17] This last illustration is especially helpful because it takes us nearer to the core division that, according to Laruelle, runs through philosophy: the split between thinking and being. In every case, he claims, philosophy consists in some sort of reasoning or speaking (or thinking) about stuff that exists 'out there' (being). This is the heart of what he calls the "Philosophical Decision." Philosophy is inherently decisional, for Laruelle, both because of the scission (the "-cision") at its root and its decision ex nihilo that it is the authoritative discipline of the real.[18]

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[16] Laruelle, *Principles*, 28. Laruelle's proposed replacement formula is then given as "One-in-One."

[17] See Alfred Tarski, "The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages," in *Logic, Semantics, Metamathematics: Papers from 1923 to 1938*, 2d ed. (trans. J.H. Woodger; Indianapolis, In.: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), 152–278. My thanks, as ever, to Joseph Spencer for this example.

[18] For an apt summary of what Laruelle means by philosophical decision, see Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 122–4. Though I agree with Anthony Paul Smith's note that Brassier overemphasizes immanence in this account (see *Laruelle: A Stranger Thought*, 179, n.13),

Just because the One is directly unthinkable, however, does not mean that there is no recourse for human thought. The real may not be graspable, but it is also not a mystically transcendent instance; there remains, for Laruelle, room for a thought *according to* the real rather than *of* the real. In place of philosophy, then, Laruelle argues that human thought should be resituated on the terrain of science. The sciences are exemplary, for him, because rather than trying to say something about the real directly they trace its effects. Science, he argues, is less about securing particular data or experimental outcomes and more about an experimental method that registers the effects of the real on a constructed apparatus.[19] As he explains, scientific representation has "a power of *manifestation* of the real … [Science] does not manifest … *data* or the theorico-experimental phenomena that serve as its material; it manifests the real … by means … of these data and the objects of knowledge of which they are the ingredients."[20] In a similar way, although the One remains forever foreclosed, the effects of its indifference can still be registered on the phenomenal world. Where philosophy faces the One and makes illusory claims about it, science faces the world in order to trace the One's effects.[21]

The project of non-philosophy, then, is to take up the stance of science and trace the One's effects on philosophy. The non-philosopher generates apparatuses that will display the

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it is no more than a quibble. Brassier has ably described the decisional structure at the core of Laruelle's critique of philosophy, and helpfully puts it in conversation with the Kantian transcendental.

[19] Though, again, language gets tricky here: the real does not have "effects" in the sense of being a direct cause. It is more accurate (though awkward) to say that science tracks the consequences of the real's foreclosure for the world. This will be further elaborated below.

[20] François Laruelle, *Theory of Identities* (trans. Alyosha Edlebi; New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 249.

[21] This, especially, will be further clarified below when we turn to quantum theory.

consequences of the real's foreclosure in and on philosophical materials. In this way, each of

Laruelle's books asks what philosophy (dialectics or Marxism or deconstruction or

phenomenology or its downstream variants in theology and technology and literature, etc.) looks

like in light of the real? Non-philosophy thus becomes the study of philosophy's divisive

structure, the revelation of its invariance, and the putting of those invariants to new use. Intend

on avoiding every kind of divisive or reciprocal logic, however, Laruelle calls his method *non-*

philosophical rather than anti-philosophical. "Non-philosophy is not philosophy's massive

negation," he explains, "but another usage [of it] … Non-philosophy is the only usage of

philosophy that is not programmed by it."[22] Testament to the sciences as his primary model for

this project, Laruelle intends the "non-" in non-philosophy to be the analogue of the "non-" in

non-Euclidean geometry, in which the suspension of a single axiom or postulate brings an

entirely new region of thinking into view.[23] Likewise, Laruelle hopes to make visible an entirely

new register of human thought by suspending philosophy's claim to self-sufficiency.

In some sense, Laruelle's quasi-scientific resolution to the problems of philosophy is

every bit as simple as the two axioms from which he begins. Non-philosophy starts simply by

suspending philosophy's pretentions and then tracing the effects of the One on the now-

suspended philosophical materials. This move, for all its simplicity, is also deeply constrained by

the axiomatic of the One. The One needs no operation in order to constitute itself, nor does it

license any operation in its name. Thinking in-One, then, as Laruelle hopes to do, can never

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[22] Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, 10.

[23] Ibid., 92–102, 107. There is, however, an important disanalogy here. Non-Euclidean geometry is still a kind of geometry, but Laruelle refuses to characterize non-philosophy as a variant of philosophy.

entail an operation *on* or a critique *against* or a deconstruction *of* some philosophical position. The only relationship that can possibly pertain between the One and philosophy is that of indifference, and the only consequence to then result is the suspension of political authority— quite simply because the One is, in fact, as indifferent to philosophy as it is to everything else.[24] The non-philosopher's task—indeed, the only action available to him—is to examine the consequences of the One's foreclosure for philosophy, recognizing the reduction of philosophy to inert materials and registering how those materials react to or appear in light of the One's complete indifference.

Laruelle's name for this reduction and appearance is determination-in-the-last-instance, that is, the final determination effected by the One after philosophical determinations have made their claims.[25] Politics, history, culture, ethics, and so on all govern the shape of the world as we know it, but they do so locally and contingently. The only absolute or necessity is the One, and so the non-philosopher's task is to take the already-given shape of the world and bring to bear its "last" determining instance (the real). "Last" should thus be understood logically or structurally rather than temporally. When all is said and done, there is really only the real and all things are identical in-the-last-instance because all things are identically emplaced by the One's indifference. The One is thus the "last" determiner of things after and beyond every philosophical determination, and determination-in-the-last-instance is Laruelle's name for the

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[24] Ibid., 26.

[25] The language of the "last instance" comes from Engels via Althusser, although Laruelle does not use it in the same way as either thinker. Nonetheless, Laruelle has deep investments in Althusserian Marxism. See François Laruelle, *Introduction to Non-Marxism* (trans. Anthony Paul Smith; Minneapolis, Minn.: Univocal, 2015).

causality of the One's indifference and its effect of putting the world "in its place," so to speak.[26] Importantly, because the One is foreclosed, this causality extends in one direction only. Ian James describes it as "a one-way street of causality whereby everything which 'is' is necessarily 'in' immanence and caused by it, but never able to exert any reverse causal determining force on the indivisible and autonomous One."[27] This unilaterality is, for Laruelle, the single most important characteristic of determination-in-the-last-instance because it breaks with philosophical specularity and eliminates the reciprocality of difference and dialectic. The One's immanence exacts consequences for the world without the world being able to exert any degree of influence on the One in return.

With philosophical hierarchies suspended and unilaterally put in their place, something truly generic can begin to come into view. This is where the primary non-philosophical task arises. Once philosophical determinations have been suspended and all things are viewed in light of the One, the non-philosopher undertakes a kind of thought—although we have to be careful with the term. "Thought" alone, for Laruelle, entails the consideration of overdetermined objects from some transcendent remove, a cognitive operation philosophically split between (thinking) subject and (thought) object. In place of "thought" alone, then, Laruelle refers to the "force-(of)-

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[26] See Laruelle, *Biography*, 120. This emplacement is sometimes also called "unilateral duality." The mention of "duality" here is no contradiction, despite Laruelle's professed distaste for philosophical binaries. Here Laruelle has reference to the perspective of philosophy, which insists on its own separation from the One. From the perspective of the (philosophically-informed) world, there are two instances at work—One and world. From the perspective of the One, however, there remains only One. See Laruelle, *Principles*, 126 and *Introduction to Non-Marxism*, 130.

[27] James, *The New French Philosophy*, 170.

thought," which he describes as "a thought adequate to vision-in-One" or an "instrument" for "thinking *in, through* but not *from* or *within* the One."[28] Here Ian James is helpful once again:

> [Force-(of)-thought] could best be defined as the effort or act of thought itself by which thought assumes the immanent real as its determination-in-the-last-instance; it is the effort by which thought assumes its identity with the real and maintains itself resolutely within a posture of immanence with regard to the real … [It is] therefore the key operation which underpins or produces the performance of non-philosophical discourse.[29]

Instead of thought alone, then, Laruelle refers to the *force* of thought in something like the same way Derrida or Agamben refer to the force of law: it is what remains once thought (like law) has been stripped away and the specular relationship between thinking and being is cancelled. Laruelle also clearly intends to invoke the language of performativity, citing "force" in the same way that J.L. Austin talks about illocutionary force. The non-philosophical task trades on a certain force rather than on truth or meaning. Thus, he writes

> we call performation … the operation of the force-(of)-thought … The force-(of)-thought is such that the intention, end or effect of the act are immediately realized with the act itself, without any division or transcendent distinction being able to slide between them and differentiate what emerges in one piece.[30]

Force-(of)-thought is a way of reflecting thought's force in the world but absent thought itself. It is the performative effect that results from a stance in-One and (again because of its grounding in the real) its results are fully generic—i.e., available to anyone and everyone. This, too, is in

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[28] Laruelle, *Principles*, 24.

[29] James, *The New French Philosophy*, 177.

[30] Laruelle, *Principles*, 178. "Performation" continues to be a recurring theme throughout the book—see pp. 1, 18, 55, 68, 163, 168, 175–84, 191, 195, 216, 223, 226, 269, 278. See also J.L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962).

keeping with the scientific register of non-philosophy; science produces generic results that are available to anyone and everyone, indifferent to partisan identities.

Force-(of)-thought is thus produced by non-philosophers as they view the world in light of (that is: as determined by) the One. But because this viewing invokes both the world (as the thing viewed) and the One (as the determining instance), force-(of)-thought has a kind of double-facing quality. It looks both toward the One (in what Laruelle calls vision-in-One) and toward the world (in the force-(of)-thought proper). Facing the One, vision-in-One sees everything as indistinguishably real, identical in-the-last-instance. Facing the world, however, force-(of)-thought can distinguish philosophical constructs as illusions that are unilateralized or emplaced *by* the One. Looking "toward" the One, so to speak, one sees identity (in that there is only one real to see); looking toward the world, one sees dualysis (since determination in-the-last-instance always entails two).[31] This organon also faces two directions because it is both "caused" and "occasioned," as Laruelle puts it. The *cause* of force-(of)-thought is the real—the only cause there could be, running in only one direction. Its *occasion*, however, is some given material in the world. Because the One cannot be viewed directly, its effects can only be registered on discrete philosophical objects or concepts. Any given philosophical material can serve as the occasion for registering the effects of the real, and the selection of which material is also purely occasion*al* (i.e., arbitrary and contingent).

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[31] Laruelle, *Principles*, 186. In some sense, Laruelle here returns again to his two founding axioms—the immanence of the One and the emplacement of everything else as a result. This is what force-(of)-thought sees and helps construct.

This double-facing quality positions force-(of)-thought to do a unique work, a work that—at its most concrete—Laruelle describes as a kind of cloning. As a clone, the force-(of)-thought displays all the DNA of a philosophical situation. It contains every operation and division, every treatise and axiom and neologism, but treats them all in-One as identically real in-the-last-instance, suspending all their sovereign gestures (e.g., pretensions to completion, totality, or adequacy to the real). Indeed, at bottom, the force-(of)-thought simply *is* a clone of some particular philosophy but drawn from the One as the "real identity" of that philosophy's binaries.[32] This is nicely illustrated by Laruelle himself as he undertakes non-philosophy. What Laruelle calls "non-Marxism," for instance, is a clone of an entire situation of discourse within and around Marxism, including its so-called "failure." For Laruelle, the deviation to the right is not an abandonment of Marxism; rather, it is a revealing element of the Marxist situation and one with which, in fact, "Marxism" is identical-in-the-last-instance. Non-Marxism is the force-(of)-thought as clone of the entire Marxist situation in-One.[33] Laruelle speaks about Christ in a similar way. What he calls a "Christo-fiction" rests on the construction of "Christ" as a clone of the God-man situation. Rather than thinking of Christ as the synthetic moment of a dialectic between divinity and humanity or as the tertium quid that bridges the ontological chasm between God and man, Christ represents for Laruelle the clone of God and man taken together, identical

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[32] Ibid., 105, 186.

[33] Laruelle, *Introduction to Non-Marxism*.

in-One.[34] In this way, "cloning is a repetition, itself immanent, of transcendence."[35] Cloning repeats philosophical materials by suspending their transcendent (and divisive) pretensions and taking them up again in their real (and identical) immanence.

Working with a clone in this fashion brings several things into view.[36] First, and most naturally, it performatively displays the identity of all things in-the-last-instance. In the force-(of)-thought, all philosophical binaries are indistinguishable, displayed as identical parts of a single situation. The clone is thus one instance of what is true universally: that the One is equally foreclosed to all things, ultimately rendering all things (from the perspective of the real) equivalent. Second, although all things are rendered equivalent in light of the One and its foreclosure, some regions of the world feel this leveling more than others. Indeed, by Laruelle's account, philosophy feels this leveling most of all. Cloning suspends what he calls the "Principle of Sufficient Philosophy"—philosophy's claim that it "suffices for the real and for the thought of the real and thus that it is unsurpassable like the real itself."[37] It is, in short, philosophy's self-aggrandizing belief that it can always provide a sufficient and superior account of any

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[34] François Laruelle, *Christo-Fiction: The Ruins of Athens and Jerusalem* (trans. Robin Mackay; New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

[35] Ibid., 238–9, emphasis removed. On this point, Laruelle must again hasten to forestall several misunderstandings. Most importantly, he distinguishes cloning from the *unification* of philosophical divisions, on the one hand, or the *negation* of philosophical mixture. To combine dualities smacks too much of philosophers and their dialectics, for Laruelle. Hence his investment in cloning. The force-(of)-thought is already the clone of binaries in their real-identical form and, consequently, the refusal of any distinction between what becomes, in the world, dual. Similarly, this cloned identity is not such that it would "bear on a sole term and dissolve the mix itself, but an identity which declares itself to be that of duality, whose new, 'unilateral' form excludes the mix on its behalf or invalidates it. Consequently, non-philosophy is very exactly, through the force-(of)-thought, a *transcendental cloning and a dualysis* of the philosophical materials." Laruelle, *Principles*, 186.

[36] What follows is drawn from Laruelle, *Principles*, 30–1.

[37] Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, 98.

phenomenon. Religion, from a philosophical perspective, appears readily-explainable—a kind of

slave morality (Nietzsche), perhaps, or an analgesic for material oppression (Marx)—just as

neurotic behaviors are the result of previous traumas stored in the unconscious (Freud) or

modern existential or technological ills are best diagnosed as the purview of human animals

struggling with the anxieties of being (Heidegger). Philosophy is "shrewdly adroit … in

projecting its idealist articulation of the Real" as though it were a "material or ontological fact."[38]

This perceived sufficiency is what force-(of)-thought suspends, thereby exhibiting philosophy's

real status as simply one more discourse among others, just as incapable of describing or

constituting the One as every other. Third, force-(of)-thought displays philosophy's structure.

Having suspended philosophy's operations, the clone functions like a gas cooled to a low

temperature—its molecular structure is visible in a way that was not possible when its particles

were in motion. In a similar way, philosophy's operations must be suspended in order to see

them more clearly. One of Laruelle's most insistent and audacious claims is that, at bottom,

every philosophical situation has an identical structure, whether that philosophy is classical or

modern, dialectical or deconstructive. Laruelle articulates this structure through a series of "a

prioris" which function something like philosophy's DNA. In the clone, these DNA are isolated,

repeated, and put on display. Indeed, this is the primary aim of force-(of)-thought: to display the

a prioris in an inert, cloned form.

These three components of the clone—identity, suspension of philosophy's sufficiency,

and the a prioris—account for its generic nature. In fact, to restate force-(of)-thought's function

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[38] Wallis, *Critique of Western Buddhism*, 53–4.

yet again, it is precisely to take a philosophical situation and render it generic, just as a clone is the generic version of a particular set of genetic arrangements or a generic medicine extends the reach and availability of a certain drug precisely by stripping away the authority of its commercial name. Force-(of)-thought is generic, Laruelle explains, "in the sense employed in pharmaceuticals and the sciences, where certain properties assume a universal yet not explicitly totalizing extension as discrete individuals."[39] In the clone, a discrete philosophical situation functions as a type for what philosophy does universally. Non-philosophy, then, is the work of registering the effects of the real on the occasional materials provided by philosophy, with the end result of illustrating their illusory pretensions and suspending their sovereign entanglements. This work is done for the sake of a generic humanity whose best analogue is that of scientist rather than philosopher, a humanity that *theorizes* the real of which they are a part without falling into the ec-static transcendence of thought.

Second Pass: Laruelle's Formalist Picture

So far, our introduction to Laruelle has been quick and schematic. At such a scale, it can be difficult to see the power of his thought—especially since, as I have emphasized, its foundational axioms are so simple. The real payout of non-philosophy, however, lies in its formal precision. This section therefore outlines two formal apparatuses we can use to cash out Laruelle's theory in more precise terms. The first is Graham Priest's inclosure schema which, although something Laruelle never mentions, bears an uncanny similarity to his diagnosis of philosophy as well as to the four "a prioris" that structure every philosophical decision. The second apparatus is

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[39] Laruelle, *Clandestine Theology*, 12.

Laruelle's own latest analogue for non-philosophy: quantum physics. We will use the inclosure schema, therefore, to clarify Laruelle's diagnosis of philosophy and we will use quantum to clarify Laruelle's ontological picture and the non-philosophical solution he offers to the problems of philosophy.[40]

Inclosure Schema

The basic Laruellean dilemma might be summarized as follows: human beings, as real, try to make authoritative claims about the real which they are, with philosophy representing that pretension at its most acute. The real, however, is foreclosed to the transcendence implicit in such an investigation and thus finds itself illusorily distributed between being and thinking. Philosophy then charges itself with the unending task of suturing back together what it continues to divide. As we have already seen, the inclosure schema reflects a fundamentally related dilemma: self-reference within formal systems yields paradox in a similarly binary shape—the amphibology of transcendence and closure.[41] For both Laruelle and Priest, the self-referential gesture of purporting to grasp the whole of what one is results in a split of that thing—a split that, from Laruelle's perspective, does violence to the lived reality of human beings and from Priest's perspective calls for new logical doctrines (dialetheism). Even here, however, their stakes are not far apart: Laruelle and Priest agree that this paradox calls for a new axiomatic.

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[40] Quantum physics has been on Laruelle's radar from the very beginnings of his project (see *Biography*, 15) though it isn't until his Philosophy V period that he takes up quantum in any sustained way. For more on Laruelle's development and the broad trajectory of his career, see Anthony Paul Smith, *François Laruelle's Principles of Non-Philosophy: A Critical Introduction and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 11–17.

[41] By "formal systems," recall, we mean specifically those systems of sufficient complexity to encode self-reference, reflexivity, and totality.

It will be helpful, then, to reacquaint ourselves with the particulars of Priest's schema:

(1) $\Omega = \{y; \varphi(y)\}$ exists

(2) If x is a subset of Ω: (a) $\delta(x) \notin x$

and (b) $\delta(x) \in \Omega$
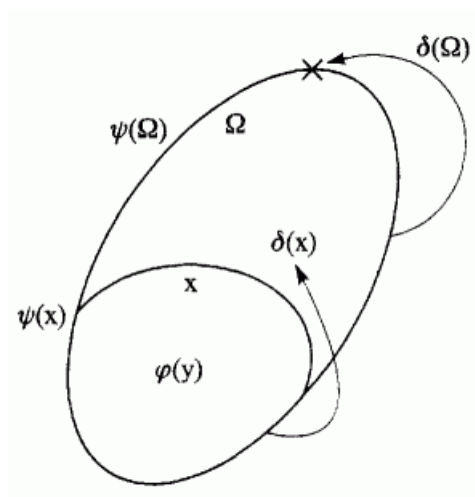
Figure 2. Inclosure Schema.

Recall that the inclosure schema formalizes logical paradoxes that arise at the limits of thought. In each case, the paradox in question takes the generic shape of some designated totality (1) and a self-referential operation which yields an element that is both inside and outside that totality (2). Condition 1 defines the domain of the schema by naming the existence of some total set (Ω) and Condition 2 then draws a subset (x) within Ω and applies a diagonalizing function (δ) to it, thus generating an element that transcends x but remains enclosed within Ω. The trouble arises when this diagonalization applied to Ω itself. What is especially important for our purposes is that this application—although ultimately resulting in paradox—is nonetheless allowable because of the set-theoretical truth that every set contains itself as its own subset. Ω is, definitionally, one of the subsets of Ω, and hence a candidate for the diagonalizing function. This function, when applied to Ω, generates a paradoxical element that is simultaneously within and without Ω. Condition 2a names this element's exclusion from Ω (and hence its transcendence of

the defined set) while Condition 2b names the element's inclusion within Ω (and hence the intact closure of the totality).[42]

With an eye toward Laruelle, we might summarize the inclosure schema's intervention as outlining two steps: the definition of a domain (1) on which thought or language operates (2). In this way, Condition 1 represents something like being while Condition 2 represents something like thinking. What is of special interest for us, however, is a subtle distinction between the ways that Ω shows up in each condition. What Laruelle would find in Condition 2a is not Ω as a matter of being, but rather a *representational double* of Ω as a matter of thought, the subset Ω as a specular copy of the original Ω. And even in Condition 1, Laruelle would question the representational stakes of positing a domain in the first place. If Ω is taken to designate the real (as we are presuming for the purposes of this chapter), to designate this domain is already to presuppose it as available for thought. Naming the real as a condition for thinking it—whether it is named "being" or "God" or "Ω"—is an operation that Laruelle excludes a priori. The Ω of Condition 1, in other words, is also an operation of thought, the presumption in the head of the philosopher to delimit a domain for the operations that will proceed in Condition 2. And when we arrive at Condition 2, the Ω that shows up therein is a doubled omega, an assumed/representational Ω based on the Ω of Condition 1 that is only presumed to pertain in being.

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[42] These diagrams are drawn, of course, from Graham Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought* (New York: Oxford, 2002), 156. For a more thorough discussion of the inclosure schema, see chapter one of this dissertation.

What Laruelle would identify in the inclosure schema, in other words, is a partitioning of

the real Ω across being and thinking. Condition 1 represents the way that thought always

presupposes a certain domain where it does its work, with that work then summarized in

Condition 2 as the representational double of Ω as its own subset. Even before proceeding to the

two consequences (a and b), the conditions already provide a clear illustration of Laruelle's

critique of philosophy: it splits the real into being (1) and thinking (2), where thought both

presupposes a material domain and then produces a specular iteration *of* that domain. Unable to

grasp the real as such, philosophy instead presupposes a graspable-real in being and then

representationally doubles that illusorily-graspable real every time it speaks of it. For Laruelle,

the paradoxical consequences of (a) and (b) follow from an already-problematic split of omega.

The inclosure schema here would thus represent for Laruelle not the One but rather philosophy's

misapprehensions about the One.

But the inclosure schema holds even more illustrative potential vis-à-vis Laruelle,

mapping not just the broad strokes of his critique of philosophy but also its minute particulars.

Laruelle identifies four invariant functions to philosophy—what he calls the "a prioris"—that

structure every philosophical act. Each will be elaborated at greater length below but, for the

sake of clarity, a simple first pass will suffice. The four a prioris, together with a brief definition

of each, are as follows:[43]

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[43] The following is drawn from Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy,* 12, 42, 52, 149, and *Principles*, 4–5, 234–5. It is also worth noting that Laruelle occasionally talks about Philosophical Decision in the same way he talks about the Principle of Sufficient Philosophy—i.e., as a wholistic problem that names the entire structure of philosophy. This can lead to some confusion. In what follows, I will always use "Decision" to name Laruelle's smaller, a prioristic use of the term, and refer to the wholistic diagnosis as the Principle of Sufficient Philosophy.

1. Position | The *positing* of some material domain for the operations of thought

2. Autoposition | Philosophy's *self*-positioning as adequate to the domain in question

3. Decision/Transcendence | The production of scissions and binaries as philosophy begins its work in earnest

4. Unity | The sovereign gesture of reunifying what has been divided

These four are "a priori" in precisely the Kantian sense: they are the conditions of possibility for any experience of philosophy and that which give philosophy shape and determination. They can be thought and studied independent of their embodiment by any particular philosophy, and they serve as the transcendental frame for all philosophical objects. Whatever the philosophium under consideration, Laruelle claims, it will achieve its particularity only by passing through four a prioris.

It will be helpful to illustrate these a prioris within a particular philosophical dogma. In *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, Laruelle provides just such an example with the famous Cartesian formula *ego cogito, ego sum*. What motivates his exegesis is, of course, the fact that "ego" shows up twice. On one side of the formula ego is associated with thinking while, on the other, ego is associated with being. This is used as an illustration of the way philosophy attempts to divide and then reunify the real. In this context, the real must be imagined as the undivided ego, with its Cartesian distribution across being and thought representing philosophy's attempted domination of it. What is important for our purposes, however, is that all four philosophical a prioris can be neatly illustrated in the Cartesian *cogito*. First, of course, is Position, the moment in which

philosophy posits the ego as its domain. There is a real of the ego, but that is not what philosophy discusses since the real is indifferent to language. Philosophy instead "gives itself these terms and thus assumes the Ego itself, which it thus must codetermine through the dyad." The Ego "must appear as such in what we presuppose."[44] Ego, here, does not name the real (because the real is indifferent to naming); instead, it is posited as a category that philosophy can think.

The second a priori, Autoposition, is the reflexive moment when thought thinks about itself. In the same gesture that philosophy posits something on which it can operate, it also positions *itself* with respect to that domain. Here the Cartesian example is especially apropos because the reflexivity of thought is centrally at issue in the *cogito*: "'We are conscious that we are conscious and that we think': this is auto-reflexivity as essence of … thought."[45]

As soon as Descartes begins to run the system he's set up—that is, as soon as he starts to construct self-referential sentences about his own thinking substance—he performs Decision/Transcendence and produces the binary at the heart of the Cartesian formula. This, perhaps more than anything else, is what the *cogito* represents for Laruelle: the division of the ego. The resulting dyad is, by this point, obvious: "this is the dyad of thought (*cogitatio*) and of being (*esse*), of their necessary liaison."[46] The ego is repeated, divided into these two dimensions, obscuring the real as a result.

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[44] Laruelle, *Principles*, 85.

[45] Ibid., 86.

[46] Ibid., 85.

Unity then occurs when the Ego reappears as a "third term" such that "the dyad is thus in fact already a triad." Laruelle continues: "There is a *primacy* of the Ego over the *cogitatio* and *esse* but it remains a reflexive operator or, more widely beyond this reflection, a dependent of thought."[47] Hovering always above the *cogito* is the transcendent and unifying "I" that speaks both sides of the binary. By showing up on both sides of the dyad, the ego is split (Decision) but *also* unifying (Unity), allowing for the supposed reunification of thinking and being.

Laruelle argues that, across every philosophy and in every philosophical situation, there can be found the four invariant a prioris of Position, Autoposition, Decision, and Unity. These are philosophy's DNA, the "minimal structures of every thought."[48] Philosophy invariably posits some material 'out there' on which it works, positions itself in relation to that presupposed material, produces binaries, and then works to reunify them.[49] What is truly noteworthy about these four moments for my purposes, however, is how precisely they map onto Priest's inclosure

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[47] Ibid., 85–6.

[48] Laruelle, *Theory of Identities*, 11.

[49] These four a prioris stay fairly consistent across Laruelle's later works, though he does make some minor tweaks—usually in his conventions for naming them. My naming of the four here follows *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, but in *Principles* he complicates things by reworking the a prioris to foreground what he calls "givenness" and "position" (see pp. 234, 237). Givenness and position there take on the status of something like Kant's two pure forms of intuition—they are what pre-form the object before the other a prioris take hold. Laruelle emphasizes this by abstracting the reflexive gesture of Autoposition as the overarching essence of philosophy and then filtering each of the three remaining a prioris (position, transcendence, and unity) through givenness and position in order to produce six inflections. There are also further options still in any of Laruelle's later works. By *Theory of Identities*, for instance, Laruelle prefers to speak in terms of three a prioris (position, decision, and unity) together with what he calls the *chora*, the non-philosophical "space" where materials are all rendered equivalent. These sorts of revisions may appear drastic but, at bottom, philosophy retains a virtually identical structure in each case. I have chosen to emphasize the earlier configuration in *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy* because it allows for readier comparison with the inclosure schema, but it is of course entirely possible to explicate the structure of philosophy from any of Laruelle's articulations. Anthony Paul Smith, for example, pins his explanation to the version given in *Principles*. See Smith, *Laruelle*, 18–26.

schema.[50] Position corresponds broadly to all of Condition (1) but even more particularly to φ. In the first moment of thought, the thinker posits the elements of Ω *as* φ, with φ as what allows the philosopher to identify elements and gather them as a set. This is the moment in which the domain for the rest of the schema is articulated. Autoposition, as philosophy's self-reflexive moment, is found in the tying together of (1) and (2), the representational doubling in (2) of what was posited in (1) as the material for thought. Since all the actual 'thinking' is mapped in the operations that take place under Condition (2), we might say that Condition (2) is where thought positions *itself* with respect to Condition (1), just as Autoposition designates the self-reflexive positioning of philosophy vis-à-vis the material domain it initially posited.[51] Decision/Transcendence then matches neatly with outcome (2a), also conveniently labeled Transcendence. Here, thought transitions from simply positioning itself to actually switching on its conceptual machine. δ enters the picture as the moment when thought begins to produce new conceptual objects, and the result is the splitting of the real into dyads (2a and 2b).[52] Finally, Unity corresponds to Closure (2b) in which Ω is said again to be a kind of total upper limit, claiming the very unity that is belied by (2a).

Given the tight fit between the four a prioris and the four moments of inclosure, it should come as no surprise that one of Laruelle's most recurrent critiques of philosophy is its iterative

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[50] I owe this articulation of the a prioris to Joseph Spencer.

[51] Again, this autopositional relationship comes to paradoxical fruition only later in the schema but it finds its condition, first, in the relationship between (1) and (2).

[52] Notice, too, that this is also where negation comes into the picture. Negation, for Laruelle, is always a transcendent gesture, an operation-*on* and so, necessarily, from a kind of distance.

nature. Laruelle imagines philosophy as the equivalent of a system that constantly re-runs δ in an attempt to subsume the previous iteration's Transcendence with a new iteration's Closure. He writes: "Unitary systems will be interminably reproduced in this variously balanced mode, where each philosophical decision, crisis or rupture in relation to an old state of thought reestablishes and brings along with itself another way of closing and re-closing the system."[53] "Philosophical decision … is a machine … that 'runs' to the infinite or the unlimited."[54] In this way, where Priest reserves the inclosure schema solely for limit cases, Laruelle identifies its operations across all of philosophy because, for him, every case of philosophy already *is* a limit case— limited because it performs an adequacy to the real which simply cannot pertain. No matter how particular the situation philosophy attempts to think, it claims to be thinking the reality *of* that situation, and so always makes claims on and for the foreclosed One. This immanence of the real to every situation, combined with the real's absolute foreclosure, transforms every instance of thought into the sort of limit structure where inclosure can apply.

The non-philosophical alternative proposed by Laruelle, then, is essentially just one more variation on the class of solutions that attempt to bar the self-reference that generates the paradox in the first place. Laruelle writes: "The One is an absolute or intrinsic finitude. Finitude resides in the One's powerlessness to operate on itself … or even to leave itself and alienate itself, to separate itself from itself … This finitude thus delivers us from the operation of transcendence

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[53] Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, 211.

[54] Ibid., 36.

… and from the philosophical decision."[55] The One is so fully immanent, so fully 'within' itself, that it does not possess the self-difference necessary for reflexivity. In essence, suspending the Principle of Sufficient Philosophy (which Laruelle in the above quote calls "philosophical decision") means to suspend the linkage between Condition (1) and Condition (2), to bar the moment when Ω is doubled in its representational form. To prohibit that self-reference is to suspend philosophy's operations. Then, once the machine is no longer running, we can see what it is made of and how it operates in the first place—that is, we as non-philosophers can begin to extract the a prioris.

Barring self-reference, however, does not drive Laruelle into the arms of metalanguage as a solution. Metalanguages are every bit as transcendent as self-reference, for Laruelle, and though he does create new formal systems in non-philosophy, they are not metalinguistic. The goal of Laruelle's formal construction is neither to describe philosophy with exact precision nor to provide a grounding discourse for philosophy; his goal, rather, is to provide a contingent material in which the effects of the real might be revealed. He thus bars metalanguages as fiercely as he refuses self-reference—and for much the same reason:

> The Real … prohibits the auto-reflexive then philosophical usage of language and shows that … language is required without still speaking by redoubling its own ground, or of a *hinter-language*, since it speaks only from the Real and submits to the transcendental law of its identity and of unilaterality, a non-autopositionality.[56]

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[55] Ibid., 40.

[56] Laruelle, *Principles*, 176. See also his discussion of Gödel on pp. 64–8. Laruelle understands Gödel to be revealing the philosophical prejudices that lie behind metascientific projects.

Wherever metalanguage remains an option, we have recreated the philosophical double (and, hence, Autoposition) by providing a metalinguistic mirror in which any statement from the object language can be reflected.

Given all that we've seen of Laruelle's ontological picture and his analysis of philosophy's structure, we are now in a position to summarize the task of non-philosophy. At its most basic, the non-philosophical project consists of two steps: the suspension of philosophy's sufficiency, followed by a display of its a prioris. Both steps are direct consequences of the real's indifference: philosophy's pretensions are suspended by the real's foreclosure and indifference, and the a prioris consequently serve simply as displays for the effects of the real on transcendent illusions. Once the operations of philosophy are suspensively neutralized, its a prioris cease to be functioning cogs and instead become occasions for displaying the real's reduction of every transcendence. Like judicial regalia put behind museum glass, the a prioris serve as now-inert materials that exhibit the suspension of philosophy's pretense. This task might also be translated into the terms of the inclosure schema: non-philosophy (first) suspends the link between Condition (1) and Condition (2) and (second) shows how these four moments (1, 2, 2a, and 2b) are at work in whatever philosophical material is under consideration. Extracting the a prioris is the non-philosophical equivalent of dissecting a frog: the real is to philosophy as chloroform is to an organism, and nothing proves philosophy's lifelessness like opening up its internal structure.[57]

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[57] Laruelle changes his mind over time about how detailed this display of the a prioris needs to be. In *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, he claims that force-(of)-thought needs to extract an equivalent "non-thetic" (that is, non-philosophical) version of every a priori, essentially producing a non-thetic Position, non-thetic Autoposition, and so on. By *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, however, Laruelle revises that claim, admitting that defining the non-thetic a prioris in terms of their philosophical equivalents concedes too much to the decisional structure of thought (see *Principles*, 35–6). By the later work, then, Laruelle is more apt to say that every philosophical a priori is simply reduced to an "occasion." The four a prioris remain the invariant structural elements of philosophy, but the task is no

It is only with Laruelle's quantum turn, however, that the non-philosophical task comes into its clearest articulation, and so we turn next to the clarifications on offer in the conversation between non-philosophy and particle physics. It is enough, at this point, simply to summarize the Laruellean task as follows: to do the work of non-philosophy is to take some particular slice of philosophy (e.g., the Cartesian *cogito*) and exegetically show where it divides the One from itself, splitting the real into being and thinking (or their various avatars) such that the real appears on both sides of the split as what somehow holds the two terms together in their specularity. In light of the One, philosophy's operations are suspended, unilateralized, and analyzed right down to their a priori components. Because the One never itself enters the fray, however, it is up to the non-philosopher to extract a clone from the One in the shape of the real identity of the philosophium under consideration. That clone, in all its force, engages in the unilateralizing work of putting philosophy back in its proper place.

However, if exegetical analysis of philosophical a prioris is at least somewhat clear, cloning and identity and unilateralization still remain too abstract for comfort. To bring all this pragmatically down to earth, then, we follow Laruelle into his quantum turn.

Quantum

Laruelle took up quantum theory in earnest only in the fifth of his five self-described periods of the non-philosophical project. Quantum had, curiously, been on his horizons since very early in his work, though he seemed initially uncertain about whether it could serve as

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longer to reproduce each of these four in a non-thetic guise. It is enough simply to say that the a prioris are rendered inert.

anything beyond mere metaphor. In the opening pages of *Biography of Ordinary Man*

(Philosophy II), he explained:

> Any comparison of one science to another, particularly of a science as peculiar as a transcendental science [such as non-philosophy] to the empirical sciences, is dangerous and *rarely transcends metaphor* … The transcendental theory of individuals has a second shared characteristic, this time with a particular empirical science which, *even if it is a mere metaphor*, could give philosophers a better way into this project. It is quantum mechanics.[58]

Some thirty years later in *Christo-Fiction*, Laruelle's ambivalence around employing quantum

mechanics disappears:

> It will be objected that the leap … to quantum materiality is inadmissible, a metaphorical passage; but this is to forget that the atomistic and Newtonian 'natural,' which philosophy largely adopts, is no more natural than quantum matter, and that it is precisely the latter that we can learn from … [The quantum interpretation of Christ] is only metaphorical for the philosophy that impregnates theology, but not beyond its bounds.[59]

If quantum theory appears as a metaphor, he now claims, it is only due to philosophical prejudice

on the part of the reader. From two anxious sentences in 1985 to a full-blown method in the

2010s, quantum has become Laruelle's stay for articulating his project.

Quantum theory clarifies non-philosophy in two fundamental ways: first, it illuminates

Laruelle's ontology, shedding light on the nature of the real; second, it elucidates the pragmatic

work of non-philosophy by casting it in the mold of particle physics. We begin, then, with the

first. Laruelle's quantum turn lays definitively to rest every metaphysical undertone that readers

have unavoidably heard in his discussion of the One. According to quantum physics, reality is

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[58] Laruelle, *Biography*, 15–16, emphasis added.

[59] Laruelle, *Christo-Fiction*, 64.

probabilistic rather than determined, and the nature of this probability is what marks the real as foreclosed.[60] Where Newtonian physics operated on the premise that there exists an independent reality separate from the scientists who study it—some reality 'out there' that can be approximated through mathematical modeling—quantum physics was forced by experimental outcomes to operate on an entirely different premise. At quantum scales, it turns out, the behavior of matter is altered by observation. Matter will behave like a wave or like a particle depending entirely on whether there is some measuring device (including human eyeballs) involved at some stage of the experiment. As a result, experimental physicists can only make predictions about particles within a quantum system and the necessity of these probabilistic terms is unavoidable. Probability—and the uncertainty that attends it—is *inherent*, baked in, not just a function of limited human measuring capacity. The size of quantum particles is such that their trajectory is affected by even a single photon. The very photons of light that make human observation possible interfere with the quantum particles scientists are interested in observing. As a result, reality is plagued by uncertainty at its smallest scales.

Werner Heisenberg is one of the theorists associated with this uncertainty, famously proving an inverse relation in the precision with which we can measure certain pairs of

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[60] At least, that is, if we follow the Copenhagen interpretation. The status of reality—that is, whether it is *constitutively* probabilistic or whether probability entered the equation only because of *human* limitation—was the site of most of the Einstein-Bohr debates and remains a point of some contention today. The Copenhagen interpretation, however, in which reality is inherently foreclosed to deterministic knowledge and behavior, is the version of quantum physics taught in mainstream textbooks today and is, at the very least, the version of quantum physics that Laruelle clearly has in mind. For an introduction to quantum physics attuned especially to the history of its development, see Jim Baggott, *Beyond Measure: Modern Physics, Philosophy, and the Meaning of Quantum Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). For an even more intuitive introduction, see Terry Rudolph, *Q is for Quantum* (self-pub., 2017).

observable qualities. The more precisely a scientist can pinpoint the position of a quantum particle, for instance, the less precisely she is able to measure its momentum. The dual wavelike-and-particulate qualities of matter operate the same way—they cannot be observed simultaneously. Properly speaking, the wave characteristics of matter are said *not to exist* concurrently with its particulate characteristics. Thus, Heisenberg reminds us, "we have to remember that what we observe is not nature itself but nature exposed to our method of questioning."[61] Or, as Jim Baggott explains: "Quantum probabilities do not reflect our ignorance of the intricate details of some underlying physical reality, as do classical, statistical probabilities." Even if we "force the issue and think at the level of individual particles, it is generally wrong to suppose that the particles possess the properties we are measuring *prior to their measurement*."[62] Quantum uncertainty is thus not a result of human imperfection, whether in measurement sensitivity or scientific technique. Uncertainty is simply intrinsic to the real. When it comes to Heisenberg's conjugate pairs, it is not that *we* cannot know both position and momentum at the same time; it is, rather, that there isn't yet an exact position or momentum *to* know in the first place.[63]

It is this inherence to the real's probabilistic uncertainty that clarifies the One's foreclosure in Laruelle. The One is foreclosed not because *we* are inadequate to describe it, but

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[61] Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 58.

[62] Baggott, *Beyond Measure*, 77, emphasis in original.

[63] If all this sounds vaguely positivist in its anti-realism, that's because it is. Baggott's chapter 6 addresses the connection between quantum physics and logical positivism.

because *it* is constitutively foreclosed. Like the quantum real, its indescribability is not due to our failure or limitation so much as the fact that there simply isn't anything describable in the first place. Quantum physics thus clarifies how something can be inherently foreclosed without being transcendent. There is no 'some*thing*' to exist 'out there,' just as there are no waves or particles at the level of the quantum real, simply wave-*like* or particle-*like* behaviors observed in carefully prepared quantum systems. Just as it would be nonsensical to think about quantum reality as a kind of otherworldly beyond, the Laruellean One is not a transcendent metaphysical reality. It, like the quantum real, is simply the reality most immanent to everything in the macroscopic world. It is not that there exists a One somewhere 'out there' and we are forbidden from accessing it; rather, to even ask the question of whether or not it could be accessed is to obscure the phenomenon.[64]

The quantum real also provides a semi-intuitive image for the One's undulatory quality. Because Laruelle is so insistent on the radical immanence of the One—its self-inherence and foreclosure to all difference and division—readers may be wrongfully left with the impression that the One is therefore inert. Without the usual philosophical drivers of dynamism (self-difference, alterity, dialectic, etc.), it is easy to assume that the only alternative is static unity. As soon as Laruelle takes up quantum theoretical terms, however, it becomes clear that the One is neither inert nor rigid. On the contrary, its clone is best modeled as "a wave function or a state

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[64] Again, this was and is a point of contention in quantum physics. Laruelle sides so firmly with the Copenhagen interpretation that, for our purposes, we won't be entering the debate here.

vector, containing the probability amplitude of [its] message being received".[65] Or, again: non-philosophy "is more interested in [its] materiality as wavelike or interferent lived, … which excludes punctuality and atomist representation."[66] Though the sense of these phrases will be opaque to those unfamiliar with Laruelle, the novelty of their semantic register is clear: waves, state vectors, interference, probability—these are the terms in which the effects of the One are to be modeled.[67] In the same way that wave packets and superposed vectors are the terms for modeling the effects of the quantum real on a prepared experimental system, undulatory language becomes the formal analogue for Laruelle's force-(of)-thought as it models the effects of the One on a suspended philosophical situation.

The quantum real is thus doubly equivalent to the Laruellean One. First: it, too, is foreclosed even to the mathematical models that register its effects. At bottom, the quantum real is simply perturbations in an electromagnetic field, but these perturbations are constitutively inaccessible, as we discussed above. As a result, the terms and concepts of quantum theory (wave packets, state vectors, the Schrödinger equation, and so on) are merely contingent models for tracking the real's effects. Reality itself is not composed of wave packets; wave packets are instead *models* for the effects of the real on a quantum system. So, too, with the foreclosure of

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[65] Laruelle, *Christo-Fiction*, 91. In context, the subject of this sentence is "messianity" which is simply *Christo-Fiction*'s idiomatic name for the force-(of)-thought.

[66] Laruelle, *Christo-Fiction*, 171. For more on Laruelle's relationship to atomism, see Joseph M. Spencer, "The Laruellean Clinamen: François Laruelle and French Atomism," *Continental Philosophy Review* 51.4 (2018): 527–47.

[67] Laruelle cautions, however, that readers not overinvest themselves in the "physical or material intuition of a wave" since "wavelike here designates a schema or form that is not necessarily a visible phenomenon of the sonorous or liquid flow of concepts … The phenomenal mark of the wavelike as a schema that can sustain superposition is, above all, the interference of meanings or concepts." *Christo-Fiction*, 156.

the One and the non-philosophical work that nonetheless follows in the wake of the One's indifference: the One is not composed of cloned philosophies; force-(of)-thought instead registers the effects of the One on a philosophical situation. The quantum real is equivalent to the Laruellean One in a second way, as well: this foreclosure does not mark either real as a mystical, inert unity. Both are mobile and undulatory, neither fully exhausted in their macroscopic capture, nonetheless without passing over into self-transcendence. In this way, Laruelle prohibits the self-reference of the inclosure schema but also retains the potency of a probabilistic materialism, full of undulatory possibilities and immanent contingency.

Conceiving of something that is mobile without being riven with self-difference, however, is difficult. Here again quantum provides Laruelle with a way forward. Foreclosed as it is, the One of course has no direct non-philosophical equivalent or model; its effects can only be registered elsewhere. The kind of organon that can register its effects, however, must meet certain criteria. Within Laruelle's thought, that object is the vision-in-One and its quantum equivalent is a wave packet. A wave packet is a group of added or superposed waves that together express the probability amplitude for where and how a particle is likely to register on a detection device. Because it is composed of waves, a wave packet accounts for the wavelike behavior of matter at quantum scales, but it would be an error to conceive of these waves as physical or passing through some material substance. A wave packet is, quite simply, a statistical distribution of possibilities. As a mathematical model of the real state of a quantum system, a wave packet does not purport to mirror or describe the *actual* real. It also does not have any need of a self-reflexive gesture (indeed, it is unclear what the specular construal of a wave packet

could even mean).[68] Fully self-identical and yet full of undulatory potential, wave packets are

replete with "possible pathways … without any identified traceability, … that leave traces only

after the fact, once they have been detected or received."[69] The One is dynamic, indeterminate,

and yet unquestionably self-same in the same way that a wave packet is dynamic, indeterminate,

and inherently one.

Working in the terms of waves and superposition, Laruelle not only provides a more

intuitive model for the real's undulatory quality, he also provides a more intuitive model for

identity. Because a wave packet is properly disintricable—that is, because it does not preserve

the individuation of its component waves—superposition serves as non-philosophy's analogue to

the immanent identity of the real. This analogue was a necessary development, as Laruelle

admits:

> The One that we have previously used to speak this immanence that escapes every
> ontological norm would not alone have allowed us to understand immanence in itself, or
> only across so many hesitations in writing … Already we have to rework the One in new
> idempotent equations such as One-in-One or One + One = One.[70]

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[68] The question of reflexivity in Laruelle is slightly more complicated than the scope of this chapter allows me to discuss. Transcendence or self-representation are prohibited, but Laruelle repeatedly states that the force-(of)-thought is a kind of thinking that knows itself *as* thinking. This is especially marked in *Theory of Identities*. (See, for example, p. 51, where science "knows itself straightway as science (of) the real.") Here, too, a wave packet is a helpfully concrete analogue. In order to transition from a wave equation to the actual position of some particle, one takes the modulus square of the wave's amplitude. Squaring, in this way, is something *like* self-reference—a putting of the amplitude in relation with itself—but not in a way that is at all a self-*representation* of the wave equation. When Laruelle talks about the performative or self-reflexive nature of non-philosophy, he has something more like this squaring in mind: self-reference without self-representation, as represented in the immanent formalisms of quantum theory.

[69] Laruelle, *Christo-Fiction*, 175.

[70] Laruelle, *Christo-Fiction*, 171.

To call the real "One" was not enough to convey the nature of its identity. Almost immediately, Laruelle found himself forced into awkward linguistic formulas. In quantum theory, however, the translation of "One-in-One" is fairly straightforward: "The One is … *superposed* with itself … it is what we call the One-in-One or … radical immanence."[71] Compared to cumbersome expressions like "One-in-One," the clarity of superposition is a welcome relief.

At its most basic, superposition simply refers to the addition of two or more waves. Because quantum systems are modeled as waves, superposition also refers to the combination of several quantum states, thus representing the different possibilities for the system through time. Once the system is observed, that superposition collapses and the system is instantaneously reduced to only one of its potential particulate outcomes. It is important to remember that these superposed wave packets are mathematical models, created by scientists who extrapolate from a handful of observed experimental states to recompose the superposition state (called a state vector) of the system as a whole. The state vector provides a more precise and complete picture of the quantum system and its various possibilities than could be obtained either by repeated experimentation or extrapolating linearly from the observed results alone. Although this pragmatic approach to superposition (that is, constructing a state vector from the ground up, working backwards from observed experimental results) will helpfully concretize the positive project of non-philosophy, it is the top-down perspective on superposition itself (rather than its construction) that serves to illustrate the One's identity.

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[71] Ibid., 105, emphasis added.

Laruelle insists that, for his purposes, "Superposition is not a synthesis, and least of all is it a mélange in which those components are simply scrambled together but relatively recoverable."[72] A superposed state is not a philosophical unity, the transcendent coherence or holding-together of isolable components within some greater whole. In a state vector, the component vectors representing possible quantum states are totally flattened, disintricable, fully immanent to one another in what is, at the end of the day, simply another single vector. The state vector is just one vector among others—more comprehensive in its model of a particular quantum system, perhaps, but not a fundamentally different kind of thing from any of the vectors that compose it. Superposition conveys the possibility of undulatory phenomena being 'added' to produce a wave packet without therefore being transcendent to or distinguishable from the end result. Thus:

> There is superposition when immanence is the same through and through … Two terms can be superposed if they are of such a nature that they conserve the same unchanged immanence despite their adjunction or their addition … Not just any matter whatsoever is susceptible to superposition, it must be of a wave type; and not just any logic works for it, it must be an idempotent logic.[73]

Idempotence—mentioned at the end of the above quote—is the other formal equivalent used by Laruelle to describe the One's identity. It refers to the quality wherein a mathematical operation can be applied repeatedly without altering the result. As Laruelle prefers to notate it: "A + A = A," but other examples include multiplying any number by 1 or multiplying 0 by any

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[72] Ibid., 146.

[73] Ibid., 63.

other number.[74] An operation is idempotent, then, if the result of the function remains unaltered by some operation and indifferent to the frequency with which it is applied. This algebraic logic, Laruelle insists, is a perfect description of the One: idempotence "programs the identity of a term with itself as result or resultant, whatever may be the operation that serves as its mediation and that is therefore neutralized or suspended without being, for all that, forgotten or negated."[75] The One, too, remains One no matter what operation is performed upon it, utterly indifferent to how many times it is (illusorily) divided and reunified by philosophy. Where superposition conveys both the One's undulatory quality and its immanence, idempotence is Laruelle's way of doubling the theoretical defenses around the self-inherence of those undulatory possibilities. Superposition insists on the wavelike (rather than objective or conceptual or metaphysical) nature of the real, while idempotence insists on its unfailing identity.[76]

Superposition is also the concept that allows us to concretize the non-philosophical project. It will be most helpful, however, to first outline the methods of experimental quantum physics, since this is the analogue on which Laruelle hopes to hang non-philosophy. A physicist takes discrete particles (photons, electrons, calcium ions, etc.) and isolates them from observation in order to preserve their undulatory behavior. Once underdetermined in this way, beams of these particles are fired toward some detection apparatus. The array of scattered

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[74] Ibid., 63, 103.

[75] Ibid., 107.

[76] Ibid., 56. As far as I can tell, this juxtaposition of superposition and idempotence is a Laruellean innovation rather than something drawn directly from quantum physics. Idempotence is a genuine algebraic concept, but it does not seem to play a regular role in quantum formulas. It is for reasons like this that Laruelle occasionally reminds his readers that his quantum work contains only "a minimum of algebra" (*Christo-Fiction*, 67, 106).

particles registered by the detector then gives the physicist information about the entire experimental system—including its otherwise-unobservable but undeniably-real behaviors—and thus allows her to retroactively determine the system's state vector. There are numerous examples of this method over the long history of quantum experimentation, but what remains perhaps the most intuitive (especially for non-specialists) is the famous double-slit experiment that arguably launched the field. In 1801, Thomas Young directed beams of photons through two slits in an opaque object and then registered the pattern of light that appeared on a screen on the other side. What Young saw, much to his confusion, was not two straight lines directly behind the two slits but a series of light and dark stripes corresponding to the interference pattern of a wave. There was, it turned out, a quantum reality to photon behavior that was unobservable and yet accounted *better* for the experimental outcomes of the experimental system than had previous theories.

Young's experiment not only proved that light was a wave phenomenon; it also provided the template for later experiments on matter. Sending a beam of electrons (that is, particles of matter rather than particles of light) through two slits also resulted in a wave diffraction pattern, thus demonstrating wave-particle duality for matter at quantum scales, as well.[77] For our purposes, however, what is important is that the parameters of Young's double-slit test illustrate the general contours of all quantum experimentation, right down to the much more complicated research conducted well into the present. To this day, quantum experimentation uses the collision of particles—tracking when they collide, how they interfere, where constructive and destructive

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[77] See Baggott, *Beyond Measure*, 27–9.

patterns occur—to reveal something about the possibilities of an entire system. Based on the array of where individual particles are detected after passing through the experimental apparatus, the system's state vector can then be reconstructed. This vector is the probability equation that best predicts where individual particles will materialize on the far side of the apparatus. Because an unobservable quantum reality is at work in every experimental system, a far better account of the system will be obtained in light of that quantum reality than by observing individual particles alone.

Laruelle clearly intends non-philosophy to undertake a fundamentally parallel process. The task of non-philosophy, as he describes it, is to reconstruct the state vector of a given philosophical situation. To view philosophy in-One means to view philosophy and its objects in a more wavelike state, closer to the undulatory reality that they already are.[78] And just as the macroscopic world is shown, in quantum, to exhibit wave-particle duality at quantum scales, Laruelle's clone puts something like wave-particle duality to work in non-philosophy, as well. This is the double-facing quality of the clone, which is force-(of)-thought when facing the world and vision-in-One when facing the real. Force-(of)-thought names the particulate aspect of the cloned philosophium while vision-in-One names its undulatory aspect—and this undulatory aspect finds fullest expression in the reconstruction of philosophy's state vector.[79] The clone is a

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[78] In this regard, it may be significant that Laruelle identifies the first philosophical a priori as Position. To collapse a wave function is precisely to decide on the particulate side of wave/particle duality, and consequently to determine a particle's position in space and time. What is lost in that perspective, however, are all the behavioral phenomena associated with quantum particles.

[79] For Laruelle's discussion of the clone as exhibiting wave-particle duality, see *Christo-Fiction*, 91–5, 181–2. Laruelle associates vision-in-One with the "vectoriell" (his 'good' version of the undulatory) and talks about force-(of)-thought or "faith" as the likelihood of a message's being received—i.e., of a specific particle landing at a

wave as it is pointed toward the One and a particle as it is pointed toward the World, but it remains microscopic through and through.[80]

Non-philosophy is fundamentally equivalent to the reconstruction of a state vector—and, thus, the array of possibilities for the whole philosophical system—by retroacting based on a handful of that system's actualized materializations. By viewing things in-One, it views phenomena as they hew closer to their undulatory reality. Non-philosophy is the task of retroacting back to the array of probabilities out of which such-and-such determinate object or situation is distilled. The trick, of course, is that state vectors themselves are unobservable; a state vector is simply a mathematical model for a set of probabilities. The only observable on offer is, instead, one of the actualized phenomena whose probability the state vector contains. This is why Laruelle speaks so frequently of underdetermining some philosophical material— this is the Laruellean equivalent of rendering phenomena vectorial (since only vectors can be superposed).[81] Within non-philosophy, then, reconstructing a state vector proceeds in two steps: 1) underdetermination of philosophical material to render it microscopic and hence preserve its wave-particle duality and 2) staging a collision between at least two of these now-vectorial

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precise place. The clone is thus a matter both of a probability amplitude on a wave *and* what that amplitude predicts: a determinate location for a determinate particle on the detection apparatus.

[80] In other words, one ought not mistake the particulate face of the clone for a macroscopic object. Once the transcendent pretensions of a philosophium have been excised, according to Laruelle, we are working at the level of the micro rather than the macro.

[81] Within *Christo-Fiction* alone, see pp. 15–16, 71–3, 83–5, 139, 174–5, 201, 208–9. It's important, as well, that this be *under*determination as opposed to fixed *over*determination or pure *in*determinacy. Non-philosophy counteracts the overly rigid determinations of philosophy but does so without swinging to the other extreme as a result. This sensibility, in part, informs Laruelle's critique of deconstruction.

phenomena in order to gather data about the array of probabilities that both, properly speaking, really are.

What Laruelle gives us with quantum theory, then, is a way of understanding the non-philosophical project that is both pragmatically intuitive (or, at least, *more* pragmatically intuitive than his earlier descriptions of it) and formally precise:
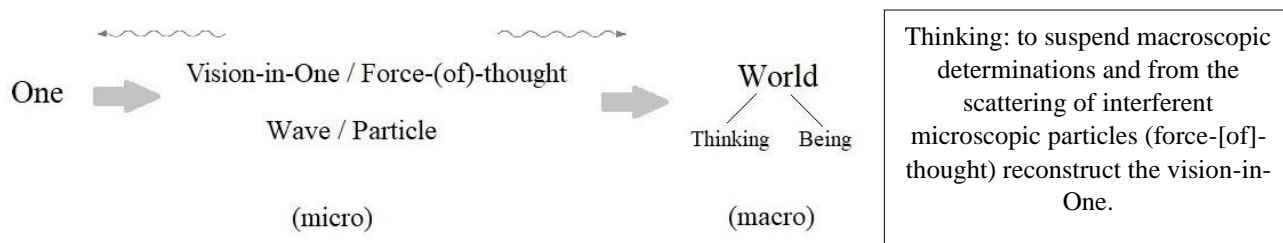
Figure 3. Laruelle's Quantum Thought.

This diagram moves from left to right to reflect the unilateralizing determination of the One as effected through the clone. On the far left is the real (to which, of course, we have no access). On the far right is the macroscopic realm of determinate objects. These objects are composed of parts whose undulatory behavior has been collapsed by observation. Situated between them is the constructed scientific apparatus, the collider that preserves wave-particle duality in the shape of a clone. The clone's double-facing quality is expressed by its split aspect, double names, and the two smaller arrows that designate the orientation of each 'side': force-(of)-thought as it faces the macroscopic and hence deals in the particulate, and vision-in-One as it faces the One and hence deals in the undulatory. The world provides material occasions for the work of non-philosophy which proceeds under the determination of the indifference of the One. The task of thought, then, is to reduce the transcendence of macroscopic determinations and clone divided worldly material

in its real identity. This clone, due to its immanence, registers at the level of the microscopic. Once the reduced particles drawn from the world are made to interfere, their resulting scattering makes it possible to reconstruct the state vector (i.e., the vision-in-One) of the worldly occasion as a whole.

It is also clear from Laruelle's quantum writings that this is precisely how he understands his own non-philosophical work. In *Christo-Fiction*, for instance, Laruelle isolates two kinds of material—the Greek and Jewish strands of thought that lie behind Christianity. By Greek thought, he means things like the *koine* dialect of the New Testament, the Neoplatonism of early Christian philosophy, the development of the tradition through Justin and Origen, and so on. And by Jewish thought, he has reference to the messianic prophecies of the Hebrew Bible, the religious priors of Jesus's first disciples and the cultural Judaism of the early Christian community. Recognizing that Christianity represents the collision of these two strands, Laruelle resumes Christianity as what he calls a Christ-*system*, arguing that Christ himself is best understood as the collider for these two collections of particles. To make a quantum reading viable, however, Laruelle must first underdetermine the Greek and Jewish strands, freeing them from their hardened determination in history and memory and theological systematization. After isolating each strand (which means, again, suspending the philosophical sufficiency of each), he can then restage their collision in explicitly quantum terms.

He thus speaks of the cross as an "experimental apparatus" where this collision takes place, or the tomb as Schrödinger's box where the vectorial power of Christ renders him alive

even in his death.[82] Christ becomes "a collider for those two rationalities that he makes interfere"

and the resurrection then serves to name the "resumption" of particulate phenomena in their

undulatory, probabilistic state.[83] In short:

> The theory named "Christ" results from a superposition by idempotence of the [Jewish and Greek] Laws … grounded respectively in the double transcendence that supports the Torah and the Word … In order to be superposed, the two Laws, with their information content on Christ, must be reduced to phenomena of vectoriellity … Christ is not a subject-point like God or the ego, an atom or a corpuscle that can be identified by the coordinates of a theological space; he is an interference, Greco-Judaic in origin, but one whose components are no longer identifiable.[84]

Laruelle's quantum Christ is the probabilistic array that collapses into determinate Jewish and

Greek strands. Non-philosophy is akin to looking at the scattering of particles on a screen (in this

case, things like individual *logia* and the idiosyncrasies of specific Gospels and the heretical

offshoots of early Christianity, together with contemporary theological teaching and cultural

enforcements—all the particulate data that make up the world of "Christianity") and using them

to reconstruct the state vector suggested by this scattering. That state vector is Christianity when

seen in-One, determined by the real.[85] In this generic wave equation, "Christianity" is revealed to

be much more than a rigid orthodoxy dictated by an ecclesiastical body in Rome. Its situation is

shown to harbor much more potential; heretical offshoots also have a certain probability

expressed in the amplitude of the state vector, as do nineteenth century reform movements and

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[82] Laruelle, *Christo-Fiction*, 193, 196–7.

[83] Ibid., 28, 205.

[84] Ibid., 145–6.

[85] Ibid., 106, 61.

the deeply Christian priors of modern secularity. The reward for reconstructing the state vector is a clearer understanding of what messianism really amounts to, and a display of the insurrectional potential that remains within an almost suffocatingly transcendent regime of thought. That insurrectional potential lurks, claims Laruelle, wherever the world is viewed in light of the One.

This, then, is the project of non-philosophy: to suspend the determinations of the world and think according to the real. Laruelle models an intellectual project that is not divisive or transcendent, neither determining nor corpuscular, a kind of thought that proceeds *according to* the real rather than taking the real directly as its object. Non-philosophy displays situations in their undulatory possibility, freed from the sovereign and macroscopic encroachments of transcendence. Although non-philosophy cannot be said to have a specific telos or even any necessity (teloi, after all, are suspiciously transcendent and thinkers are always free to ignore Laruelle's proposals and proceed as philosophically as ever), it is an innovative approach to thought and, when it comes to illustrating this innovation, the concretion of quantum physics serves Laruelle well. Non-philosophy's task is to reconstruct an array of probabilities by retroacting based on some of that array's actualized materializations. Central to that reconstruction is the image of a particle collider: the site where materials are underdetermined, made to interfere, and then superposed in light of the One that they always-already are. In the collider, physicists trace possibilities that are precluded by the particular form of macroscopic phenomena, possibilities obscured by the determinations of the observational world. It is with a particle collider, then, that we arrive at the chamber where this kind of thought occurs and Laruelle's most concrete image for the positive project of non-philosophy.

It is also, I want to argue, the chamber of prayer.

Inside the Chamber: A Laruellean Theory of Prayer

So far, nothing about Laruelle's thought would seem to suggest any special interest in religion. In actual fact, however, Christianity is a recurrent theme from very early in his career. Mysticism occupies *Biography of Ordinary Man*, icons serve as a point of contrast in *The Concept of Non-Photography*, and there is a pronounced investment in gnosticism throughout his writings.[86] This interest culminates in a series of books that all deal with the non-philosophical treatment of Christian materials: *Future Christ* (2002), *Mystique non-philosophique à l'usage des contemporains* (2007), *Christo-Fiction* (2014), and *Clandestine Theology* (2019).[87] Very little of this writing shows any interest in prayer, however. There is some attention to contemplation in *Biography* and at least one reference to a semi-contemplative/semi-linguistic Hesychast prayer practice in *Mystique Non-Philosophique* but, by and large, Laruelle's mentions of prayer largely dismiss it as philosophical and decisional.[88] Given the similarities between Laruelle and Agamben, however, there is nevertheless a useful model of prayer lurking in non-philosophy. Indeed, given the ground covered in the previous chapter, it is already possible to see elements of

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[86] See Laruelle, *Biography*, and François Laruelle, *The Concept of Non-Photography* (trans. Robin Mackay; New York: Sequence Press, 2015).

[87] See François Laruelle, *Future Christ: A Lesson in Heresy* (trans. Anthony Paul Smith; New York: Continuum, 2010); *Mystique Non-Philosophique à l'usage des contemporains* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007). Given that *Mystique Non-Philosophique* has not yet been translated into English, English-speaking readers may be interested in the summary and critical engagement offered by Alex Dubilet, "'Neither God, nor World': On the One Foreclosed to Transcendence," *Palgrave Communications* 1, 15027 (2015): 1–8.

[88] For the Hesychast prayer practice, see *Mystique Non-Philosophque*, 108–9, as well as a brief discussion of this passage in Smith, *Laruelle*, 161–2. In general, however, prayer is dismissed by Laruelle, as in *Clandestine Theology*, 45, as a dogma that "organize[s] the old faith."

prayer that slot quite well into a Laruellean frame. Laruelle's thought, too, can countenance prayer as fundamentally suspensive rather than reactive or self-objectifying. He, too, takes as his point of departure the non-self-identity of the world and looks for methods of disallowing worldly effectivity to capture and determine the potential of human beings. And just as Agambenian prayer is the performative resolution of life into an indistinction of form and content, Laruelle too is invested in a display of worldly materials in their real identity. There are, in short, any number of places where Laruelle might be enlisted for the model of prayer sketched in chapter two.

But even as it bears fundamental similarities to the model forwarded in the previous chapter, Laruelle's thought also clarifies Agamben in ways that advance our thinking about prayer. Reading Agamben, for instance, it is easy to get the impression that the important upshot of the messianic is suspension alone, as if the goal were simply putting the world out of play. Laruelle, however, places a positive project on the far side of suspension and clarifies that the potentiality being restored is not for the sake of specific objects (which would still be to remain within the frame of the world) but, rather, is a way of invoking the real of the situation in its entirety. The point is not the objects themselves but what is displayed through them. And though there are passages within Agamben's writing that might be enlisted in a similar project (i.e., his discussion of typology in *The Time That Remains*), it is Laruelle's thought that makes this clearest and that offers it as a pragmatic task. Paired with Laruelle, then, Agambenian "use" takes on a different cast. It is clarified as a generic construction on the basis of occasional materials, rather than an apparatus for re-potentializing discrete objects or identities.

This section, then, looks at how Laruelle's non-philosophy—in its quantum articulation especially—provides a model of prayer and fills in some of the gaps left over from the previous chapter. I will introduce prayer as the theological equivalent of a particle collider, a chamber in which the world takes on a minimal appearance and where various worldly determinations become entangled and exposed to the real. The quantum terms of *Christo-Fiction* also force us to ask about the *person* involved in prayer. Like a physicist preparing a laboratory environment, the disciple must be modeled immanent to the prayer he speaks. Between the entanglement of the disciple with his own prayerful system and the system itself modeled as a kind of apparatus, prayer becomes the chamber within which the data of the generic are produced and traced. All of this will be illustrated along the way through a handful of examples, including a brief comparison with the contemplative rigors of Simone Weil. The section then concludes with clarifications vis-à-vis Agamben. Although it provides a virtually identical diagnosis of worldly effectivity, Laruelle's positive project nevertheless answers the critique of quietism occasionally leveled at Agamben. By comparing their implications for a theory of prayer, it is possible to clarify both thinkers' approach to the relationship between the world and the real together with all the implications that follow.

The first thing that sets a Laruellean theory of prayer apart is, naturally, its commitment to absolute immanence. Traditionally, prayer is theorized through its transcendent components. God, the voice, desire, body—not to mention any conception of prayer as a primarily mental activity taking place interior to a subject—each of these makes prayer a question of alterity or some kind of ecstasis or even routine mind-body dualism. Prayer is often treated as a

transcendent posture *towards* something, whether that something is interior to the subject (thus splitting the self into the "I" who does the intending and the "I" who is intended) or exterior to the subject, residing supernaturally in the heavens. Non-philosophy, of course, holds no truck with any version of this thinking. Rather, it insists that the disciple—like the physicist—is simply one more element of the apparatus, fully identical in-the-last-instance with any other element. This follows, in part, from the decisive role played by observation in quantum physics: the observer is an integral *part of* the system, such that it matters when and where and in what order results are observed. Differences in the timing and sequence of observation yield different results because the observer is directly entangled with the system rather than transcendently abstracted from it at some purportedly objective distance. The disciple here functions in the same way: as an element identical to the prayerful apparatus rather than a transcendent observer or operator of it.

This is why, in place of Position and Autoposition, Laruelle occasionally uses the language of *stance*. Stance is Laruelle's name for a posture of immanence. It refers to being grounded in oneself, indifferent to the world rather than intending toward it. Stance is, for Laruelle, a posture of such absolute self-inherence that it lets-be the universe.[89] This notion is, in part, what draws Laruelle so repeatedly to the sciences. He finds in scientific investigation an insistence on a certain posture that withdraws determinations about the outcomes of experimental conditions. For Laruelle, science simply *is* this stance and nothing more—an immanent indifference to the world that lets-be its materials as mere occasions for registering the effects of

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[89] See Laruelle, *Concept of Non-Photography*.

the real. In much the same way, prayer simply *is* the assumption of a certain stance. Prostration, meditative walking, kneeling, craning over a rosary or a prayer book—whatever the posture, the disciple's first move in prayer is to assume a stance that performs his or her immanent imbrication with things. There are few better performative models of immanence than flattening oneself against the ground or entwining one's hands with a rosary or submitting oneself to the liturgical assemblage enacted by the Book of Common Prayer. Rather than being some sort of cerebral content posited on the bases of these corporeal activities, prayer is the transcendental reduction of the world enacted in a stance grounded immanently right among things. Prayer, then, is not my distant reviewing of a day or week or the events of a worship service. It is my entanglement with and in the situation, a stance relative to these objects and happenings that includes me right within them. And, once I have regained a stance within immanence, the world takes on a different sort of appearance: it is reduced, allowing the effects of the real to come into play. By assuming a stance rather than a position, the disciple has accomplished the most important step in excising transcendence and its determinations. Treating prayer as a stance, first and foremost, is what allows the rest of its immanent effects to proceed.

Following from its stance, prayer enacts the reduction of the world. The world takes on a minimal appearance as the disciple suspends his usual panorama of intentionalities toward it. As discussed in the previous chapter, prayer is that time and space in which the determinations of the day no longer hold sway, in which objects' identities are revealed to be more undulatory than is acknowledged in the course of their day-to-day use. With Laruelle, however, this takes on a quantum clarification. The reduction of the world is not a function of restoring potential to and

for the sake of these particular identities. Prayer is not on the behalf of specific objects. Rather, it uses these objects to stage a confrontation between the real and the world, with downstream consequences for the world's emplacement on the far side of the real's indifference. Laruelle's own preferred term for this consequence is "occasion." In prayer, objects and identities are rendered merely occasional—they become, that is, contingent opportunities for assuming a prayerful stance. What's more, any object whatsoever will do—any landscape or person or religious tradition or fortuitous coincidence or tragic mishap. The point of prayer is not the object that occasions its occurrence; the point of prayer is to trace the effects of the real in any material whatsoever. In this way, prayer is once again like a quantum experiment. The physicist is not invested in *these particular* calcium ions or this specific arrangement of crystal diffractors coupled with this very precise temperature setting. None of these are themselves the point. Instead, their ensemble is an occasion for once again tracking the effects of the real on a contingent assembly of worldly materials.

Nor does it require much creativity to render Christian prayer in these terms. The reduction of the world is very much at issue in one of the most paradigmatic of prayers in the New Testament. In the famous intercessory prayer of John 17, Jesus explains that he does not petition heaven "on behalf of the world" because his followers "do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world." "Righteous Father," he goes on to say, "the world does not know you."[90] This is a prayer in which Jesus prays on the occasion of the world but with a clear indifference to its determinations. The world—with its ignorance of the Father, rejection of the

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[90] John 17:9, 14, 16, 25, NRSV.

messiah, and capture of his disciples—offers so many contingent supports for the content of this prayer, but the prayer itself aims at something decidedly non-worldly: the renewed visibility of a prior glory "before the world existed" and, in language ripe for a Laruellean rereading, the hope that the disciples "may be one, as we are one."[91] Indifference to the world and the world's reduction to mere occasion or support—these have strong precedent from the very beginnings of Christian prayer.[92] On a Laruellean model, then, for prayer to be the salutary practice that it has the potential to be, it must countenance no intentionality toward the world. It must be a viewing of an a priori dimension that finds *occasion* in the world without being in any way constrained by or in response to it.

This reduction of the world—the barring of its efficacy and determinations—is one of the key upshots of thinking prayer as a kind of chamber. This, too, bears a pedigree with a certain heft: "Whenever you pray," says Jesus, "go into your room and shut the door."[93] Prayer constructs a chamber for itself. It has a beginning and an end, an opening and a closing. It often involves the shuttering of eyes, the fashioning of interiority through folded arms, the craning of spines braced in arcs of apathy against the world. Like a particle collider, prayer is a space for the collision and scattering of macroscopic fragments, the reconstruction of arrays that simply are not possible if the door remains open to the force of the world's determinacy. Prayer is the

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[91] John 17:5, 22, NRSV.

[92] The gospel of John is well-suited to a Laruellian reading in general, due to the connection between this gospel and Christian gnosticism, which is one of Laruelle's recurrent interests. Whether John is an outright gnostic text is a matter of considerable debate, but its theology has unquestionably shaped gnosticism through and through. It is likely for this reason that the gospel of John lends itself so well to articulating a Laruellean picture.

[93] Matt 6:6, NRSV.

careful partitioning of a chamber that brings into view things that are not visible under differently constructed experimental conditions. In this way, again, prayer is a fundamentally suspensive practice, à la Agamben. But it is what goes on *inside* such a chamber that most interests us for a Laruellean theory of prayer. To view prayer as suspensive is only to construct the chamber; Laruelle is much more invested in the constructive project that follows.

In Laruelle's quantum thought, the chamber is where one takes phenomena (cloned so as to render them microscopic and undulatory) and fires them at each other in order to track the effects of the real on these particular materials, thereby allowing the non-philosopher to reconstruct the state vector of the system as a whole. The chamber is a space that sustains undulatory behavior, a space designed to keep the macroscopic world at bay in order to allow the construction of something generic. Prayer is a fundamentally similar project. Though this will be unpacked only in the course of what follows, the general picture is this: in prayer, the disciple suspends the world, renders its objects and determinations undulatory (by reversing the potential-draining effects of their determination), entangles them with one another, collides them, and uses all this experimental data to reconstruct the state vector of their lived experience. Prayer is a space where objects and identities can retain their undulatory qualities long enough to run an experiment and construct the genericity born of vision-in-One. And, what's more, it is a space and project to which the disciple is entirely immanent—so immanent, in fact, that the chamber is constructed out of the posture of her very body, borne on the supports of her own flesh and lived experience.

Prayer renders objects and identities undulatory and then concatenates them as a way of performatively enacting their identity in-the-last-instance. It serves as a chamber where the illusory divisions imposed by philosophical determination are exposed to their real indivisibility. Prayer is not, then, just one more philosophical instance of a subject transcendently viewing objects, such as the events of the day in review or the interiority of the self. Prayer in fact refuses the subject/object dichotomy. Prayer is better understood as the wrestle of one's felt self-entanglement with the material of life. To pray is to feel the rigors of being right down in the mix of immanent things. It's to wrestle with one's desperation for a loved one's recovery, the urgency of keeping poor health and financial ruin at bay. Prayer is where I register all over again my delight at a friend's promotion, a plentiful harvest, the victory of my preferred political party. Or it is where I stand shoulder-to-shoulder in vigil for an unjust death on the margins, or press palm to palm in the yawning expanse of a chapel, swapping sweat and heartbeats with strangers. Prayer is a rigorous discipline because it is a wrestle, right down in the mix of one's own circumstances and yearnings and the objects and people by which one is surrounded. Even the posture of prayer bespeaks this immanent imbrication: flattening oneself against the earth in prostration, or walking through the hustle and bustle of city life, or entangling human flesh with beads, shawls, books, candles, pews. Prayer is similar in this way to photography, of which Laruelle states: "What is apparently the most objectivating art is in fact that one that best destroys objectivation, because it is the most realist." Prayer thus "knows nothing for itself … of the distinction … between a ground and a form" and, hence, "presents not some 'subject,' but its

Identity, with the aid or on the occasion of the 'subject'; and presents it without transforming what it is."[94]

Just as it refuses the split between subject and object, prayer also scrambles form and content. Take, for instance, the words "Our Father." To invoke this phrase is simultaneously to speak the *content* of the first line of the Lord's Prayer and, at the same time, it is to enact its *form.* "Our Father" is a title and genre as much as it is the prayer's substance. It is impossible to determine which part of this phrase represents the abstract overlay of a substantive speaking and which part functions as the verbal material being submitted to conceptual imposition. Given the strong performative dimension of the Lord's Prayer, form cannot be peeled apart from content. Or, again, take the example of the kind of posture one might assume in prayer: to kneel with eyes closed and arms folded is also to scramble any easy distinction of form and content. To an outside observer, the kneeling figure simply *is* praying, despite that observer having no access to the mental or emotional content purportedly accompanying the body's pious configuration. A prayerful posture—whether kneeling, or seated in the lotus position, or prostrate facing Mecca— simply *is* prayer, and if asked to locate which parts of the phenomenon are 'really' the prayer proper (that is, to ask which moment defines the prayer's content and which is simply a formal support *for* that content), an observer will struggle to detangle the two. A kneeling (or seated or prostrate) disciple inhabits a performative posture that is both a form in support of content and content in its own right, itself responsive to the forms prescribed for prayer.

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[94] Laruelle, *Concept of Non-Photography*, 22, 44, 50.

In this way, the chamber of prayer is significant not only for its suspension of the world but also for the way it allows the reconstruction of real identity. It is not enough just to isolate and underdetermine quantum particles, as if the point of a collider were simply to return undulatory behavior to macroscopic matter. The point is that, once suspended, these objects can then *do* something constructive: they become entangleable, available for indivisible imbrication with like phenomena. Prayer, too, does not simply suspend the world over and over; it also concatenates its newly-vectorial objects and entangles them, showcasing their real identity. In the same breath, a mortgage gets entangled with an uncle's cancer and a child's math test the next morning. A blessing on the food entangles Wednesday night's dinner with the neighbor's home repair and the diplomatic straits of the president of the United States. Anyone and anything mentioned in prayer—blessed, worried over, remembered—become the superposed vectors that make up the wave packet of the devotional lived.[95] The world is suspended in prayer, yes, but it would be a mistake to think that this is simply for the purpose of giving potentiality back to the world's objects. To do so would make the *objects* the primary stakeholders. Rather, once potential is returned to objects, they are now the kind of things that can be entangled in order to track the real. Prayer is an apparatus for turning everything in the world into types. It is a particle collider that allows otherwise determinate materials to become occasions for displaying the real. The point is not that bread become "daily bread" alone, as if the bread itself were primarily at

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[95] Adam Miller has something like this in view when he describes prayer as the practice of the ordinary. See Adam S. Miller, *Speculative Grace: Bruno Latour and Object-Oriented Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 151–2.

stake. The point, rather, is that once bread shows up as "daily bread," it becomes the kind of thing that can be superposed with debtors and the kingdom of heaven.

Even petitionary prayer, with its investment in particular outcomes, is often less about securing those outcomes and more about coming to terms with the vector of possibilities that surround a situation. It is a quasi-therapeutic practice of moving from some determinate occasion to a kind of acceptance, working through one's confinement in the world in order to assume a stance that simply lets-be the universe. Take, for instance, a prayer over the serious illness (say, cancer) of a loved one. First, the world is suspended. I assume a prayerful posture over the course of which cancer is slowly transformed into an occasion and loses its original status as the primary issue at stake. The successful assumption of this posture is signaled by that fact that what I pray over is, in fact, an array of possibilities. Even as I express anxiety for my loved one's cure, I cannot help but contemplate a variety of alternatives: an unavoidable and painful decline, the emotional roller coaster of a tenuous remission, irregular outcomes from chemotherapy, etc.—all coupled with the wish that so-and-so had not gotten cancer in the first place. Different outcomes, like Feynman paths, become visible as part of the lived situation of cancer. As soon as the chamber of prayer is opened, it is flooded with a variety of possibilities because potential is restored in the suspension of the world's sufficiency. In prayer, the situation is revealed as something more than a fixed actuality. Prayer generates other possibilities, constructing a wave function in which my loved one's illness is conjugated with the possibility of either their decline or their remission, the whole spectrum of possibilities in between, and my emotions about each. And, as the prayer proceeds, this wave function will likely extend to include a great many more

objects. Cancer can entangle itself with recent morbidity statistics heard on the news, a doctor's second opinion, the whole medical complex with its drug trials and radiologists and saline drips. My prayer has the capacity to include doctors, nurses, and other patients in the chemo ward. It can grow to include the funding for the hospital as a whole, the GoFundMe campaigns of acquaintances also struck with cancer, and can even cross time, recalling and entangling a friend's past-cancer with the future genetic likelihoods of similar disease striking my children. In all of this, of course, my emotions come powerfully to the fore; entangled with every other object and occasion is my desperation for things to be different, my own grief, the temptation to flee.

It is true that petitionary prayer takes as its occasion a desire for a particular, determinate outcome. Even so, prayer is rendered non-philosophical by the moment that often concludes such prayers: the sentiment, here expressed in its Christian idiom, "nevertheless thy will be done."[96] Many a prayer will consider the possibility of a loved one's cure from cancer and ask for that outcome, but then also immediately consider the possibility of no cure and ask to be made equal to that possibility as well, should it actualize. It is the letting-be of the universe exemplified in an expression like "thy will be done" that arrives at prayer's display of genericity. Rather than a cover-all-bases desperation or a stopgap against the possibility of God's inefficacy, even petitionary prayer is better understood as the unilateralizing and rendering-occasional of my own desperation for specific outcomes. It is not just the determinacy of a terminal disease that must be suspended but also the emotions that threaten to entangle the disciple in that determinacy.

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[96] Matt 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42.

Even in a prayer of extreme need and anxiety, the arc of devotion runs such that something like a loved one's terminal cancer can be rendered a simple occasion for the letting-be of the universe.

This is, in fact, the project of prayer described by D.Z. Phillips:

Let us consider [a situation in which] medical treatment has failed, and a child is dying. Religious parents pray, 'O God, let her live.' What does this amount to? The parents recognize that things can go either way; the child may live or it may die. Indeed, in this case, it looks as if the child will die. But they meet the possibility of things going either way in God. *They … seek something to sustain them which does not depend on the way things go* … The prayer of petition is [therefore] best understood, not as an attempt at influencing the way things go, but as an expression of … devotion to God through the ways things go.[97]

Phillips articulates the way that even petitionary prayer reaches for the real rather than aiming merely to manipulate the actual. In the example of the terminally ill child, prayer is a chamber in which the actualities of "the way things go" are viewed in-One. These actualities are superposed with other possibilities ("the possibility of things going either way") and the parents assume the prayerful stance of letting-be the whole ensemble. Rather than attempting to manipulate "the way things go," this prayer reaches for a generic stance that can be maintained *through* the way things go. Prayer, for Phillips, is an apparatus that "transforms … necessities into possibilities," precisely that which underdetermines the actual in order to contemplate it in-One.[98]

The simplest way to put all this in Laruellean terms is as follows: prayer is the clone. Prayer does not just construct a chamber where worldly phenomena *are* cloned; it is *itself* the equivalent of Laruelle's force-(of)-thought. The whole practice of closing a door, assuming a

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[97] D. Z. Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer* (New York: Routledge, 1965), 120–1.

[98] Ibid., 130.

posture, saying certain words, enacting certain gestures, and standing back up again—this practice in its entirety is the in-One suspension and display of worldly determinations and philosophical divisions. The force of prayer simply *is* to put the world back in its place. Hence, in addition to cloning subject and object or form and content in their real identity, prayer also extracts certain a prioris and puts them on display. Like non-philosophy more broadly, prayer can be thought as the task of isolating invariant DNA drawn from every macroscopic situation, however contingent. And what prayer uniquely puts on display is one's seduction by and entrapment in the world. Through their suspension, the confining tactics of worldly objects are clearly displayed. Hence the disciple wrestles with their desperation for specific outcomes in the lives of themselves and their loved ones. They see displayed their pettiest feelings or their temptations toward power and control. Prayer reveals to disciples how easily they are enmeshed in the determinacies of capital, secularity, or a whole range of personal attachments. By suspending the world and resituating its objects as occasions for the display of the real, prayer reveals the world as a kind of temptation and turns any discrete situation into a type for what the world does universally: entangle, capture, and determine.

In this way, prayer—as the in-One clone of worldly situations—engages in the unilateralizing work of putting the world back in its place. What's more, this emplacement goes on whether prayer is petitionary or not. In prayers of need or request the macroscopic temptation is clear: disciples risk being enmeshed in the determinate outcome they initially desire. Here, as in the D.Z. Phillips quote above, the task is to unilateralize these temptations and let them be emplaced by the real. But a good many—perhaps most—prayers are not driven by situations of

acute need. They are driven, rather, by the devotional obligation to pray always. And so, a week after some petitionary catalyst has been resolved and everything is fine once more, the disciple must nevertheless kneel yet again. Here, too, the task is the same. It is to assume a stance in-One, take up some occasion, and reencounter all over again the pull and sway of the world's determinacy. Prayer is the process of (first) putting on display, in any occasional material whatsoever, one's seduction by the world and (second) repositioning a stance according to the real. It is a habituation to the real, performatively enacted by the emplacement of the world, over and over again, through the in-One cloning of whatever worldly materials happen to be at hand. Prayer is confessional, then, in that it invariantly confesses the struggle of determination.

As a result, prayer is also the performative enactment of the world's real identity, the lived identity in-the-last-instance of all the things mentioned in the prayer—bread, humanitarian causes, medical bills, lost keys, sick children. Prayer performs the reality that my relationship to the meal in front of me is made of the same stuff as my relationship to my neighbors, that the anxieties that tangle me in financial worry are no different from any other anxieties that originate in macroscopic illusions. Prayer is the collider where particles of food, shelter, people, memories, wishes, failures, and disappointments all get tossed together, each a performative occasion for displaying its real identity with every other. This, in part, is why prayer tracks the realities of life so intimately: life *really is* this concatenation of objects and desires and events. Life is revealed as I superpose a blessing on dinner with a distant relative's surgery and tomorrow's high-stakes board meeting. Life is revealed when a congregation superposes bits of

liturgy with so-and-so's cancer diagnosis and well-wishes for a recent high school graduate. Aided by these underdetermined material supports, prayer reveals the flux of the lived.

Though a Laruellean frame and quantum lexicon for prayer are novel to my project, the model of prayer that it reveals is neither entirely unique nor merely aspirational. It finds expression in dozens of contemplative thinkers and regularly occurs in prayer, whether disciples recognize it or not. To illustrate this ubiquity and to give it a more traditionally theological register, I turn briefly to Simone Weil. Weil, too, describes prayer as an attentive posture that turns objects into contingent supports. Whether the object in question is a geometry problem, a church pew, or a Latin translation, she insists that the task is the same: "suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty, and ready to be penetrated by the object … Above all our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object that is to penetrate it."[99] Not only does Weil engage the register of suspension here, she also articulates an attunement to what Laruelle would call the real. As she explains in another essay: "We live in a world of unreality and dreams. To give up our imaginary position as the center, to renounce it, … means to awaken to what is real and eternal."[100] For Weil, the world is a place of illusion. The task of contemplative attention is to renounce one's worldly "position" and take up a posture adjusted to "what is real."

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[99] Simone Weil, "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God," in *Waiting for God* (trans. Emma Craufurd; New York: Harper Perennial, 2009), 62. The nuances of Weil's treatment of attention are beyond the scope of this chapter; for more on this topic, see Sharon Cameron, "The Practice of Attention: Simone Weil's Performance of Impersonality," *Critical Inquiry* 29 (2003): 216–52.

[100] Simone Weil, "Forms of the Implicit Love of God," in *Waiting for God*, 100.

This attunement characterizes Weil's thought more than anything else and its goal is strikingly similar to the discipline of a quantum physicist: to hold the particularities of thought or observation in reserve so as not to dissolve the suspensive terms of the experiment. To wait for God is, in this sense, the faithful discipline of not collapsing a wave function. Weil, like Laruelle, also describes this process as one of rendering worldly objects mere occasions for coming to accept the unavoidable necessity of the real. Hence school studies are rightly used not for personal enjoyment, performing well on exams, or obtaining certain credentials, but purely for "increasing the power of attention that will be available at the time of prayer."[101] Hence, too, the usefulness of beauty, religious ceremonies, friends, and neighbors. Each is the equivalent of an actualization of the larger wave packet of the love of God. The task is to move from these "implicit" forms to reconstruct the state vector of divine love.[102]

Perhaps most surprising, Weil even describes the result of this rigorous attention as an attunement to something undulatory: the "tearing apart [of Godself in crucifixion]," she writes, "echoes perpetually across the universe … The whole creation is nothing but its vibration."[103] The task of prayer, then, is to look for this vibration running through all of creation, most especially by seeing the real identity of seemingly disparate terms and objects: "Whoever has finished his apprenticeship recognizes things and events, everywhere and always, as vibrations of

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[101] Weil, "Reflections on the Right Use," 57.

[102] Thus, as Weil says, "[God's] love in all these forms has become … a ray merged in the light of God." Weil, "Forms of the Implicit Love of God," 138.

[103] Simone Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction," in *Waiting for God*, 72.

the same divine and infinitely sweet word."[104] It is in no way an opportunistic exaggeration to say that prayer, for Weil, is an attunement to an undulatory real, an attentive and suspensive stance assumed on the occasion of determinate objects, all in the name of constructing the state vector of their real identity. Even vectorial terminology finds its way into her contemplative register, for "love is a direction and not a state of the soul."[105] Weil, like Laruelle, thus provides this clarification: prayer is not where *disciples* suspend the world and return potential to objects; the world simply *is* suspended by virtue of its relationship with the real, and prayer is where the disciple assumes a stance in which that relationship is made visible.

What Weil sketches in a theological register is clarified with formal precision by Laruelle's non-philosophy. Prayer is a contemplative suspension, yes, but the suspension is not for its own sake; it is, rather, the necessary prerequisite for an attunement to what is real. This attunement is manifest in the cloning in-One of now-suspended objects, the display of one's temptation to worldly entrapment, and the revelation of the flux of the lived in all its identity. Where an Agambenian theory of prayer renders the world undulatory, a Laruellean theory of prayer goes one step further in rendering the world occasional. Agamben gives us the world's suspension, but Laruelle gives us the world's emplacement. And although Agambenian

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[104] Weil, "Love of God," 78.

[105] Ibid., 81. Unsurprisingly, given this undulatory and vectorial framework, Weil also famously speaks in probabilistic terms. Although affliction is experienced as necessity, it is deeply cut through by "the element of chance" (see Weil, "Love of God," 73). It is also worth noting that Weil, living contemporary to the beginnings of quantum physics, wrote frequently on quantum. She strongly disliked it, however, in part because quantum physics did not take up an adequately contemplative posture toward contradiction. See Simone Weil, *On Science, Necessity, and the Love of God: Essays* (New York: Oxford, 1968). See also Vance G. Morgan, *Weaving the World: Simone Weil on Science, Mathematics, and Love* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

suspension cordons off a certain chamber for prayer, it is Laruelle who clarifies what one does within it. If prayer is something like a particle collider, it is true that its blueprints can be located in Agamben. But it is Laruelle who shows us how to switch it on.

The Laruellean picture of prayer entails three general consequences that I wish to mention en route to a conclusion: first (and most briefly), a pragmatic upshot for the actual task of praying; second, a philosophical consequence for phenomenological approaches to prayer; and, third, a clarification of the previous chapter's engagement with Agamben. First, then: there is real pragmatic payout to a Laruellean model of prayer, but it is (appropriately) minimal. Non-philosophy encourages us to shift the burden of prayer from content to stance. In truth, prayer has begun as soon as a suspensive posture is assumed, and it has succeeded as long as that posture is maintained and the world held at bay. Prayer, thus, does not depend on any particular combination of words, affects, or thoughts in order to be successful. Indeed, the very notion of "success" is normative and teleological in ways that threaten to re-import the world. Particular words, affects, or thoughts are mere occasions for the more fundamental and more urgent work of assuming a stance in-One; they are the mere supports through which one continues to pray. The actual prayer itself, however, occurs in the stance. If the stance is held, the world recedes and the generic comes into view. It is that simple. Disciples can thus dispense with the normative anxieties that so often interrupt prayer. To ask 'am I doing this right?' is to cease praying, to collapse a wave function in favor of fussing over determinate particles. Normative meta-examinations of prayer are, in the moment, the equivalent of throwing open the collider to see if all the ions are in their assigned places. It is to grind the project to a halt. A Laruellean theory of

prayer thus urges disciples to rest easy, to focus only on maintaining a stance in-One. Are you on your knees (or prostrate, or seated, or walking at a meditative pace, or…)? Is the world at bay? Then you are praying. Hold the stance for as long as you can and see what comes into view.

Affording this minimality to prayer also has immediate consequences for prayer's philosophical treatment. The philosophy of prayer has been, to this point, based almost entirely in phenomenology—from classic treatments like Chrétien's "Wounded Word" or Marion's work on icons to the ever-rejuvenating engine of secondary literature on the topic.[106] Phenomenology, however, is just one more philosophical variant that gets thrown into the Laruellean crucible. For starters, phenomenological bracketing appears to him to render the subject transcendent, to objectify the world, and to reactively operate *on* the world rather than assume a stance of indifference toward it.[107] Every "in-itself" also feels suspiciously metaphysical, to Laruelle, insofar as it gestures toward something hidden behind appearances.[108] What's more, he accuses phenomenology of inverting the true relationship between man and the world: phenomenology asserts that man transcends toward the world (thereby retaining an obvious intentionality) whereas Laruelle insists that it is the world which transcendently encroaches on the immanent

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[106] See Jean-Louis Chrétien, "The Wounded Word: Phenomenology of Prayer," in *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate*, ed. Dominique Janicaud (trans. Bernard G. Prusak, Jeffrey L. Kosky and Thomas A. Carlson; New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 147–75; Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being* (trans. Thomas A. Carlson; Chicago, Il.: University of Chicago Press, 1991) and *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies* (trans. Thomas A. Carlson; New York: Fordham University Press, 2001); Bruce Ellis Benson and Norman Wirzba, eds., *The Phenomenology of Prayer* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005). For the classic treatment of the long history of entanglement between theology and phenomenology see, of course, Dominique Janicaud, *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate* (trans. Bernard G. Prusak; New York: Fordham University Press, 2000).

[107] Laruelle, *Biography*, 77–8, 139–40, 149.

[108] Laruelle, *Concept of Non-Photography*, 95.

reality of man.[109] In short, phenomenology remains a philosophically-positioned kind of thought,

for Laruelle, making it inadequate for thinking according to the real.[110]

Fuel for Laruelle's critique is well illustrated in the phenomenological literature on

prayer, though just one brief example will suffice for our purposes. Jean-Yves Lacoste's

Experience and the Absolute sketches a phenomenology of liturgy, claiming that prayerful forms

of ritual suspend being-in-the-world (at least symbolically, if not actually) and replace it with

"nonplaces" or "spaces where determinations enter into a new order of signification."[111]

Although this picture resonates in certain ways with Agamben and Laruelle—i.e., the suspension

of the world followed by potential for new determinations—it is problematic for both the totality

and transcendence that characterize its suspension. Lacoste's illustrative metaphors are

especially revealing. As evidence of the suspensive quality of liturgy, Lacoste points to Gregory

the Great's vision of St. Benedict in which Gregory sees the world "as a little ball lost in the

immensity of a sky."[112] He also makes reference to "icons or statues in which the infant Christ is

represented holding a globe in his hands."[113] In both cases, Lacoste provides as classic an image

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[109] Laruelle, *General Theory of Victims*, 24.

[110] Laruelle, *Introduction to Non-Marxism*, 45.

[111] Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man* (trans. Mark Raftery-Skehan; New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 33.

[112] Ibid., 23.

[113] Ibid., 25.

of transcendence as Laruelle could hope for: the abstraction of the viewer and the totalization of the world seen from a purportedly objective distance.[114]

Suspension via transcendence, however, is not true suspension from Laruelle's perspective; it is just the logic of the world reasserting itself. Rather than emplacing the world, then, Lacoste's thought betrays its inability to escape the world's frame. This is revealed when, in order to fund the usefulness of what is, in the end, only a halfway suspension, he turns to ethics. Ethics becomes the specific use value that he feels it necessary to assign to liturgy. Thus Lacoste explains that the "nighttime inoperativity of prayer" has its telos in the "daytime work of ethics," such that "ethical 'work' … [and] liturgical inoperativity … maintain a circular relation." Or, again: "Night follows day and heralds the dawn. But if … we consider it as a preparation for the day … we may perhaps see in it the strongest possible denial of moral fatalism."[115] Prayer is not, on Lacoste's account, either an Agambenian means without end or a Laruellean one-sided emplacement of the world; on the contrary, Lacoste understands prayer as intentional toward the world and for the sake of being an ethical actor within it. Liturgical suspension is one half of a dialectic between operativity and inoperativity, transcendent in both its suture to its opposing term and the way it steps beyond the world in order to render it total.

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[114] Also key, here, is the alterity that pertains between subject and world-object. Alterity is a key feature of phenomenologies of prayer and is, for Laruelle, another hallmark of transcendence. Examples of phenomenological alterity are everywhere in the literature on prayer. As representative examples, see the essays by Merold Westphal, Edward F. Mooney, B. Keith Putt, Christina M. Gschwandtner, and Mark Cauchi in Benson and Wirzba, *The Phenomenology of Prayer*. From Laruelle's perspective, alterity can only fund a transcendent take on prayer because it divvies prayer between subject and object, self and other—the traditional dualities of philosophy, in which each term is defined by and transcendent to the other.

[115] Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute*, 80, 94–6.

Lacoste's suspensive prayer, in other words, is ultimately just one more version of a
metalanguage, ramifying transcendently to eternity.

Laruelle's critique of phenomenology is thus directly applicable to phenomenologies of
prayer. Here, too, thought is dictated by division and transcendence, too captive to the logics of
philosophy to adequately describe a practice that is at odds with them. As Laruelle explains:
"Phenomenological 'bracketing' was already a softening of destruction, and even of doubt: it left
the World there … [Phenomenology] was too eager to negate [the World] *logically* after having
reduced it to an unavowable empiricity."[116] Where phenomenology inadvertently reifies the
world in its bracketing, non-philosophy (and non-philosophical practices of which, I argue,
prayer is one) is indifferent to the world. Phenomenology, then, cannot adequately think prayer
because it keeps the world as its frame when in fact the project of prayer is to reduce the world in
light of the real. Phenomenology is to Newtonian physics as Laruelle is to quantum, and it is
only in the latter that we find a method adequate to the immanent realities of prayer.[117]

The third consequence of a Laruellean model of prayer has, finally, to do with the
clarifications it offers vis-à-vis Agamben. These are threefold: clarifications on use, the
consequent positive project, and form-of-life or identity. Neither Laruelle nor Agamben, for

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[116] Laruelle, *Biography*, 77.

[117] Phenomenologists will no doubt balk at the critique leveled at them through Laruelle. Michel Henry, for instance, is often taken to be a phenomenologist seriously invested in immanence. It may be for precisely this reason that Henry, more than any other phenomenologist save perhaps Heidegger, comes so regularly under fire across Laruelle's writings (see *Introduction to Non-Marxism*, 43–5, 182; *Principles*, 60–62, 80, 89, 118, 190; *Christo-Fiction*, 166, 172, 229). In other words, if there seems here to be a too-sovereign characterization of all phenomenology as transcendent, it is because that is Laruelle's genuine stance. He acknowledges that phenomenology has attempted to think according to immanence, but he views all such attempts as dramatically insufficient and transcendent nonetheless.

starters, are interested in suspension for the sake of reactualizations on the other side. With

Laruelle, this indifference to world and actuality is quite clear. Agamben's discussion of "use,"

however, can give the opposite impression. His recurring example of play can lead to the sense

that, as Durantaye says, the point of suspension is to open objects "to whatever new usages lie at

hand."[118] Thus, when children play with a cardboard box, the suspension of its original utility for

shipping dishwashers can redound to the benefit of using the cardboard box differently—as a

spaceship or dollhouse. In an example such as this, it is easy to misinterpret Agamben's turn to

play as if the point were to return potentiality to an object for the sake of reactualizing that object

in different directions. Even when Agamben clarifies that the plaything he has in mind is less

some material object in the world and more the abstract "separations" imposed by sovereignty,

this conceptual play nonetheless sits alongside quotes like the following:

> Children, who play with whatever old thing falls into their hands, make toys out of things
> that also belong to the spheres of economics, war, law, and other activities that we are
> used to thinking of as serious. All of a sudden, a car, a firearm, or a legal contract
> becomes a toy.[119]

Agamben's concrete metaphors too easily give the impression that the goal of "use" is simply *re-*

use, an infinite series of different actualizations of potential.[120]

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[118] Leland de la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2009), 358. For play in Agamben, see Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (trans. Kevin Attell; Chicago, Il.: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 64; "In Praise of Profanation," in *Profanations* (trans. Jeff Fort; New York: Zone Books), 85–7; and "In Playland," in *Infancy and History: Essays on the Destruction of Experience* (trans. Liz Heron; New York: Verso, 1993), 65–87.

[119] Agamben, "In Praise of Profanation," 75–6, 87.

[120] It is this misunderstanding, by the way, that comes in rightly under critique by Jessica Whyte for being too easily coopted by the logic of capital. See Jessica Whyte, *Catastrophe and Redemption: The Political Thought of Giorgio Agamben*. Albany, New York: SUNY Press. 2013. Laruelle, though, reveals this as a misreading of what Agamben

Laruelle's clarity on this point is preferable to Agamben's lingering ambiguity. Laruelle is abundantly clear that suspension is not somehow undertaken for the sake of the world. One does not suspend philosophical decision, for instance, for the sake of somehow doing philosophy better or injecting new potential into old philosophical determinations. One suspends philosophical decision, rather, in order to trace the real *through* the now-inert philosophical materials. The same is ultimately true of Agamben, although it takes juxtaposition with Laruelle to throw it into sharpest relief. As Agamben writes in *The Time That Remains*, "the messianic vocation separates every [calling] from itself, engendering a tension within itself, *without ever providing it with some other identity*."[121] The messiah does not suspend identity in order to reactualize a series of new and different identities on the other side; the messianic is, rather, a name for the non-self-identical tension of every identity with itself. What Agamben finds in play, then, is likewise the display of the world's non-self-identity on the contingent occasion of some object. The point is to display that non-self-identity in a way that cannot resolve into sovereign (re)capture. Or, in the Benjaminian terms with which Agamben concludes the book, the point is the crystallization—indeed, the crystalliz*ability*—of history as a whole, not any particular constellation that flashes up. Agamben is after a gallery of typological images, not a multi-use cardboard box.

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is really after. Although his examples occasionally lead in this direction, it is my contention that Agamben is *not* advocating a series of different uses, as if a fuller use value were what ought to be restored to objects.

[121] Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (trans. Patricia Dailey; Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2005), 53, emphasis added.

Agamben's ambiguity on this point also has a flip side: if use is not aiming for a series of reactualizations, it can be hard to feel like Agamben has any concrete task at all. If not re-use, then what lies on the far side of suspension? Some of this ambiguity is beneficial in that it thwarts readers' knee-jerk demand for teloi and pragmatic payout. The fact that we crave a reason for suspension—some 'then what' moment, some productive reckoning—is, for Agamben, symptomatic of our role as cogs in a biopolitical machine. At the same time, however, there are real reasons to be dissatisfied with Agamben's account. Given the urgency of his critique and the deep ethical warrant lying behind the *Homo Sacer* project, mere suspension feels insufficient. Combined with the further ambiguities that lie around the status of the messiah, this felt insufficiency gives rise to the occasional critique of Agamben as quietistic.[122] One way of phrasing this worry is in terms of collective political resistance. As Nina Power frets, "Has contemporary philosophy become so withdrawn from organized struggle that it can only conceive of transformation in the attitude to work by recourse to minimal individuals?"[123] Top of mind, for Power, is the figure of Bartleby, one of Agamben's favorite images for impotentiality. Although Bartleby exemplifies suspension of activity and the liberation of potential from its actualization, he remains a lone individual (and a fictional, tragic one at that).[124] The lingering

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[122] Perhaps most famously, Žižek writes: "One can only wait for an outburst of 'divine violence'—a revolutionary version of Heidegger's 'only God can still save us' (a perspective embodied today by Giorgio Agamben …)." See Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (New York: Verso Books, 2008), 338. See also Nina Power, "Potentiality or Capacity?—Agamben's Missing Subjects," *Theory and Event* 13.1 (2010); Robert Sinnerbrink, "From *Machenschaft* to Biopolitics: A Genealogical Critique of Biopower," *Critical Horizons* 6 (2005), 257; Richard Bailey, "Up Against the Wall: Bare Life and Resistance in Australian Immigration Detention," *Law and Critique* 20.2 (2009), 116.

[123] Power, "Potentiality or Capacity?"

[124] For more on this tragic aspect, see the recent discussion of Bartleby in Byung-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society* (trans. Erik Butler; Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2015), 25–9. Han argues that the philosophical

question for readers of Agamben is whether we can organize resistance or whether he locates our best hope in the mold of one-off individuals.

Here again Laruelle provides a way forward. While sharing an ontology and critique very closely aligned to Agamben's, Laruelle nonetheless sketches a clearer possibility for organizing resistance to sovereign powers. Laruelle has a positive project on the far side of suspension. This difference is already featured by the two thinkers' respective methods: Agamben writes in a genealogical vein, concretizing his thought in case studies, while Laruelle outlines non-philosophy, book by book, as a concrete method for (a kind of) thought. As a result, Laruelle's suspension gives way to something one must *do*—namely, construct the generic on the basis of contingent materials. Where Agamben lands readers in the vague sense that we must simply suspend and re-use objects over and over, Laruelle lands readers in the project of non-philosophy: suspend philosophical determinations over and over, yes, but as types and clones, always en route to a display of the real.[125] Without a stronger project on the far side of suspension, Agamben does not seem to have a clear sense of what to do with the biopolitical machine. He hopes to grind its gears, but does not clearly articulate a way of dismantling it and tossing it on the trash heap. Readers are often left with the nervous impression that the machine

discussion around Bartleby has largely overlooked one key detail: he is depressed. Rather than representing the paradigmatic figure of impotentiality, it may be that Bartleby is, instead, the avatar of an acutely modern form of bare life, crushed into apathy by an oppressive system.

[125] It is worth noting that Agamben is not far off from articulating a similar project. Given his ontological nearness to Laruelle, his thought provides nearly all of the same conceptual resources. Indeed, he gets close to a Laruellean picture in his discussion of typology in *The Time That Remains*, where the point of use is to turn identities into types—that is, to show that the object, as a material occasion, is actually a type for messianic fulfillment. See *The Time That Remains*, 73–7. Agamben, however, does not take up these insights consistently across his work.

is simply stalled, waiting to be switched back on again, held at bay only by the form-of-life of its target (a kind of life which, on Agamben's account, is achieved only rarely if ever and only in a piecemeal fashion across history). Finishing a book by Laruelle, by contrast, one has a greater sense that the machine, in fact, stands dismantled in its relationship with the real. Laruelle does a better job articulating sovereignty's illusions, such that non-philosophers show up to capitalize on available pieces of scrap metal after the One has always-already done its work. Whether one agrees with each author's implicit descriptions of sovereignty's status, it is only with Laruelle that readers are given a clear sense of what they might actually *do* in the face of the world.

Finally, Laruelle also offers new clarity to Agamben's account of identity. In the previous chapter I argued that prayer resolves life into an indivisible whole, an indistinction of form and content akin to what Agamben calls form-of-life. Laruelle makes clear that prayer can accomplish this indifferentiation because, at bottom, this indistinction is what life really is. The real of life (what Laruelle calls "the lived") *is already* this immanent indivision. Its apparent division is only a post hoc illusion pedaled by philosophical transcendence. Prayer, as a stance where the real (as One) is put in priority, is a chamber which bars the world and allows this reality to come into view. Agambenian form-of-life is thus an indivisible whole in the same way that Laruellian force-(of)-thought is a thought in-One: both are the appearance of worldly materials in light of the (immanent and indivisible) real. What's more, Laruelle clarifies how a form-of-life can maintain a certain non-self-identity together with its indivisibility. Here, too, the clarification comes from his sharper articulation of the real. The real is One, yes, but it is undulatory rather than static, mobile and dynamic without for that reason ever transcendently

exiting itself. In this way, Laruelle clarifies one of the fundamental tensions at work in Agamben's form-of-life: it is both indivisible and non-self-identical in the same way that the real is both One and undulatory.

In this way, Laruelle highlights what Agamben sometimes leaves understated: form-of-life is not an indifferentiation of form and content *after* the fact. Immanent identity is already what is real. Form-of-life is the originary instance, so to speak, with any division of form from content only a subsequent transcendent accretion. Form-of-life is misapprehended if it is understood as a reaction to sovereign encroachments. It is, rather, a kind of life attuned to the priority of the lived. Here again superposition is illuminating. Form-of-life is akin to superposition in that, rather than indicating an advantageous transcendence beyond the world, it names a way of performatively fusing the lived materiality of one's current situation, whatever that may be. Form-of-life represents the reality of one's situation, just as a state vector represents the reality of a quantum system. The fact that we must retroactively construct forms-of-life and state vectors from determinate objects does not therefore mean that forms-of-life and state vectors are secondary responses to the world; it is simply a contingent accident of history. The temporal priority by which we first encounter objects in their macroscopic form belies the ontological priority with which the real determines the world in-the-last-instance. Form-of-life thus takes priority over sovereignty in the same way that the real takes priority over the world.

Laruelle and Agamben, in sum, share uncannily similar ontological pictures: both articulate a real which gives the world to be non-self-identical, a negative valuation of division and transcendence as logics of sovereign capture, a refusal of negation and dialectic in favor of

suspension, and the construction of the generic through the typological use of suspended materials. Thanks to this broad similarity, Laruelle can bring things into view in Agamben that are not readily apparent in Agamben's own terms: that use is not done for its own sake, that there exists instead a positive project on the far side of suspension, and that identity takes real priority over the world. What this clarifies about prayer, as a result, is that prayer, too, is neither performed merely to inject more potential into one's situation or to put a variety of objects and identities to a series of newly actualized uses, but nor it is a way of quietistically awaiting the global suspension afforded by some coming messiah. The stakes of prayer lie with the real, not with the world. The reason to resolve life into form-of-life, Laruelle clarifies, is because this resolution enables the positive project of constructing the genericity of the lived. It enables the display of the real's priority, and it does so prayer by prayer in the concrete materials gathered on one's knees.

Conclusion

Each chapter has found prayer to be closely related to the paradoxes of inclosure. This relation is unsurprising, as we saw in chapter one, in that prayer is a prime example of limit speech, a kind of language that attempts to speak its own ground. For Anselm and Pseudo-Dionysius, prayer is a liturgical resource for stabilizing the resultant non-coincidence, a kind of metalanguage that infinitely transcends logical and theo-logical insecurities because it transcends in the direction of an infinite God. Agamben, however, staked out a different relationship between prayer and non-self-identity. Chapter two thus presented non-coincidence as an unavoidable fact of inhabiting the world linguistically, with prayer (like all forms of life) representing a posture that scrambles

the usual nodes of sovereign capture and prevents non-self-identity from conscription for the divisive violence of biopolitics. Laruelle's theory, like Agamben's, would also position prayer as a comportment to an ontological fact and a kind of display in the fact of non-self-identity. Laruelle, however, allows us to make prayer one step more pragmatic by articulating a positive project in a way that Agamben obscures and clarifies that identity is not an after-the-fact response to unavoidable non-coincidence but, in fact, a real fundament that indifferently contests every worldly pretension.

On a Laruellean model, prayer is a particle collider in which underdetermined materials are entangled and rendered sites for tracing the effects of the real. Prayer has always been a chamber of a certain sort—it has an opening, a closing, and clearly specified procedures for how it is to be performed. My point is not to adjudicate which tradition's procedures are somehow normatively best, but instead to catalogue the real effects (that is, the effects [of the] real) that are displayed whenever prayer of any sort holds the world at bay. With prayer as a particle collider, the disciple's role is neither to sustain some particular kind of interior cognitive activity nor to execute some particular kind of dialogue with God. Cognitive activities and transcendent dialogues become themselves the contingent materials fired through the apparatus. The task of the disciple is simply to maintain the stance that prayer, at bottom, most fundamentally is: one of indifference toward the world, a stance that constructs in flesh the sheeting and fasteners for a quantum chamber. In this way, prayer reduces the world (and any particular material drawn from it) to a mere occasion, a necessary but contingent support for the work of prayer. Suspensively underdetermined, these materials become the kinds of objects that can be entangled with one

another, serving as sites of display for the real identity that they (like everything) always already are in-One. Suspension and use, in a Laruellean frame, are undertaken not for the sake of drenching objects in potential but because potential-soaked objects can be superposed to reveal the flux of the lived. If prayer can be said to serve any concrete purpose on a Laruellean model, it is simply to (1) display the disciple's constant seduction by the world and (2) habituate disciples to the real by performatively emplacing that world over and over again.

It nevertheless remains the case that prayer in an Agambenian and especially a Laruellean mold are abstract, heady articulations of what prayer amounts to. After two chapters formulating a theory of prayer as suspensive form-of-life and quantum chamber, it is time to bring this theory out of the ether and return to a more grounded articulation of Christian prayer. If one were to instruct disciples in this form of prayer, what would it look like? How are we to bring this theory back to earth, proving that it is, in some sense, already on its knees? By way of concluding this entire project, we turn in the next chapter to a reading of that most famous and most formally schematic of Christian prayers: the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION: THE LORD'S PRAYER

For all the sentimentality with which Christians are prone to read the Sermon on the Mount, it is

at times a surprisingly irrational text. Jesus counsels his followers to rejoice in poverty and

starvation (Luke 6:20–21; compare Matt 5:3–6), to refuse self-defense in the face of abuse (Matt

5:38–44), and to exhibit no concern for the physical necessities of life (Matt 6:25–33). Jesus

opposes the rich and the powerful, threatens the religious authority of Pharisees and Sadducees,

and critiques the affectations of contemporary Mosaic observance. The poor and hungry are

blessed as a challenge to a social order that prioritizes wealth and plenty, just as an ethic of

nonviolence defies the political order of empire that walks the streets of first-century Jerusalem

in Roman uniform. The irrationalism that brands the Sermon on the Mount is a symptom of a

broader confrontation between Jesus and the established political and social orders of the world.

Jesus's ministry was an announcement—both constative and performative—that the world was

out of order.

It is for this reason that John D. Caputo can summarize Jesus's messianic ministry as

follows:

> The event that takes place under the name of the kingdom of God is an anarchic field of
> reversals and displacements … like a field of forces that have been scrambled under the
> influence of some electronic disturbance or interference. In the kingdom, weak forces
> play themselves out in paradoxical effects that confound the powers that be, displaying
> [an] unsettling shock delivered to the reigning order … The opposite of a sacred anarchy

is the profane order that the New Testament calls the "world."[1]

Caputo's characterization of messianity bears much in common with the thinkers discussed in this dissertation. Talk of "reversals," "displacements," and a "scrambled" field of forces brings Agamben to mind, while language of "interference," "weak forces," and "paradoxical effects" trends in the direction of Laruelle. All three together side with the apocalyptic work of a messiah who brings an end to "the profane order" called "the world."

The Sermon on the Mount represents Jesus's announcement of and first foray into a messianic contest against the world. What is interesting for our purposes is the centrality of prayer to that contest. Here, in a jointly Agambenian and Laruellean reading of the Lord's Prayer, we try out the legs of the theology put forward in the preceding chapters, seeing what light it might shed on Jesus's prayer in Matthew 6. I begin (à la Agamben) by looking to this prayer's relationship with the temporality of the imminent kingdom of God. Then (à la Laruelle) I examine the Lord's Prayer in the context of the decidedly linear, non-reciprocal logics of Matthew 5–6 and argue that the prayer's treatment of debt provides the a prioris that prayer, like non-philosophy, draws out of the world. Through these two thinkers and across these five verses, the Lord's Prayer is shown to be paradigmatic not only of subsequent Christian devotions but of the very theology forwarded in this dissertation.

The Lord's Prayer sits almost dead center in the Sermon on the Mount, with fifty-six verses preceding and forty-eight verses following. Whatever readers are meant to understand this

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[1] John D. Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2006), 14, 17.

text to be doing, prayer lies at its heart. What lies at its beginning, however, determines how we read its center. Though readers have come to regard this text as a "sermon," this is a somewhat misleading categorization, domesticating the text's potential through an anachronistic genre that connotes drowsy boredom in Protestant pews. Jesus's hillside teaching is, rather, an announcement. The declaration begins with his opening words, which concern "the kingdom of heaven" and the startling identity of those set to inherit it (Matt 5:3–11). The "Sermon" on the Mount is less a Sunday discourse in a grassy outdoor chapel and instead the topographical elevation of a messianic revelation that God's kingdom is on its way. Preceded as it is by centuries of biblical prophecy, this announcement invokes a certain time as much as it does a place or a people. The Markan backdrop for Matthew 5:3 makes this temporal significance explicit: "the time [*kairos*] is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15).

The difficulty, of course, is that Jesus makes this announcement when the kingdom has manifestly *not* arrived in its entirety.[2] Jesus is only at the beginning of his ministry and much of the realities he announces (blessedness to the poor, food to the hungry, liberation to the captive, etc.) require physical enactment. God's kingdom, as announced in Matthew 5, is both already *and* not-yet. In this way, the kingdom occupies the same disjointed temporality that draws Agamben's attention in *The Time That Remains*. Writing, in fact, about the very Greek term that

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[2] Hence the subtlety of Matthew's kingdom pronouncement as compared to Mark's. John Nolland explains: "The proclamation is that the kingdom of heaven *has drawn near*. For the Markan source one can make a good case for understanding this as implying the present inauguration of the kingdom: Jesus announces the arrival of the kingdom of God. In Matthew this seems much less likely … At the very least we are to understand that God has now acted to set in process advance arrangements for the coming of the kingdom … Things were now on the move in relation to God's rule … New possibilities were now present precisely because the kingdom of heaven had drawn near." See John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC 1; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 176.

informs the Matthean announcement by way of Mark, Agamben explains that "*kairos* … does not have another time at its disposal." It is "only a small portion of *chronos*, a time remaining," such that there is a "paradoxical tension between an *already* and a *not yet* that defines the … concept of salvation."[3] The kingdom is here—right at hand, you can reach out and grab it!—and yet the world remains manifestly as it ever was. Thus: "the messianic event has already happened, salvation has already been achieved … but, nevertheless, in order to be truly fulfilled, this implies an additional time."[4] The temporality of the kingdom, then, is not a straightforward remainder of *chronos* but chronology's being-out-of-joint. The temporality of the kingdom is time's failure to be self-identical. The Sermon on the Mount is in no small degree a description of the consequences of this temporal disjunction. When the messiah arrives, determinate identities see unexpected outcomes (Matt 5:3–6, 11), old laws are suspended and put to new use (Matt 5:21–39), clothing and sustenance arrive freely without the compulsive operativity born of economic anxiety (Matt 5:25–32), and salvation finds those who least expect it (Matt 7:21–23). In the time that remains, disciples turn the other cheek and walk uncompelled second miles and take no thought for the morrow. The sermon is a three-chapter-long posture that Jesus entrains on disciples as their comportment to the disjointed time of the messianic. And the beating heart of that sermon, of course, is a prayer.

The Lord's Prayer takes up residence in the temporal non-coincidence that attends the messiah's arrival. If prayer is, indeed, a way of dwelling in operational time, it makes sense that

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[3] Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (trans. Patricia Dailey; Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2005), 69.

[4] Ibid.

prayer is part of what Jesus commends to his followers in the very moment of announcing time's non-self-identity. Those stakes even leave their mark in the prayer itself, which petitions heaven for "daily" bread, thus furnishing with temporal import something as basic as a day laborer's subsistence. Prayer is the constant messianization of lived temporality such that even bread becomes characterized by the 'days' that attend the messiah.[5] But the recasting of bread as "daily bread" hints at more than just the messianic time of prayer; it also illustrates prayer's role as an apparatus of suspension and use. Bread, as we have mentioned before, here ceases to be the object of one's purchasing power or the result of one's culinary labor; it is recast, instead, as a gift from heaven whose novelty is signaled by its "daily" receipt rather than routinely predicted by a series of determinative causes such as handing over coins, sifting flour, heating an oven. In prayer, bread becomes as-not bread—still bread, to be sure, but not "bread" as it is usually defined and as it usually signifies. Prayer reveals bread's non-self-identity, its refusal to be totalized or locked down into a single determinate identity in an already-defined social order. In prayer, bread displays its potential, its daily giftedness, and the possibility that it may always be given on different terms.

This suspension of identity continues throughout the prayer, revising the vocations ascribed to human persons as well. Creditors become as-not creditors, the identity of "lender" hollowed out by the entanglement of one's lending with one's indebtedness to God (Matt 6:12). In a similar way, earth becomes as-not earth, uncomfortably occupied as it is by heavenly

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[5] I am aware, of course, of the standard exegetical interpretation of ἐπιούσιον ("daily") as referring to the contingency of a day laborer's evening meal. I simply mean to note that the messianic temporality invoked by Jesus adds an additional kairotic element to the adjective.

trimmings like God's "kingdom" or a divine "will" (Matt 6:10). In the Lord's Prayer, as in

prayer more broadly, identities are destabilized, tensed against themselves to reveal their non-

self-identity, and this non-self-identity then leveraged to glimpse the new uses to which various

vocations might be put. Creditors and even the earth become as-not what they are, repurposed in

surprising directions. Prayer is an apparatus of suspension and use, a devotional engine for the

same messianic operations that run through the entire sermon in which the poor and the outcast

become as-not, instead figured as heirs of God's inbreaking reign.

The stakes of this prayer, however, reside not just with particular identities but with life

as a whole. The Lord's Prayer generates a certain kind of existence alongside and inseparable

from the schematization of that existence. Despite its prestigious reception history the Lord's

Prayer is stubbornly immanent, almost banal. Life—normal, everyday life—is clearly at issue in

this prayer, taking center stage in the form of concerns over one's daily meal, economic

wellbeing, and basic petitions to avoid undue hardship (Matt 6:11–13).[6] Life is centrally at issue,

then, in the Lord's Prayer, but it is also generalized into a schematic *of* the very life it describes.

Life is formalized in this prayer as involving three basic gestures: (1) its ground (earth as defined

in relationship to heaven), (2) its operation (the economic give-and-take of immanent material

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[6] Here I am at odds with many biblical scholars who argue that the Lord's Prayer should be understood as entirely eschatological, such that "daily bread" refers to a messianic banquet, "forgive our debts" requests acquittal at the final judgment, and "deliver us from evil" petitions relief from apocalyptic trial. See, for instance, Raymond E. Brown, "The Pater Noster as an Eschatological Prayer," *Theological Studies* 22.2 (1961): 175–208; Dale C. Allison, *Matthew: A Shorter Commentary* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 90–96. I side, however, with Ulrich Luz on this score: there is a clear eschatological hope in view in the first half of the prayer, yes, but there exists no compelling terminological reason to constrain the interpretive possibilities of the prayer's second half. The descriptions of bread, indebtedness, and trial are intentionally general, intended to accommodate immanent, day-to-day realities in the several forms with which disciples might be confronted. See Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Continental Commentary* (trans. Wilhelm C. Linss; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1989), 384. See also Douglas R.A. Hard, *Matthew* (Interpretation; Louisville, Kent.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 68.

life), and (3) the guiding principle that most fundamentally organizes organic life (avoid pain). The structure of life, according to the Lord's Prayer, is composed of standing in a certain relationship with heaven, consuming and being consumed, and circumventing hardship wherever possible. In this way, the prayer schematizes human life even as it takes up these petitionary gestures as its central content. It puts life in relation to its own contracted outline. Life is both content and form, the two rendered disintricable, knit together in prayer.

The kind of life generated in and formalized by the Lord's Prayer—that is, the form-of-life to which it gives rise—is then illustrated by the behaviors and vignettes forwarded in the rest of the sermon. This is a life in which Mosaic law is fulfilled, suspended, and put to new uses in light of the messianic kingdom, such that law is now a thing to be played with by a backwater Galilean rabbi. Social identities are reversed, such that the poor and hungry become as-not poor and hungry, and Judean disciples become as-not what Rome ascribes them to be. Vocations are put to new uses, as well. Conscripted walkers become as-not conscripted, *using* their consignment to walk two miles rather than one (Matt 5:41). This is a life in which almsgiving is repurposed for something other than public glory (Matt 6:2–4), lilies become avatars of monarchical apparel (Matt 6:28–29), and coats and cloaks cease to be the stuff of legal retaliation (Matt 5:40). The final form of this sermon, with the Lord's Prayer situated at its center, might thus be more than mere redactional accident. If prayer in general can be considered an apparatus which, iteratively repeated, generates a certain kind of life—resolving the locked-down determinacies of sovereign power into a(n in)consistency befitting the messianic—the Lord's Prayer is just such an apparatus for Jesus's early disciples.

If the vignettes that frame the Lord's Prayer are thus united by a shared investment in the as-not structure that follows from messianic temporality, they are also display another shared characteristic: their dogged unilaterality. Jesus's teachings in Matthew 5–6 are organized around the refusal of reciprocal logics whether in the face of provocation (e.g., when hit across the cheek) or in situations of public worship. Rather than returning blow for blow or receiving acclaim for one's piety, Jesus counsels a linear rather than reciprocal comportment. Indeed, it is not in any way an exaggeration to say that unilateral determination is *the* ethical tenor of the Sermon on the Mount. Take, for instance, the text's famous tit-for-tat about eyes and teeth (Matt 5:38–39). Citing a verse from Leviticus, Jesus introduces the specter of reciprocal justice: an eye damaged or a tooth lost can justify taking another's eye or tooth in turn. But Jesus immediately prohibits this specular aggression and replaces it with a different imperative: if someone hits you across the face, you are to expose the other side for the attacker to do it again. Although we might wonder about the advisability of this course of action under first century conditions of empire, or about the ethical and pastoral dangers of this text's potential misinterpretation as counselling submission to physical abuse, Jesus's point seems to be neither passivity nor conscientious submission. Based on what follows, Jesus seems instead to intervene against the broader category of reciprocation. Where verse 38 describes an economy of vengeance, in which eyes and teeth are exchanged one-for-one on the market of retribution, verse 39 replaces this circular reciprocation with the unilaterality of cheek-turning.

Jesus seems, in other words, to recommend an exchange of retaliatory circles for nonreactive vectors. This grows clearer as the passage proceeds. When disciples are taken to

court, they are advised to concede to their accuser's momentum: rather than reacting, they are to offer their cloak (Matt 5:40). And if a disciple is compelled by a Roman soldier to carry a burden for a mile, rather than sniping sarcastically or merely turning around once their obligatory mile is up, Jesus counsels his followers to carry the initial momentum for a full second mile (Matt 5:41). To be a disciple, it seems, is to cut through reactivity by extending—and thus neutralizing—the very vectors that initially expressed sovereign violence. Rather than getting caught up in the compulsory retributive logics of the social world at large, Jesus's followers are to trade every circle of violent reciprocation for a linear vector whose extension suspends the sovereignty of its initial expression. A similar logic attends the three scenarios of hypocrisy that follow. Those labeled "hypocrites" are those who aspire to the renown of piety; disciples, by contrast, are not to engage their worship in a system of specular exchange, trading good deeds on a market of glory. Just as they don't return violence or for violence or injustice for injustice, they also don't perform devotion for the sake of public reward.

In short: nearly every verse between Matthew 5:38 and Matthew 6:18—the very stretch that frames the Lord's Prayer—advises against reciprocal ways of being. They forego circles of reaction in favor of scrupulously unilateral vectors. After the last chapter, this should put us immediately in mind of Laruelle, for whom reciprocity and specularity are the chief tactics of philosophy, and whose primary recommendation for non-philosophy is its ability to offer an alternative. My aim, however, is not to recuperate a traditional Christian ethics under the sign of Laruelle. Jesus's counsel is, of course, mired in worldly determinations and social realities. Rather than using Laruelle to endorse Matthew 5–6, then, I wish to use Matthew 5–6 to point us

to Laruelle. A messiah who insurrects against the social and political orders of the world and interrupts specular behavior is a messiah in allegiance with Laruelle's own interests and aims. Set against the broader context of the sermon, it becomes clear that the Lord's Prayer models— and, indeed, is meant to generate—exactly the kind of unidirectional non-reactivity endorsed by the sermon as a whole.

For instance, by opening with an acknowledgement of a "Father … in heaven," the Lord's Prayer insists that all worship is both preceded and determined by an order that lies beyond the world. And though the text no doubt intends this heaven to be understood as transcendent and its God as sovereign, it is possible to demythologize its first century Judaean worldview (as well as the intervening centuries' Christian worldviews), reducing it to the scale of non-philosophy. If "Father" is taken to be a first name rather than a metaphysical instance— taken, that is, as an axiomatic name for the real—the ontology of the Lord's Prayer is flattened and brought into Laruellean focus.[7] Disciples are oriented, then, not by some 'beyond' but by the real/One.[8] The text of the prayer itself encourages understanding "Father" as a name in this way; its very first request has to do with the name's proper use (Matt 6:9). Disciples, like non-philosophers, concern themselves with first names and the effects that follow from them.

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[7] "First name" reflects Laruelle's language in *Principles*; see François Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy* (trans. Nicola Rubczak and Anthony Paul Smith; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 17–18, 57, 69, 84, 102–3, 196, 215–17, 221, 225, 277. "First name" refers to the initial term posited in an axiomatic. To axiomatize requires some first term that will then be operated upon according to certain rules of transformation. The "first name," then, is simply posited as part of the axiomatic. It has no translatability, no referent outside of the system.

[8] Indeed, replacing the Father with the One is a move easily countenanced in Christian theology. Although we mean something entirely distinct by "One," it is enough to slip past censors which, in a way, is all we're really after.

Once a name has been axiomatically employed (rather than dialectically or circularly derived), the unilateral effects of the prayer come into view and set the tone for the prayer's next two requests. In the first, "thy kingdom come" (Matt 6:10), Jesus asks that God's kingdom extend in a single direction from heaven to earth with no reciprocal motion in the other direction. The prayer does not ask, for instance, that God's kingdom come *down* to earth so that disciples might return *up* to heaven at the end of the age. Nor does it request that the kingdom *come* so that disciples might *go* to it. The kingdom extends its influence to earth in only one direction. This is expressed further in the second request: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6:10). The real order that determines prayer—here named "heaven" but, on our reading, a name for the One—determines earth along a one-way course. The Lord's Prayer habituates disciples to the unilateral effects that proceed from a non-worldly order and that do so in one direction only. In prayer, disciples practice being nonreactive in their engagements with others and non-hypocritical in their worship because they allow the world to be fully determined by heaven, letting heaven's influence bear on the world in one and only one direction.

The result of this unidirectional flow of heaven to earth (read: One to world), Jesus says, is that worldly objects begin to show up differently. Once a different sort of vision pertains in prayer, bread becomes "daily bread," a symbol for the necessities of life and their real identity in one and only One source. Gilded in the light of heaven, reciprocal logics come undone and economic cycles of exchange no longer determine disciples' relationship to objects. Bread no longer appears as an object that returns to me based on the money I paid for it, nor as a reward for my own hard work. Objects are no longer determined by their economic conditions, their

origin in yesterday's labor of last month's savings. This non-reciprocal approach extends not

only to loaves of bread but also to persons. In Matthew 6:12 Jesus prays "Forgive us our debts,

as we forgive our debtors." Here too the flow of action proceeds in only one direction. Disciples

ask God to forgive their debts only to pass on that forgiveness by absolving the debts of others.

Though we might conjure counterfactual possibilities (e.g., 'Forgive us our debts and help us not

go into debt in the future,' or 'Bless others to forgive our offenses, just as we forgive them

theirs') these are not the requests that characterize Christian prayer. Instead, disciples find their

debts suspended and simply pass it on. Much like the conscripted walker who goes the second

mile, changing compulsion into generosity simply by following the momentum of a Roman

soldier's instigating vector, disciples perpetuate a vector of suspension that was first extended to

them by some other order.

In this way, Jesus explains how to exit the logic of the hypocrites who seek public returns

on their investments of piety. Escaping the world's specular entrapment, Jesus implies, is a

matter of suspending indebtedness because, in such suspension, we step beyond the entire

structure of reciprocation per se. As Adam Miller explains:

> Forgiveness … is not the cancellation of a specific transaction within the kingdom of
> economy but the cancellation in sum of that old kingdom … [Turning the other cheek] is
> designed precisely to contradict a causal economy in which every blow is bound to be
> repaid and where for every eye lost one is certain to be taken. The hoary weight of such a
> retributive temporality is crippling almost before the first blow has been landed … Only
> an oblique move that evades reciprocity, that leaves empty a place in the expected line of
> episodes, can allow for the nearness of grace.[9]

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[9] Adam S. Miller, *Badiou, Marion and St Paul: Immanent Grace* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 3.

Indeed, it is possible to read the prayer's concluding plea for deliverance ("deliver us from evil," Matt 6:13) as a request for, as Miller says, "the cancellation in sum of that old kingdom," a deliverance from the world's reciprocal order as a whole. In the Lord's Prayer, the binaries and scissions that make the world go round are systematically unilateralized, emplaced along a one-way vector proceeding from something that is other than and indifferent to the world.

This vectorializing effect, furthermore, comes into view only within a certain chamber. The Lord's Prayer is preceded by direct instruction to "go into your closet" and "shut the door" (Matt 6:6). Prayer begins with an enclosed space, definitively barred from the normal run of daily life and there proceeds to construct the generic shape of worldly seduction. It brings into view a series of basic (though now-inert) temptations: the temptation to relate to bread through its economic determinants rather than as the multiform, potential-laden gift of every day. Or, more general still, verse 13 recognizes the world in general as a situation of trial or "temptation" (πειρασμός) from which humankind needs deliverance. Put side by side with the first name in verse 9, verse 13's final note of deliverance frames the entire passage in the basic dualyzing structure of non-philosophical prayer: the real being what it is, we stand to be delivered from worldly determination.

Of course, if the Lord's Prayer is to qualify as a non-philosophical chamber, it too must render visible the four a prioris in all their particularity—and, rather strikingly, it does. The a prioris appear in their unilateralized form in the discussion of debt and forgiveness.[10]

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[10] This portion of the prayer is privileged by the text in that forgiveness is the only topic of the prayer that is singled out for additional elaboration after the fact (Matt 6:14–15). If there is one segment of the Lord's Prayer that subsequent verses identify as centrally important, it is verse 12.

Forgiveness is the unilateralizing gesture that suspends their effectivity and puts them on display, but the structure of their original operation remains visible. Position and Autoposition are together found in the identification of "our debtors" (Matt 6:12) in that economic logic *posits* someone as a debtor, creating an Other whose interest accrues to the speaker as owning subject. Autoposition then reciprocally defines the speaker as subject in relation to that posited object, becoming the one to whom, as lender, the debt is intended. Between these two positions, then, the divided situation is prepared: a self and an other defined in reciprocal relationship. Decision then begins to operate on the parameters of this divided relationship. Contracts are drawn up, coins are counted, checks signed, and the world is carved into lenders, debtors, and the array of material supports that substantiate these identities. All of this is then subsumed under the summative Unity that is the economy as a whole. Economic logic demands that the world be carved up in a bifurcated way—between those who owe and those who are owed, those who produce and those who consume—but this split is assumed to be overcome in the form of the situation's supposedly inherent oneness.

It is this economic logic that is unilateralized by forgiveness. In the light of heaven, everyone is rendered identically a debtor ("forgive us our debts," Matt 6:12) but without a coordinating creditor.[11] And forgiveness, rather than naming an absolution of debt according to a reactive/reciprocal logic, instead names the rendering-inert of these a prioris, the one-way unilaterality that cancels their operation and lets them remain only as mere types. The purported sovereignty of the creditor is revealed to be illusory, his duality with the debtor shown to be a

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[11] Because, remember, we treat "Father" and "heaven" as first names, demythologized of their metaphysical content.

ruse perpetrated in the name of social hierarchy. All relationships are flattened, the same

unilateralizing principle applied equally to all things: everyone is forgiven and God's

relationship to us is revealed to be no different from our relationship to our debtors. In fact, no

relation per se remains, because the economic terms of relationality are suspended. Debt now

becomes an inert material: inert because the debt has been cancelled, and material because it

displays unilaterality under the sign of forgiveness.

The prayer then concludes here (since the doxology included in some versions is a later

addition), landing us exactly where we might have expected to land following an axiomatic of

the real: "deliverance" (ῥῦσαι) from the entrapments of worldly determination (Matt 6:13). The

Lord's Prayer thus proves itself a species of suspension, a chamber of generic visibility for

tracing the consequences of the One, and a practice of insurrection against the sovereign

pretensions that attempt to dominate and domesticate the lived. It acknowledges another order

that entails the impotence of social and ethical norms, occasioning a chain of one-way

determination that hobbles reciprocal logics. And it distills life into its own schematic at the

same moment that life remains unchanged, simply serving now as a type for the real identity of

the lived. The Lord's Prayer, in sum, demonstrates the viability of Agamben and Laruelle for a

theology of prayer.

The Lord's Prayer, then, is not a crowning devotional pragmatic that expresses the logic

of the rest of the sermon. The arrow runs in the opposite direction: prayer is, I argue, the

generative engine for the unilateral behaviors endorsed by a messiah. The suspension of

identities, their as-not inconsistency, dwelling in messianic temporality in a way that resists the

world, a habituation to nonreactivity—all this is pragmatically generated by prayer, the Lord's Prayer no exception. If, as I contended in the introduction, prayer is available to such a wide variety of theological or religious uses, it is because it is mistakenly viewed as lacking theoretical or ontological stakes of its own. Yet here, at the end of this project, we find an additional explanation: prayer is available to a wide variety of traditions and theologies because *anything* in the world can serve as an occasion for taking up the in-One stance of prayer. Prayer is the rendering-occasional of any and all things as a habituation to the real. And if it does not take a determinate shape, even at the end of this project, it is only because prayer's theoretical stakes lie with contesting determination per se.

Determination, as we saw in chapter one, is a function of delimitation. Beings are defined as much by conceptual and linguistic limits as they are by bounded extension in time and space. These more abstract limits, however, court paradox at their extremities, and no paradox so occupied early Christian theologians like their own (in)ability to speak to and about God. We formalized these limits through Graham Priest's inclosure schema, showing how it maps onto the prayerful logics of Anselm and Pseudo-Dionysius, both of whom court inclosure dilemmas and both of whom respond with prayer. For Anselm and Dionysius, prayer is a way of stabilizing theological speech, a performative petitioning of transcendence for rescue from the paradox of their own constative gestures. Prayer serves these writers as a metalanguage, a liturgical "outside" from which each author could stably survey the metaphysical instabilities of his project. Of course, as Priest illustrates, metalanguages do not ultimately resolve the dilemma; they merely displace it. For my purposes, then, Anselm and Pseudo-Dionysius serve not to

endorse transcendent theologies of prayer but instead to articulate the structure of non-self-identity as prayer's *condition*. Both authors stumble on the unavoidable truth that language and being(s) cannot speak their own ground, and both forward prayer as the appropriate comportment to that truth. Anselm and Dionysius thus provide us with the juncture of prayerful speech and ontological non-coincidence. The question, going forward, is whether it might be possible to update that convergence according to a metaphysical materialism rather than a traditionally dualist ontology.

Influenced by Agamben and Laruelle, I answer yes. Relying on Agamben's interest in Christianity and his commitment to the non-self-identity of being, chapter two constructed an Agamben-inspired theology of prayer. Prayer remains, on this model, a comportment to ontological non-coincidence, but not as a transcendent stabilizer. Rather, prayer is a way of dwelling in non-self-identity that uses the resultant potential to display life and being as what they are. The result is a theology of prayer as the operational time that introduces the messianic into the disciple's temporal experience and an apparatus that fuses form and content in a way that thwarts sovereign control. Prayer, on its Agambenian face, is the constant messianization of linear time and the generative engine of a life rendered impervious to the divisive operations of sovereignty.

The nature of this imperviousness came in for Laruellean clarification in chapter three. Form-of-life is resistant to sovereign encroachment because it hews closer to the immanent identity of the real. It is equivalent to what Laruelle calls force-(of)-thought, the cloned identity that enacts the real's indifference on the basis of concrete worldly materials. Having thus offered

a kind of ontological clarification to Agamben's genealogical picture, Laruelle also provided

practical upshots for a theology of prayer. Using Laruelle's own formalist analogue for non-

philosophy, chapter three described prayer as a quantum chamber in which the effects of the real

can be made visible due to the suspension of worldly determinations and their obfuscating

transcendence. Prayer is akin to a chamber that renders phenomena undulatory and superposable,

allowing disciples to construct the state vector of their lived situation. It is a practice of

habituation to the real and an iterative recognition and rendering-inert of the a prioris that

threaten to enmesh disciples in the perilous logics of a macroscopic and sovereign world.

As this dissertation project draws to its close, therefore, it is now possible to rearticulate

its central goal: to situate prayer on the ontological terrain of an immanent materialism. The

defining feature of such materialism is the constitutive non-coincidence of being, the way in

which everything that exists is displaced ever so slightly from itself. I have placed prayer on that

terrain as a double-facing challenge—a challenge, first, to traditionally dualist Christian

ontologies and to those who argue that the continuation of devotional theology as a discipline

demands a commitment to transcendence. I hope to have shown that it emphatically does not.

This project also challenges, second, the naïve secularist objection that nothing remains for

prayer without various transcendences (the existence of God, a metaphysical beyond, self-

scanning and the objectification of a pious interiority, etc.) to buoy it. On the contrary, prayer

may in fact have the potential to be the most immanent devotional practice of all. What's more,

situating prayer on the terrain of non-coincidence even turns out to be a fairly modest proposal

since (as chapter one demonstrated) non-coincidence has been the site of Christian prayer since

very early in its theological tradition. Chapters two and three have simply asked what might happen if we put traditional Christian theologies and practices of non-self-identity in conversation with contemporary materialist thinkers of that same structure. Far from canceling prayer entirely, this project reveals that prayer has in fact been up to something more materially substantive all along. Excising transcendence from one's religious ontology does not drain prayer of its lifeblood; it simply reveals stakes that, due to metaphysical bloat, had been obscured.

This, as I understand it, is the task of theology in a postsecular age. I agree with Adam Kotsko when he writes that "if we want to break from the futile quest for a 'true' secularism, … reference to theology cannot remain purely diagnostic and critical. We must take the next step into creative, constructive, and speculative theological work."[12] Secularism has been proven to be just one more elaborately constructed biopolitical economy, rife with sovereign violence. Is there still room, then, for theology? For devotion? Can we make room for an immanent materialist Christianity? I answer—again, artless theologian though I am—yes. And it starts not from the top down (for how, indeed, could it? There is no transcendent 'top' to begin with) but from the bottom up. This is why prayer, above all other devotional practices, has occupied my attention here. To pray is to inhabit minority not in submission to transcendence but in indifference to it. Prayer, far from being a flight into mythological fantasies, is the practice of form-of-life and vision-in-One. Prayer turns every mythos into an occasion, renders every

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[12] Adam Kotsko, *What is Theology? Christian Thought and Contemporary Life* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021), 22.

religious particularity the material support for a stance, forms lived material into its own generic type, and all this for the sake of rendering life in its undulatory reality—whether (à la Agamben) reimbued with potential or (à la Laruelle) reincorporated as just one actualization in a wave packet of real possibility. To pray in the way modeled by Jesus is to suspend every sovereign gesture, every illusory transcendence that threatens to stamp out the potential that accrues to the non-self-identity of the lived. To pray is to construct a chamber where that lived can proliferate in light of the real that it is and to ensure that nothing of the world leaks back through the closet door. Due to the non-self-identity of everything that is, an insurrection is always brewing against transcendence. Invariably, this insurrection begins from the ground up. It starts, so to speak, on its knees.

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VITA

Kimberly Matheson hails from Kennewick, Washington. Before attending Loyola University Chicago, she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Ancient Near East Studies from Brigham Young University (2011) and a Master of Theological Studies in Philosophy of Religion from Harvard Divinity School (2017). While at Loyola, she was a recipient of the five-year Edward M. Crown Fellowship in the Humanities.

Kimberly currently works as a Research Fellow at the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship at Brigham Young University where her research centers on the continental philosophy of religion. She also sits on the board of the Latter-day Saint Theology Seminar. She lives in Provo, Utah, with her husband and ten-year-old twins.