Sergei Prozorov

Like a Thief in the Night: Agamben, Hobbes and the Messianic Transvaluation of Security

Introduction

Contemporary security studies increasingly focus on the connections between the problematic of security and political theology (see Dillon 2016; Stevens 2015; Troy 2013; Hell 2009; more generally Esposito 2015).[1] This interest is not merely antiquarian, insofar as we understand secularization not as the abandonment of theological notions but their transfer to new domains that leaves their logic intact (Agamben 2007: 77). From this perspective, the inquiry into the theological origins of the principles, rationalities and apparatuses of security will also enable more effective critical interventions that problematize and transform the existing apparatuses of security. In this article we shall address the implications of the ongoing 'messianic turn' in political thought for our rethinking and revaluation of security.

This turn, associated with the work of Jacques Derrida (1994) and Giorgio Agamben (2005) as well as the revival of interest in the thought of Walter Benjamin (1968, 1978), is usually understood in terms of affirmation and anticipation of radical novelty, the advent of the (wholly) Other and the suspension of the existing order of things. At first glance, this form of thinking is distant from the

_____

[1]

problematic of security and its canonical formulations in political philosophy. Nonetheless, we shall demonstrate that the affirmation of the messianic is at the heart of what is probably the most influential text of the modern problematic of security – Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* ([1651] (1985)). Drawing on Agamben's recent reinterpretation of Hobbes in *Stasis* (2015), we shall attempt to restore the messianic dimension to the discourse on security. We shall argue that in the messianic approach security does not figure as an unquestionable good or as a necessary (or even unnecessary) evil but rather as the problematic aspiration, whose failure itself brings about the messianic event in an oblique manner, 'like a thief in the night'. Rather than denounce or renounce security, the messianic approach retains it as a demand at the same time as it maintains the impossibility of its fulfilment. The state's claim to provide security thus becomes the effective means of its undoing.

Our objective in this article is not to endorse or reject these claims but demonstrate the logic, consistency and originality of Agamben's messianic transvaluation of security. In particular, we shall focus on the way this approach goes beyond the opposition between the *katechontic* valorization of security and the *accelerationist* affirmation of insecurity. While in contemporary discussions security either continues to be affirmed as desirable despite the possible failures of the existing apparatuses or is problematized as itself the source of insecurity, the messianic discourse affirms and demands security precisely because it knows its attainment by the existing apparatuses to be impossible. What messianic politics thereby seeks is only security *from* the existing apparatuses that are undermined by the demands they could not possibly fulfil. This affirmation of 'security from security' reorients security studies towards at once a greater appreciation of security as a desirable

2

good and the dissociation of this good from the structures and institutions that have derived their legitimacy from claiming to provide it.

In the first section we shall introduce Agamben's reading of Hobbes's *Leviathan* from the messianic perspective. While Hobbes's Commonwealth has been traditionally read as a secularized version of the *katechon*, a force that restrains the anomie and violence of the state of nature while drawing on its resources (cf. Schmitt 2003; Rasch 2007; Dillon 2015), in *Stasis* Agamben argues that the Leviathan was never presented by Hobbes as the katechon restraining the Antichrist and thereby delaying the Kingdom of God. In his reading, the Hobbesian state is neither the analogue of God's Kingdom on earth nor the katechon that delays its arrival, but simply what must be removed for the latter to be possible. Rather than read Hobbes's theory in the familiar terms of the exchange of liberty for security, Agamben insists that the Hobbesian Commonwealth ensures no such tradeoff and the Leviathan and Behemoth, *nomos* and *anomie*, remain entwined to the point of indistinction in every secular order. Insofar as it is not and cannot be the Kingdom of God, the security state is forever resigned to the insecurity of stasis.

In the second section we shall elaborate Agamben's argument in the context of contemporary transformations in the governmental rationalities of security that increasingly shirk the katechontic function, problematize the costs and inefficiency of security apparatuses, and seek to devolve both the costs and provision of security to the subjects themselves through privatization, responsibilization and the ethics of resilience. The privatization, devolution or abolition of many of the security functions of the state do not entail its withering away but rather its maintenance as a strictly managerial force devoid of any eschatological dimension, even in the negative mode of the

katechon. In this context of insecurity without end, Agamben's reading of Hobbes as a messianic thinker affirming the finitude of Leviathan is particularly timely as it makes it possible to understand how insecurity is neither the contingent effect of the state nor its necessary feature but the condition of its undoing.

In the third section we elaborate this claim in a discussion of Agamben's juxtaposition of Hobbes with Walter Benjamin. For Benjamin, profane apparatuses of security actually assist the coming of the messianic precisely 'by being profane', by perpetually failing to attain the security that they claim to provide. The messianic discourse on security neither affirms a true or better security nor comes to terms with insecurity. Instead, it undermines the existing apparatuses of security by demanding what they could not possibly deliver. Agamben relies on Paul's claim in the First letter to the Thessalonians about the coming of inescapable destruction in the midst of apparent 'peace and security' to discredit every claim of constituted authority to fulfil its self-appointed mission. This exposure of the necessary indistinction between Leviathan and Behemoth in the messianic logic thus affirms nothing but security *from* the security apparatuses themselves, promising relief from the danger to which we are resigned in the name of security. In the conclusion we shall address the relation of this demand for the impossible to the advent of the messianic kingdom and discuss the possible nature of this kingdom itself.

Leviathan and the Kingdom of God

Agamben's reading of Hobbes in *Stasis* goes beyond his earlier treatment of Hobbes in *Homo Sacer* (1998: 15-29) and *The Time that Remains* (2005b: 109-110). In these earlier works he interpreted Hobbes's political thought as the epitome of the *katechontic* logic in its secularized form. The katechon, an obscure figure from Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians (2 Thessalonians 2: 6-7), is a force that withholds both the advent of the Antichrist and the Second Coming that will succeed it (see Agamben 2017; Hell 2009; Prozorov 2012). There are continuing debates in theology about both the authorship of the Second Letter and the meaning of the concept of the katechon in it, especially as the term does not occur anywhere else in the Scripture (see Best 1972; Jones 2005). From Tertullian onwards the katechon has been identified with the Roman Empire, a worldly power that delays the end of days and secures public order. For Carl Schmitt, who brought the concept of the katechon into late-modern political-philosophical discourse in his *Nomos of the Earth* (2003), the idea of the katechon endowed Christianity with a historical dimension, serving as the 'only bridge between the notion of an eschatological paralysis of all human events and a tremendous historical monolith like that of the Christian empire of the German kings' (Schmitt 2003: 60; see also Hooker 2009: 49-54; de Wilde 2013; Hell 2009).

In Agamben's *Time that Remains*, Hobbes's *Leviathan* was presented as the paradigm of the katechontic logic that has since the Holy Roman Empire been replicated in every theory of the state, 'which thinks of it as a power destined to block or delay catastrophe' (Agamben 2005b: 110). Nonetheless, in *Stasis* Agamben offers a startling reinterpretation of *Leviathan* in anti-katechontic, eschatological terms, eventually bringing him into alignment, if not an outright alliance, with Walter Benjamin, the key thinker in the contemporary revival of messianic thought:

> For Benjamin, too, the kingdom of God makes sense only as the *eschaton* and not as an historical element. And for Benjamin, too, the sphere of profane politics is wholly

autonomous with respect to it. Nonetheless, neither for Benjamin nor for Hobbes, does profane politics have, with respect to the Kingdom, any 'katechontic' function: far from holding back its advent, it is, to the contrary, Benjamin writes, 'a category of its most unobtrusive approach'. (Agamben 2015: 53)

Let us reconstitute Agamben's line of argumentation. In the second part of his essay on Hobbes in *Stasis* he poses the question of why Hobbes entitled his book *Leviathan* – a question that in Agamben's view no one has yet answered in a satisfactory manner. It is indeed somewhat counter-intuitive to call the Commonwealth by the name of the monster with distinctly demonic connotations that Hobbes could not possibly have been unaware of. While Schmitt infamously read the choice of the name as a product of the 'fine sense of English humour' (Schmitt 2008: 94), Agamben takes the choice of the biblical figure of Leviathan and its association with the Antichrist entirely seriously. In the Talmudic tradition, Leviathan and Behemoth are primordial beasts that will fight each other on the messianic day and both die in the struggle, to be eventually eaten by the righteous on the messianic banquet - the fable Agamben addressed in an earlier book *The Open* (see Agamben 2004). In the Christian tradition, the Leviathan is strongly associated with the Antichrist, the *anomos* or 'the lawless one' referred in the passage on the katechon in the Second Letter to the Thessalonians. Agamben demonstrates this proximity with reference to the image in *Liber Floridus*, an encyclopedic compilation from 1120, assembled by Lambert of St Omer, in which the Antichrist seated on the Leviathan carries a striking resemblance to the image of the sovereign from Hobbes's famous frontispiece. 'The Antichrist, with a royal crown on his head, holds a lance in his right hand (just as Hobbes's Leviathan holds a sword), while the left hand performs the gesture of benediction (which corresponds in some way as a symbol of spiritual power to the crosier of the frontispiece).

His feet touch the spine of the Leviathan, represented as a long-tailed dragon partially submerged in water. The inscription above stresses the eschatological significance of both the Antichrist and the monster: *Antichristus sedens super Leviathanum serpentum diabolum signantem, bestiam crudelem, in fine*.' (Agamben 2015: 43)

The discovery of this striking resemblance provides a point of departure for Agamben's re-interpretation of Hobbes's own text in eschatological terms, focusing on the less often discussed third part of the book, 'On the Christian Commonwealth', which has tended to 'embarrass' modern readers who have devoted surprisingly little commentary to it (Agamben 2015: 46). Rather than view the Kingdom of God metaphorically as the condition proper to the afterlife, Hobbes asserts that this Kingdom is a real entity that Christ will restore at the end of time: 'I find the Kingdome of God to signifie in most place of Scripture a Kingdome properly so named, constituted by the Votes of the People of Israel in peculiar manner; wherein the chose God for their King by Covenant made with him, upon Gods promising them the possession of the land of Canaan.' (Hobbes [1651] (1985): 442). It is a real kingdom, in which God reigned not merely over all beings but also commanded, in a literal sense, such 'peculiar subjects' as Adam, Noah and his family, Abraham, Moses and others, with whom he spoke and made covenants. It is this real kingdom with God as its real king that will be restored after the Second Coming and it will be restored here on Earth and not in heaven (ibid.: 480-484).

> And when our Saviour Christ by the preaching of his ministers, shall have perswaded the Jews to return, and called the Gentiles to his obedience, then shall there be a new Kingdome of Heaven, because out King shall then be God, whose *throne* is in heaven;

without any necessity evident in the Scripture, that man shall ascend to his happiness any higher than God's footstool the Earth. (Ibid.: 482. Emphasis original.)

The analyses of the civil Commonwealth in the preceding chapters of *Leviathan* are therefore *only valid until the second coming of Christ*, after which a different kind of kingdom takes hold, for all eternity. The two kingdoms are perfectly autonomous and only coordinated from the eschatological perspective: 'both take place on earth and the Leviathan will necessarily disappear when the Kingdom of God is realized politically in the world.' (Agamben 2015: 48). The kingdom of the 'world to come' is not 'of this world', but this only means that this world and its kingdoms will have to disappear for the 'new Earth' to take their place: 'This is that World, wherein Christ, coming down from Heaven, in the clouds, with great power and glory, shall send his Angels, and shall gather together his elect, from the four winds, and from the uttermost parts of the Earth, and thence forth reign over them (under his Father) Everlastingly.' (Hobbes [1651] (1985): 495, see also ibid.: 514-515)

Thus, Agamben challenges Schmitt's (2008) reading of Hobbes from the katechontic perspective and corrects his own earlier association of Hobbes's theory with the secularization of the katechontic logic: 'in Hobbes's 'Christian Politiques' the State cannot in any way have the function of a power that restrains and holds back the end of time, and indeed is never presented in this perspective; on the contrary, as in the scriptural tradition that Hobbes perhaps ironically reclaims against a Church which seems to have forgotten it, the end of time can take place at any instant and the State not only does not act as a katechon, but in fact coincides with the very eschatological beast which must be annihilated at the end of time.' (Agamben 2015: 52. See also Agamben 2017: 15) Rather than

secularize the notion of the katechon, Hobbes performs the opposite gesture of articulating the Leviathan and the Kingdom of God in an eschatological relation: 'the first will necessarily have to disappear when the second one is realized.' (Ibid.: 52)

From this perspective, the paradoxes of Hobbes's discourse on the commonwealth that Agamben earlier identified in *Homo Sacer* become far more comprehensible. The impossibility to fully separate the state of nature from the civil state of the commonwealth, whereby the former survives in the latter in the form of the state of exception (1998: 35-36, 105), only testifies to the transitory and ultimately unsuccessful character of the commonwealth as the project of attaining unity and peace, tranquility and security. Until the Kingdom of the God at the end of time 'no real unity, no political body is actually possible: the body political can only dissolve itself into the multitude and the Leviathan can only live together up until the end with Behemoth – with the possibility of civil war.' (Agamben 2015: 49) The anomie of the state of nature is never transcended with the institution of the Commonwealth: in fact, the 'natural' state is itself nothing other than the projection into the past of the real condition of civil war that defined the state in Hobbes's present and continues to do so in many states today. Rather than restrain the *anomos* that precedes the advent of the Kingdom of God, the state in this interpretation *is* the *anomos*, whose sovereign power never succeeds in overcoming war, violence and disorder but persists in producing them in the very guise of the acts of protection for which it demands obedience (Agamben 2005b: 111). The centrality of the anomic state of exception to any state, however normal, stable or law-governed, which Agamben asserted in his earlier works, is in *Stasis* restored back to the foundational text of the modern theory of sovereignty. Everything that the katechontic tradition sought and even pretended to find in the state, i.e. order, security, stability, happiness, is only possible in the

Kingdom that will *succeed* it. The Leviathan will never defeat Behemoth – until the last day the two are locked in a battle, in which they are destined to die and be consumed at the messianic banquet. This is why the state is resigned to *stasis*, which, contrary to the katechontic logic, does not serve to restrain an even greater evil, but rather forms the necessary backdrop of any attempt to attain peace and security.

'While People are Saying 'Peace and Security'…'

Agamben's reinterpretation is an important intervention not only in Hobbes scholarship but in the political theory of security more generally, insofar as it displaces the very terms in which political theology has been addressed in critical discourses on security thus far. Even though the notion of the katechon is rarely discussed explicitly in the context of security studies (for exceptions see Dillon 2016; Hell 2009; Rasch 2007), the katechontic logic has long been the object of critical discussion even when not mentioned by name. In this discourse the state's claim to provide security, prevent anomie and chaos and pacify the polity inevitably ends up producing more violence and insecurity, because the state can only withhold anomie by appropriating and deploying it against itself. Moreover, as critical security studies, and especially feminist and postcolonial approaches have emphasized, the state's policies advanced in the name of security have consistently undermined the security of the most vulnerable populations (be they women, minorities, children or the poor), exposing them to the destruction of vital infrastructures and ways of life if not outright violence (see e.g. Hudson 2005; Stern and Öjendal 2010). The politics of security will therefore necessarily rely on insecurity as its instrument and produce insecurity as its effect. In the more political realist versions of such critique, this paradox of (in)security is ineradicable and is something we must come to terms

with as (one more) aspect of the tragedy of the human condition (cf. Paipais 2016, chapter 5). In this more traditionally 'Hobbesian' reading, relative safety attained at a certain cost to our liberty is the best we can hope for in this world, in which true salvation is unattainable (see Rasch 2007). In the more progressive or radical versions, the necessary entanglement of security and insecurity serves as sufficient reason to problematize the desire for security as such, dismissing 'securitization' as a strategy for removing an issue from the domain of democratic politics into a grey zone of unaccountable decisionism (cf. Neocleous 2011; Neocleous and Rigakos 2011). The Hobbesian social contract is thus dismissed as a bad deal, in which the sovereign keeps accumulating its power and using force, resigning us to insecurity in the name of the very promise of security that led to its institution (cf. Neocleous 2008). While both of these readings are based on the katechontic reading of Hobbes, albeit evaluating it differently, Agamben's reinterpretation permits us to go beyond the dualism between the valorization and the renunciation of security that it has inspired.

The eschatological reading of the relation between the Commonwealth and the Kingdom of God resonates with the at first glance anti-Hobbesian messianism of Walter Benjamin, for whom the Kingdom of God was, famously, not the goal of history but its *end* (Benjamin 1978: 312). The Kingdom can never be brought about or delayed by any historical actor or action, but will only manifest itself in the termination of the historical process altogether. And yet, for Benjamin the historical or the profane is not completely unrelated to the coming of the Kingdom, but is rather the category of its 'quietest approach' (ibid.). While Benjamin's text is notoriously elliptic, Agamben's reinterpretation of Hobbes actually helps understand this point. 'The Leviathan-state, which must ensure the 'safety' and 'contentments of life' of its subjects, is also what precipitates the end of time.' (Agamben 2015: 53) It does so precisely by repeatedly *failing* to ensure the security that

should render it legitimate. It is precisely the understanding of this failure as necessary and inescapable that underlies the messianic disposition. At the very end of *Stasis* Agamben makes an allusion to Paul's famous claim in the First Letter to the Thessalonians, the consideration of which will help us understand the messianic approach to security: 'For you are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "Peace and security," destruction will come upon them suddenly, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers, are not in the darkness so that this day should overtake you like a thief....' (1 Thessalonians 5:3, cited in Agamben 2015: 53)

While this passage has been interpreted in many ways throughout history, an all but literal reading would be most helpful for our purposes. While the authorship of the Second Letter remains disputed, there is an evident connection between the passage on the katechon in the Second Letter and the claim about the Second Coming in the First. While the katechon holds back the Second Coming, its claim to provide peace and security remains a false promise and the divine judgment will arrive unpredictably yet inescapably. Only the members of the messianic community are not 'in the darkness': they know that the claim of Leviathan to provide security is worthless, that the katechon is null and the state remains pregnant with the destruction that it vainly seeks to contain. It matters little whether this destruction is something that comes upon the state from the outside or something the state itself unleashes in response to a perceived, imagined or fabricated threat. What matters is simply that the katechontic claim is not credible: no worldly apparatus of security could possibly produce what it promises. This is why the self-appointed katechon ought to be 'removed' as Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2 (see Agamben 2005b: 111) - at the very least, removed from our own considerations so we do not remain in the darkness and have a clear awareness of

what is possible. And yet, if the katechon is void, how can it also 'precipitate' the end of time? If the state has no delaying or restraining force whatsoever, does it perhaps possess the opposite force of *accelerating* what the katechon must delay and thereby helping bring about that which must succeed it?

In Schmitt's thought, the katechon and the accelerator are diametrically opposed figures: whereas the katechon makes history possible to begin with by delaying the Second Coming and establishing durable structures of political order, the accelerator speeds it up towards its inevitable end, destabilizing and dissolving these structures in the process, sometimes even against its own will (cf. Schmitt 1995; 2003: 59-60). While the Schmittian concept of the accelerator is rarely addressed in the non-specialist literature (see Hell 2009; Hooker 2009: 49; Dillon 2015: 214-17) the same cannot be said about the logic of acceleration more generally, which is central to contemporary debates in critical social and political theory (Noys 2010, 2014). Anti-capitalist accelerationism follows canonical Marxism in the belief that capitalism will collapse under the weight of its own contradictions and affirms a politics that would accelerate this process, exacerbating the contradictions in question and thereby hastening the collapse of capitalist order. The belief in accelerating the collapse of the social order through the exacerbation of its own contradictions also characterizes contemporary European anarchism, e.g. the writings of Tiqqun (2010) or the Invisible Committee (2009), both strongly influenced by Agamben's thought: 'In reality, the decomposition of all social forms is a blessing.' (The Invisible Committee: 42) Yet, the accelerationist disposition need not be restricted to the revolutionary or anarchist Left. In their own ways, both Nietzsche and Heidegger affirmed the full traversal of modern nihilism as the sole condition for its overcoming in accordance with Hölderlin's famous line from *Patmos*, 'Where danger grows, grows also saving

power' (see Nietzsche 1968; Heidegger 1991). In a more explicitly political-theological discourse, Jacob Taubes contrasted his own disposition to Schmitt's katechontic ethos by explicitly invoking the acceleration of the apocalypse: 'I can imagine, as an apocalyptic: let it go down. I have no spiritual investment in the world as it is.' (Taubes 2004: 103) The accelerationist disposition is thus an important part of the Western ontopolitical tradition that has served as an explicit or implicit antagonist of the arguably more dominant katechontic disposition. What is common to different strands of accelerationism is their impatience with the katechon and its politics of restraint, which keeps at bay the danger that accelerationism views as pregnant with possibility.

While katechontic and accelerationist logics appear mutually exclusive, contemporary tendencies in security governance worldwide rather point to their paradoxical indistinction or even mutual destitution (see de Larrinaga and Doucet 2010; Kinnvall and Svensson 2014; Nadesan 2010). The universalization of economic rationality that underlies neoliberal governmentality makes everything, including security, a scarce good that cannot be guaranteed for everyone at any cost. On the contrary, it is precisely the cost of security that becomes problematized in this logic of governance, which, to become more cost-effective, increasingly prescribes devolution and privatization of security provision both domestically and internationally, the 'responsibilization' of individuals and communities with the assurance of their own security, the proliferation of private insurance schemes in security policies, etc. (Aradau and van Munster 2007; Leander and van Munster 2007; Dillon 2007; Rose 2001; Cruikshank 1999). In all these policies the state functions paradoxically as katechon and accelerator *at once*, which does not bode well for either of the functions (Hooker 2009: 56-7). While the confluence of the two logics in historical policies or persons has been recognized by Schmitt himself, in his account it always marked a tragic moment when the

efforts of a state to avert disaster only ended up exacerbating it. This is why in his 1942 discussion of the Nazi 'spatial revolution' Schmitt speaks of the USA, which failed to act as the successor to the British Empire and thereby appropriate its katechontic function, as the 'accelerator against its will' (*Beschleuniger wider Willen*), leading the international order to its unravelling (Schmitt 1995: 436; see also Hell 2009: 305). Thus, while the confluence of katechon and accelerator is not entirely unprecedented (see also Dillon 2016: 214-217), the precedents in question are quite ominous.

While continuing to be obsessed with security as a scarce good, the neoliberal state no longer posits its own function in the katechontic terms of restraint or delay. Instead, it simply seeks to manage things as they are, *with no end in sight* in both senses of the word, there being no ultimate goal of government and no recognition of its finitude. Insofar as it posits efficiency as its highest and conditional value, in terms of which security apparatuses may be problematized, it also participates in the accelerationist paradigm, yet the acceleration in question does not pertain to the attainment of any end but solely to the speed at which the apparatuses of security are running, even if they happen to be running on empty. If the katechon ventures to maintain order at any cost, the neoliberal state first inquires into what the costs actually are, how they can be minimized or transferred onto the client to be secured. The neoliberal state may therefore be termed a *post-security state*, not because it relinquishes the katechontic function, but rather because in its concern with its own efficiency it loses sight of the effects it was meant to produce. In the post-security state, the katechon who does not delay any end joins forces with the accelerator who does not have any end in view. Critical studies of neoliberalism that emphasize its 'zombie-like' status as 'dead but still dominant', repeatedly surviving every proclamation of its demise albeit in an ever more dysfunctional state (Peck 2010; Smith 2008), illuminate a highly important feature of neoliberal

government - its drivenness with no direction and hence no possible end, only a perpetual imperative for acceleration.

This indistinction of katechon and accelerator has resulted in a certain relativization of the very value of security: as the neoliberal emphasis on responsibilization, flexibility and resilience testifies, too much security, e.g. in the spheres of finance, employment or welfare, may actually be a bad thing (Chandler 2012; Aradau 2014; Walker and Cooper 2011). The model of agency that this governmental rationality affirms does not presuppose a quasi-Hobbesian subject who trades (part of) its liberty for security and then proceeds about its business enjoying its new-found security. The responsible and resilient subject must instead *make its security its business*: come to terms with a perpetual presence of insecurity, invest in insuring oneself against it, learn to bounce back after suffering from it, etc. In this manner, the apparatuses of the Leviathan have not only learned to coexist with Behemoth, but also succeeded in making this coexistence the basis of a veritable 'ethics' of eternal insecurity.

In his theological genealogy of government in *The Kingdom and the Glory* (2011), Agamben addressed this occlusion of the eschatological dimension in modern government with the help of a striking example from Christian theology that resonates with the contemporary discussions of 'zombie neoliberalism'. The divine government of the world in Christianity has always been structurally limited in time, lasting from the creation to the end of the world. After the Last Judgment, the providential machine of government with its billions of angels comes to a halt and all that remains for them to do is sing the praises of God. The secularization of this governmental paradigm in modernity ventured to forget or efface this eschatological dimension through the

katechontic strategy of prolonging history indefinitely, but it kept on reappearing in various versions of the 'end of history' thesis, in which eschatology reasserted itself (Kojève 1969; Fukuyama 1992). There is only one true exception to this principle of the finitude of the governmental order in Christian theology and that is *hell*, where, according to Thomas Aquinas, '[the] demons will carry out their judicial function as executors of the infernal punishments for all eternity. Hell is that place in which the divine government of the world survives for all eternity, even if only in a penitentiary form. This means that from the perspective of Christian theology, the idea of eternal government (which is the paradigm of modern politics) is truly infernal.' (Agamben 2011: 164) In a later text, *The Church and the Kingdom*, this closure of the eschaton is traced back to the Church itself, which 'can be a living institution only on the condition that it maintains an immediate relation to its end. There is only one legal institution that knows neither interruption nor end: hell. Will the Church finally grasp the historical occasion and grasp its messianic vocation? If it does not, the risk is clear enough: it will be swept away by the disaster menacing every government and every institution on earth.' (Agamben 2012: 41)

For Agamben, contemporary politics fully confirms Paul's diagnosis in the First Letter to the Thessalonians. The post-security state, in which the functions of the katechon and the accelerator have become indistinct in the ceaseless optimization of its operations without a view to any end, leaves no one in the dark about the potentiality for destruction in the midst of the ostensible 'peace and security'. 'Contrary to Schmitt's thesis, the katechon – whether it is identified with the Church or with the State – can neither inspire nor defer in any way the historical action of the Christians.' (Agamben 2017: 15) Contemporary apparatuses of security are running on empty, at best efficiently

producing nothing and at worst turning being into nothing with no less efficiency. Yet, how can this infernal machine actually precipitate the 'quietest approach' of the messianic kingdom?

Without Care

What would it actually mean for the Church or any other institution to grasp the messianic vocation? Evidently, it is not a matter of the return to the katechontic function, whereby the Church, the state or any other structure of authority would assume the task of preventing or delaying the 'disaster' in question. In the messianic perspective, little would be gained from a return from a 'post-security' discourse of risk, responsibilization and resilience to some 'proper security'. The significance of Agamben's reinterpretation of Hobbes in the messianic key consists precisely in demonstrating that the katechontic promise was void already *in* and *for* Hobbes. The contemporary developments in the governance of security that downgrade, diminish or devolve the katechontic function only make this void character painfully clear. And yet, if the katechontic claim to hold back the disaster is no longer credible, should we then welcome the disaster in question with open arms and even hasten it as the condition of possibility of our emancipation? Such an extreme version of the accelerationist position would locate the problem in our very desire for security, on which the state feeds on to justify its existence and then proceeds to convert into the production of insecurity, all in the name of the aversion of the greater catastrophe. Thus, wars are fought in the name of our presumably threatened way of life, while our rights and liberties are trampled on in the name of our physical survival. If it is our desire for security that leads to the production of insecurity, then perhaps this desire should be renounced and (at least a modicum of) insecurity should be affirmed as such (cf. Neocleous and Rigakos 2011). Stasis and civil war may then be rethought as the instruments of the

undoing of the state and the insecurity they produce may even be embraced as the means to a laudable end (see e.g. Tiqqun 2010).

In contrast to such an apocalyptic accelerationism, Agamben's Benjaminian messianism does not endow insecurity, anomie or violence with any positive value. The 'danger' that grows carries no 'saving power' *in itself*. The affirmation of insecurity over security ends up in a fatal contradiction, since it was precisely the production of insecurity in the name of security that was the problem in the first place. If we desire security, we could not possibly affirm its opposite. Yet, if we happen, for some reason, to desire insecurity, then we do not seem to have a problem because our apparatuses of security already provide more than enough of it to go around. A critique of security would thus find itself with precious little to criticize. Once again, Agamben's reading of Hobbes demonstrates why this is the case. It is impossible to 'choose' Behemoth *over* Leviathan, because the two are perpetually locked together in a single structure of the state of exception and thus remain strictly indistinguishable. One gains nothing by opting for the Antichrist over the katechon, because the katechon is *already* mounting the Leviathan in the pose familiar from Hobbes's frontispiece. Just as every form of Luciferianism or Satanism produces nothing but a hideous parody of the religion it denounces, the historical movements that sought to overthrow the state inevitably produced its uglier replica, intensifying the very mechanisms of violence that they denounced in it. Agamben has argued that this repeated failure of revolutionary movements is due precisely to their continuing attachment to the idea of law and statehood, even when posited in the inverted terms of revolutionary violence: 'Politics has suffered a lasting eclipse because it has been contaminated by law, seeing itself, at best, as constituent power (that is, violence that makes law), when it is not reduced to merely the power to negotiate with the law.' (Agamben 2005a: 88)

Thus, the messianic disposition rejects the very terms of the frontal opposition between statism and anti-statism, order and chaos, security and insecurity. If the indistinction between Leviathan and Behemoth makes it impossible to oppose security to insecurity or the other way round, it would be more helpful to understand their relation as an articulation of apparent opposites: *(in)security*. What is to be negated in the messianic perspective is then this articulation as a whole, the apparatus that perennially fails to protect but rarely fails to attack in the name of protection. The 'saving power' of messianism proceeds not from the source of the 'danger' itself but as a result of its failure to protect anyone at all. This is why it is not a matter of renouncing security, since it is *only from the perspective of security* that the state could be judged and found wanting. This does not mean re-setting the apparatuses of security into motion by imagining a better, different security that they could attain without their negative counterpart. The insecurity that the state produces in the name of security must be exposed and opposed not in the name of a better security to come (or in the name of the insecurity that we should tolerate and come to terms with), but solely in the name of twisting loose from the existing apparatuses and the dangers they pose. The messianic disposition affirms neither a pure security that cannot be attained nor the insecurity that no one could possibly want, but rather security *from* security, safety from the harm that comes with being secured by the Leviathan that always uncannily resembles Behemoth.

Benjamin's elliptic claim thus becomes clearer: the profane assists the messianic not by the proliferation of fantasies about it, which is the surest way to keep it at bay, but, on the contrary, by a blunt reduction of the problem of security to the austere truth of the indistinction of Leviathan and Behemoth in perpetual *stasis*. Insecurity is a permanent reminder that the sociopolitical

arrangements we inhabit are neither perfect *nor even perfectible*, that they cannot deliver what they promise and only strive to maintain themselves in existence, warding off their eventual deactivation. This is the sole and sufficient reason why these apparatuses must be rendered inoperative. Whatever takes their place will *at least* not follow this logic of producing insecurity in the name of security. For both Benjamin and Agamben the messianic promise is entirely contained in this 'at least'. There is no vision of pure and genuine security to be attained once the katechontic apparatuses are removed. The only security that the messianic community can strive for is security from security, which is nonetheless much more than mere coming to terms with insecurity, let alone embracing it. At least one real threat is removed, the one that promised to protect but only endangered. This will have to do, since any attempt to ensure or guarantee one's security in a better way will only end up reproducing the katechontic logic that got us in trouble in the first place.

In his essay on Kafka Benjamin tells a fable about a conversation at an inn on the Sabbath evening, whose participants entertain themselves with stories about their dreams and wishes. While some wish for money, a son-in-law, a new bench, one beggar in the dark corner says that he wishes he were a powerful king in a big country. When this country would be invaded by enemies, he would have to flee with nothing but his shirt on. He would then have to travel through hills and forests for days and nights before coming to the inn in question to tell this very story. The other listeners are bemused and ask the beggar what he would gain if this strange wish were fulfilled. The answer is, of course, the shirt, which is the only thing the beggar did not have before acquiring and then swiftly losing his kingdom (Benjamin 1978: 134-135). While this fable may be interpreted in various ways, its significance in the context of messianism is the minimalist and materialist character of the salvation that remains available to us. As Agamben has insisted throughout his work, in the

messianic condition 'everything will be as is now, just a little different' (Agamben 1993b: 53), no

momentous transformation will take place aside from a 'small displacement' that nonetheless

makes all the difference (Agamben 1999a: 164). The little difference in this fable is evidently the

shirt that certainly matters to the beggar in question and is in any case a much more tangible benefit

than the elusive kingdom. Benjamin's fable participates in the messianic critique of sovereignty that

we have presented in this article by dispelling this sovereignty as an illusion. The Kingdom is lost no

sooner than it is gained, and the king is immediately transformed into a fleeing beggar, with the

added benefit of the shirt. We must recall that the fourth of Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy

of History' opens with a quote from Hegel: 'Seek for food and clothing first, then the Kingdom of

God will be added unto you.' (Hegel in Benjamin 1968, 254; cf. Vatter 2016: 122-128) What is it that

is added unto the beggar who lost his worldly kingdom and fled his persecutors in a newfound shirt?

It is evidently nothing than security itself, the security *from* the very kingdom that only put him in

danger, from which he is now safe, telling stories at the inn on the Sabbath evening.

This minimalism is what rigorously distinguishes Agamben's Benjaminian version of messianism

from any political-theological discourse: it is not a matter of imagining what might happen after the

state in a hypothetical brighter future to be built (and for the security of which many will

undoubtedly have to be sacrificed) but simply the matter of anticipating and accelerating this 'after',

without care about what is to come. Indeed, this being 'without care' is what Paul urged the

members of the messianic community to be, regardless of the imminent passing away of this world.

'Passing away is the figure of this world. But I wish you to be without care.' (1 Cor 7:32, cited in

Agamben 2005b: 23) Etymologically, the word 'secure' derives precisely from the negation, absence

of or freedom from 'care' (*se-cura*). Why should we be without care despite the passing away of the

apparatuses of security regulating this world? It is because we have come to know the destruction involved in every claim to establish peace and security and are no longer 'in the dark' about the intimate co-belonging of Leviathan and Behemoth. This knowledge does not make us entirely and irrevocably safe from every danger, but at least grants us *relief* from the illusory expectations from the existing apparatuses of (in)security. Thus, security in the messianic approach is neither valorized as a glorious end-state nor scornfully refused in a quasi-heroic posture. Instead, it is what we desire and demand but, having seen our demands lead to nothing more but insecurity, we are now content to be secure from. Messianic security is a modest and transient but still eminently real experience of relief, of being without care or at least of having one of our cares lifted off our shoulders. This is not the place to discuss, let alone devise, strategies or tactics of obtaining this relief, which may vary from the more passive ones of keeping the state preoccupied with the demands it cannot fulfil to the more active ones of devising ways of living beyond the demise of the state incapable of keeping up with these demands. 'Sancho Panza, a sedate fool and clumsy assistant, sent his rider on ahead; Bucephalus outlived his. Whether it is a man or a horse is no longer so important, if only the burden is removed from the back.' (Benjamin 1968: 140)

Conclusion

Agamben's reinterpretation of Hobbes draws a different lesson from *Leviathan* than traditional readings, including those critical of Hobbes. The katechontic claim to ensure peace and security that Hobbes's thought is often viewed as the paradigm of is necessarily hubristic as every attempt to do so will have to mobilize the same anomie and violence that the state promised to transcend. Yet,

this very failure of the katechon precipitates the advent of the messianic moment by undermining its status and leading to its eventual passing away. The messianic subject ventures to hasten this passing by demonstrating how law and violence, security and insecurity, order and disorder are linked in such an inextricable manner that it is impossible to oppose one to the other. It is only possible to oppose their articulation by demonstrating its persistent and unavoidable failure, not in the name of a better security under the new order but in the name of the relief from the insecurity of the present one. By questioning the efficacy of the katechon, by ceaselessly demonstrating the state's failure to secure, by bombarding it with the demands it cannot possibly fulfil, we prepare the very kingdom whose advent will come 'like a thief in the night'. The messianic disposition thus resonates with one of the famous slogans of 1968: by *demanding the impossible*, the security that Leviathan/Behemoth could never provide, messianic subjects act as genuine *realists* who have freed themselves from all illusions of better security and only seek security from the apparatuses of security themselves. This realism of the messianic orientation is particularly pronounced in the contemporary context of the retreat of the neoliberal state from the katechontic approach into a paradoxical accelerationism that is entirely devoid of any eschatological vision and only accelerates the operation of its own apparatuses for greater efficiency. If security is no longer even guaranteed by these apparatuses that instead extol the virtues of risk, responsibilization and resilience, then seeking security from these apparatuses is hardly an irresponsible flight of fancy or an extremist move, but an entirely plausible response to the increasingly visible void at the heart of the late-modern Leviathan. The challenge that the messianic transvaluation of security offers to security studies is how to approach security in an affirmative manner while dissociating it from the agents and structures that have laid a claim to provide it and can no longer do so in a credible and legitimate manner. Critical security studies should not be content with exposing the apparatuses of security as

resigning us to insecurity but must also probe the ways security and peace could be meaningfully affirmed outside these apparatuses and possibly against them.

Yet, what about the Kingdom of God that the undermining of the apparatuses of security is supposed to bring about in this oblique fashion? Can the argument of messianic politics stand without any serious consideration of this Kingdom, which was taken rather more seriously by Hobbes than by contemporary thinkers in the messianic orientation (see Martinich 2003; Strauss 2011)? Indeed, in contrast to Hobbes's erudite speculations on the matter, Agamben's (and Benjamin's) version of messianism does not have much to say about this kingdom, other than maintain, with Hobbes, both its advent on this Earth and its heterogeneity to any earthly institution. At the same time, this messianism cannot be reduced to the mere affirmation of the open horizon of anticipation akin to Jacques Derrida's (1994, 2005) valorization of the 'to come' that Agamben has criticized as 'petrified messianism' (Agamben 1999: 171; see also 2005b: 103). For Benjamin and Agamben, the messianic kingdom is not (only) characterized by the coming of the wholly other, but rather by the coming to an end of the self-propelling struggle between Leviathan and Behemoth, in which it is impossible to discern the two sides. What matters is less the appearance of the other than the *disappearance of the same*, the same old apparatus of (in)security that we have carried as a burden throughout history. Agamben's messianic kingdom does not merely take place on earth but lacks even a 'throne in heaven' (Hobbes [1651] (1985): 482), its heaven being merely an 'empty sky' (Agamben 1995: 82; 2005a: 57). It is beyond the scope of this article to adjudicate whether this non-theistic messianism is an affront to the Judeo-Christian tradition or the expression of its authentic intention (cf. Dickinson 2011; Whyte 2013: 69-72; Abbott 2014: 115-118; Nancy 2008). What is more important is to recall what this vision of the empty heaven is advanced against - the cramped spaces of never-ending hell, in which the governmental machine of (in)security survives

the end of time with its apparatuses running on empty. Agamben's messianism does not introduce any new figure into the world, but merely dispels the false images of peace and security, including that of Leviathan-Antichrist hovering over the city, and wagers that this, like the beggar's shirt, will suffice.

REFERENCES

Abbott M (2014) *The Figure of This World: Agamben and the Question of Political Ontology*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Agamben G (1998) *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Agamben G (1999) *Potentialities: Selected Essays in Philosophy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Agamben G (2004) *The Open: Man and Animal*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Agamben G (2005a) *State of Exception*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Agamben G (2005b) *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Agamben G (2007) *Profanations*. New York: Zone Books.

Agamben G (2012) *The Church and the Kingdom*. New York: Seagull Books.

Agamben G (2015) *Stasis: Civil War as a Political Paradigm*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Agamben G (2017) *The Mystery of Evil: Benedict XVI and the End of Days*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Aradau C and van Munster R (2007) 'Governing Terrorism through Risk: Taking Precautions, (Un)Knowing the Future'. *European Journal of International Relations* 3(1): 89-115.

Aradau, C (2014) 'The Promise of Security: Resilience, Surprise and Epistemic Politics'. *Resilience* 2 (2): 73-87.

Benjamin W (1968) *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books.

Benjamin W (1978) *Reflections*. New York: Schocken Books.

Best E (1972) *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*. New York: Harper and Row.

Chandler D (2012) 'Resilience and Human Security: A Post-interventionist Paradigm'. *Security Dialogue* 43 (3): 213-229.

Cruikshank B (1999) *The Will to Empower: Democratic Citizens and Other Subjects*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Derrida J (1994) *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. London: Routledge.

Derrida J (2005) *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Dickinson C (2011) *Agamben and Theology*. London: Continuum.

Dillon M (2007) 'Governing through Contingency: The Security of Biopolitical Governance'. *Political Geography* 26 (1): 41-47.

Dillon M (2015) *Biopolitics of Security: A Political Analytic of Finitude*. London: Routledge.

Esposito R (2015) *Two: The Machine of Political Theology and the Place of Thought*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Fukuyama F (1992) *The End of History and the Last Man.* New York: Free Press.

Heidegger M (1991) *Nietzsche*, vols 3 and 4. New York: Harper Collins.

Hell J (2009) 'Katechon: Carl Schmitt's Imperial Theology and the Ruins of the Future'. *The Germanic Review* 84 (4): 283-326.

Hobbes T [1651] (1985) *Leviathan*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics.

Hooker W (2009) *Carl Schmitt's International Thought: Order and Orientation*. Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press.

Hudson, H. (2005) ''Doing' Security as Though Humans Matter: A Feminist Perspective on Gender and the Politics of Human Security'. *Security Dialogue* 36 (2): 155-74.

The Invisible Committee (2009) *The Coming Insurrection*. New York: Semiotext(e).

Jones I H (2005) *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*. Peterborough: Epworth Press.

Kinnvall K and Svensson T (2014) *Governing Borders and Security: The Politics of Connectivity and Dispersal*. London: Routledge.

Kojève A (1969) *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the* Phenomenology of Spirit. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

de Larrinaga M and Doucet M (eds) (2010) *Security and Global Governmentality: Globalization, Governance and the State.* London: Routledge.

Leander A and Van Munster R (2007) 'Private Security Contractors in the Debate about Darfur: Reflecting and Reinforcing Neoliberal Governmentality'. *International Relations*, 21 (2): 201-16.

Martinich A P (2003) *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nadesan M H (2010) *Governmentality, Biopower and Everyday Life*. London: Routledge.

Nancy J-L (2008) *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Neocleous M (2008), *Critique of Security*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Neocleous M (2011) ''A Brighter and Nicer New Life': Security as Pacification'. *Social and Legal Studies* 20 (2): 191-208.

Neocleous M and Rigakos G (eds) (2011) *Anti-Security*. Ottawa: Re Quill.

Nietzsche F (1968) *The Will to Power*. New York: Knopf.

Noys B (2010) *The Persistence of the Negative: A Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Noys, B (2014) *Malign Velocities: Accelerationism and Capitalism*. Alresford: Zero Books.

Paipais V (2016) *Political Ontology and International Political Thought: Voiding a Pluralist World*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Peck J (2010) 'Zombie Neoliberalism and the Ambidextrous State'. *Theoretical Criminology* 14 (1): 104-110.

Prozorov S (2012) 'Katechon in the Age of Biopolitical Nihilism'. *Continental Philosophy Review* 45 (4): 483-503.

Rasch W (2007) 'From Sovereign Ban to Banning Sovereignty'. In: Calarco, M and DeCaroli, S (eds) *Giorgio Agamben: Sovereignty and Life.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 92-107.

Schmitt C (2003) *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Public Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*. New York: Telos Press.

Schmitt C (2008) *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Shalhoub-Kevorkian N (2015) *Security Theology, Surveillance and the Politics of Fear*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Smith N (2008) 'Neo-liberalism: Dead but Dominant'. *Focaal* 51: 155–7.

Stern M and Öjendal J (2010) 'Mapping the Security—Development Nexus: Conflict, Complexity, Cacophony, Convergence?' *Security Dialogue* 41 (1): 5-29.

Stevens T (2015) *Cybersecurity and the Politics of Time*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Strauss L (2011) *Hobbes's Critique of Religion and Related Writings*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Taubes J (2004) *The Political Theology of Paul*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Tiqqun (2010) *Introduction to Civil War*. New York: Semiotext(e).

Troy F (2013) *Religion and the Realist Tradition: From Political Theology to International Relations Theory and Back*. London: Routledge.

Walker J and Cooper M (2011), 'Genealogies of Resilience'. *Security Dialogue* 42 (2): 143-60.

Whyte J (2013) *Catastrophe and Redemption: The Political Thought of Giorgio Agamben*. New York: SUNY Press.

de Wilde M (2013) 'Politics Between Times: Theologico-Political Interpretations of the Restraining Force (Katechon) in Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians'. In: Blanton, W and de Vries, H (eds.) *Paul and the Philosophers*. New York: Fordham University Press, 105-125.