ON FOUCAULT'S *ASKĒSIS* OF DEATH MEDITATION:

EXPLORING BENJAMIN'S SECULARIZATION AS A TEMPORAL MODEL

by

MAUREEN ADAIR KELLY

B.A., Cornell University, 2010

A thesis submitted to the

Faculty of the Graduate School of the

University of Colorado in partial fulfillment

of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Religious Studies

2013

This thesis entitled:
On Foucault's *Askēsis* of Death Meditation: Exploring Benjamin's Secularization as a Temporal
Model
written by Maureen Adair Kelly
has been approved for the Department of Religious Studies

_____
Dr. Ruth Mas

_____
Dr. Elias Sacks

_____
Dr. Anthony Abiragi

Date _____

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we
Find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards
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Kelly, Maureen Adair (M.A., Religious Studies)

On Foucault's *Askēsis* of Death Meditation: Exploring Benjamin's Secularization as a Temporal Model

Thesis directed by Assistant Professor Ruth Mas

This thesis seeks to provide a possible reading of the question of temporality in Foucault's formulation of *askēsis* in a passage of his work "Hermeneutics of the Subject." I suggest a relationship between a modern secular temporal experience and the philosophical problem of death that sheds light on the importance of temporality in Foucault's theory of *askēsis*. Talal Asad is instrumental in demonstrating that modern secular time has an uneasy relationship with a certain experience of death. Talal Asad will also introduce the relationship between Foucault's theory of modern power and Walter Benjamin's theory of secular time. This relationship, namely that modern power operates on subjects in part through an organization of the experience of time, will allow me to explore the implications of temporality in Foucault's formulation of *askēsis* through an explanation of death and secular time in Benjamin's early work on German mourning plays. I emphasize the temporal question in Foucault's *askēsis* because it expands the understanding of Foucault's late work on *askēsis* through reading it in relation to the work on *askēsis* by Pierre Hadot, who recalls the question of temporality. I argue that Benjamin's notion of secular time is such that time can operate hegemonically, but a certain experience of death has a disrupting function in this operation. I explore how an experience of death in Benjamin's notion of natural history interrupts politics that rely on this secular time (as noted by Asad), and that this might indicate the force of *askēsis* in the agency of the actions of

(experiencing a temporality by) the modern subject. Benjamin's discussion of secular time and death, therefore, offer an insight into the way the mediation on death operates as a disrupting force in the hegemonic organization of modern subjectivity for Foucault.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Let me recall a political problem articulated by Michel Foucault: political regulations, manipulations, and categorizations of the body and its actions constitute individuals as particular, historical subjects. Talal Asad analyzes the way that this occurs in secular politics and the results, intersections, and tensions for religion in this secular context of the modern nation-state. For Asad, secularism is a project that seeks to constitute secular subjects through the power mechanisms that Foucault describes. One of the mechanisms through which this subjectivity is constituted arises from (Walter Benjamin's theory of) secular time and its location of death.

Secular time is defined by Asad as "empty, homogeneous time," a term coined by Walter Benjamin in his 1940 "Theses On the Concept of History." Benjamin gives the account of secular time that operates as a homogenizing political force as Asad cites. For Benjamin, I would note up front, the secular is a temporal question. Secular time, or 'empty homogeneous time,' organizes time into a politically hegemonic 'proper' history. In this secular history, i.e. history proper, the world is evacuated from history and replaced by its narrative progressive meaning. In another temporality, for Benjamin, secularization gives rise to an experience of time without this narrative. Secularization is the process through which the world is severed (or freed) from its Historical meaning, or expectation. Secularization has a temporal structure in which the sequential ordering of temporal moments is broken apart into radical confrontations with the material (meaningless) present and its world. For Benjamin, the first is the hope of the nation-

state. This is precisely the project of secularism that Asad refers to that operates as a mechanism to create secular liberal subjects (in a Foucaultian model). Secularization, on the other hand, is a disruptive temporal construction that hiccups the homogeneous time of the state.

Temporality in Foucault's *askēsis* (as it disrupts the modern project described by Talal Asad) operates as a disruptive moment for secular subjectivity that follows from the temporal qualities of secular time. However, Foucault does not elaborate what he means by this temporal element of *askēsis* and the *melete thanatou*. In this paper, I will present a possible understanding of the temporal experience of the contemplation of death *askēsis* as theorized by Foucault. I argue that the temporal experience might be a 'living in the present' as Pierre Hadot defines this following from Hadot's influence on Foucault's late thinking and turn to *askēsis.* This temporal experience can be understood as disruptive to hegemonic secular politics in that secularism is characterized by a hegemonic experience of time and *askēsis* offer a temporal experience that challenges not only secular time, but also its hegemony in the contemplation on death as the limit of modern disciplinary/biopower.

By way of introduction, I present Talal Asad's argument on the politics of secular temporality and the disruption of this temporality by certain notions of death. This introduction will set up the position of Michel Foucault's work on the body and subjectivity as well as Walter Benjamin's work on secularization and secular time. What I hope to establish is that Foucault's theory of *askēsis* can operate through a temporal disruption (for example, of empty homogeneous time which, Asad argues, disciplines secular liberal subjects). In order to understand this temporal disruption (in, for example, secular time), we can turn to (the theorist of time, history, the secular, and secular history) Walter Benjamin. I argue that we can see how Benjamin's

secularization disturbs the empty homogeneous time. And thus, we can see how Foucault brings temporality into the ascetic disruption of normativizing mechanisms.

Before turning to Asad and the connection between Foucault and Benjamin that introduces a reading of the temporal question of *askēsis*, I present another comparison of their works in order to clarify my own purpose in this argument. A comparison of the thinking of Walter Benjamin and Michel Foucault has been presented, for example, in the work of Sigrid Weigel. In her book *Body- and Image- Space: Re-reading Walter Benjamin*, Weigel writes a chapter on resonances between their work. She addresses their common interest in male sexuality, public space, and questions of history. She also notes their common methodological practice and passion for excavating obscure sources in the archives of libraries in Paris. In this chapter, Weigel points to interesting commonalities in their interests, methods, and questions. Weigel writes that her interest in bringing Foucault and Benjamin into comparison with one another is "to be understood as being of model character: their target is a blind spot in contemporary theoretical discourse; namely, the buried links between the *early* Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School and post-structuralism."[1]

Therefore, Weigel points out that her purpose in discussing Benjamin and Foucault together is to work towards an intellectual history that better understands the connections between their thinking. Rather than directing itself towards the goals of intellectual history, the argument in this paper seeks to understand a moment in Foucault's work through the understanding of its connection to Benjamin's work via the arguments of Talal Asad. I hope to explain something unclear in a particular piece by Foucault (namely, the temporal aspect of *askēsis* and the meditation of death). I consider how we can guess what Foucault was referring to (Hadot) and how this makes sense in light of the argument in which Talal Asad brings Foucault

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and Benjamin into conversation in order to present the disciplining political capacities of secular homogeneous time. I follow this reading of the possibility of secular time as hegemonic for Asad in order to think about how *askēsis* are a political response to normative operations on temporal grounds.

Talal Asad works – from an anthropological perspective – on the political and disciplining operations of secular modernity in a Foucaultian sense. He approaches this work with an orientation to the tradition of Islam and the way that modern secular engagements with Islam and Muslims reveal the operations and commitments of modern secular governance/politics. Asad also thinks historically about the conditions that give rise to modern secularism and the moments of convergence and dissonance in its history. There are two points in Asad's work on secular modernity which I hope to introduce in order to present a reading of the question of temporality in Foucault's *askēsis*. The first point in Asad on secular modern politics – as exercised by the nation-state – is that it seeks to homogenize time into a proper history. The second point is that death figures in modern secular politics in a way that perpetuates and stabilizes this secular time. The relationship between secular time and an experience of death will ultimately be best understood in the reading of secularization in Benjamin's work on German mourning plays, particularly with the notion of allegory.

Asad presents the location of homogeneous time in secular modern governance in the following:

> The homogeneous time of state bureaucracies and market dealings is of course central to the calculations of modern political economy. It allows speed and direction to be plotted with precision. But there are other temporalities – immediate and mediated, reversible and nonreversible – by which individuals in a heterogeneous society live and by which therefore their political responses are shaped.[2]

Thus homogeneous time is not a definite, stagnant, and permanent condition of secular modernity. Rather, this time, like the many other associated elements of secularism Asad names, is a goal of modern governance in order to establish and proliferate itself as a political project. Asad elaborates this in the following passage:

> 'Modernity' is neither a totally coherent object nor a clearly bounded one, and that many of its elements originate in relations with the histories of peoples outside Europe. Modernity is a *project* – or, rather, a series of interlinked projects – that certain people in power seek to achieve. The project aims at institutionalizing a number of (sometimes conflicting, often evolving) principles: constitutionalism, moral autonomy, democracy, human rights, civil equality, industry, consumerism, freedom of the market – and secularism. It employs proliferating technologies (of production, warfare, travel, entertainment, medicine) that generate new experiences of space and time, of cruelty and health, of consumption and knowledge.[3]

Death is configured in this political schema in a particular way that perpetuates the secular modern project and its homogenizing capacities. In his piece *On Suicide Bombing*, Talal Asad looks at the response to certain modes of death and dying as horror-inducing while others are part of the perpetuation of the modern state. Immediately, Asad identifies the location of violence as acceptable or horrifying in terms of the secular configuration of time as proper history. Asad writes:

> However reprehensible it was to liberals, the violence of Marxists and nationalists was understandable in terms of progressive, secular history. The violence of Islamic groups, on the other hand, is incomprehensible to many precisely because it is not embedded in a historical narrative – history in the 'proper' sense. As the violence of what is often referred to as a totalitarian religious tradition hostile to democratic politics, it is seen to irrational as well as being an international threat.[4]

As described in this passage, Asad holds that violence is acceptable or unacceptable under certain criteria. For (secular) liberals, violence is acceptable when it works for the project of modernity. Asad writes, 'in terms of progressive, secular history,' which might be paraphrased as

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a temporal experience in which events are discrete, successive, and meaningful in terms of a telos, then violence is acceptable. On the other hand, violence that does not accomplish this telos or fit within 'proper' history is not only inscrutable; it is a threat. (The question here is not why violence is considered a threat. The question is why some violence (outside of history) is considered a threat while other violence (within secular history) is not.)

Asad points out historical reasons for the configuration of death within secular liberal politics and their inconsistencies. One example of this reads:

> This contradiction is a part of modern liberalism that has inherited and rephrased some of its basic values from medieval Christian tradition: on the one hand, there is the imperative to use any means necessary (including homicide and suicide) to defend the nation-state that constitutes one's worldly identity and defends one's health and security and, on the other the obligation to revere all human life, to offer life in place of death to universal humanity.[5]

The salient point here is that death has become the property of the nation-state that operates through a multitude of disciplining and biopolitical mechanisms, one of which is homogenizing time. For the state, death is acceptable in the form of violence that perpetuates its goals and community. Asad reiterates the point that death is acceptable where it is the property of the state in the following passage. He writes:

> In the Abrahamic religions, suicide is intimately connected with sin because God denies the individual the right to terminate his own earthly identity. In the matter of his/her life, the individual creature has no sovereignty. Suicide is a sin because it is a unique act of freedom, a right that neither the religious authorities nor the nation-state allows. Today, the law requires that a prisoner condemned to death be prevented from committing suicide to escape execution; it is not death but authorized death that is called for. […] The power over life and death can be held legitimately only by one God, creator and destroyer, and so by his earthly delegates. But although individuals have no right to kill themselves, God (and the state) gives them the right to be punished and to atone.[6]

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In this passage, Asad presents both a historical reason for the position of death in secular liberal thinking and an explanation of the position of death as an indicator of power. One's own death through suicide is "a unique act of freedom" because it exercises the right to die. However, Asad points out, the subject does not have the right to die – in either secular or religious ontologies. The determination of death is a determination of the governing apparatus (either God or the state) and the determination of death by the subject is forbidden and politically threatening.

This determination of death will figure in my following argument about secular time and temporality of Foucault's contemplation of death. It seems to me that the organization of temporal experience is precisely the political regulation of life that is dislodged in Foucault's theory of the *premeditatio malorum*. In Benjamin's theory of 'homogeneous' secular time and secularization, political sovereignty breaks apart when the temporality upon which it depends is disrupted by secularization. For Foucault's theory of modern bio/disciplinary power (Asad describes how homogeneous time is a disciplining element), the fracturing temporality in *askēsis* forms a critical response through the occupation of one of those temporalities that secular time has not yet included, normativized, and assimilated. The fact of death presents a right that political sovereignty and biopower both claim from the subject. For both, secular time is essential in political operation and control yet death presents a disruptive moment. I elaborate how death and Benjamin's theory of secularization pose problems to politics and the way the temporal question and secular time can be read in order to understand temporal hegemony and disruption.

Out of the theories of normativizing processes, Foucault – late in life – theorizes *askēsis*, the antique Greek practice of self-constituting in an ethical formation. Following from the example in Asad, these *askēsis* might likewise offer a potential disruption of the grasp of

normative discipline of the body by secular constructions of temporal experience. In fact, in the explanation of *askēsis* offering this possibility of disruption, Foucault cites a temporal orientation as part of this process. However, this point is not elaborated and I think – at the same time – key to understanding the critical force of *askēsis* against the modern secular disciplines.

In this paper, I will seek to establish the temporal import of *askēsis* in Foucault's piece and the relationship of secular time to ascetic disruptions following from this argument. In order to do so, I first establish the political problem of subject formation via regulation of the body in the thinking of Foucault. I will point out clues to the notion of *ascetic* temporality Foucault mentions such as the influence of Hadot on Foucault's thinking on *askēsis*. Then, I will turn to Benjamin to propose a reading of what I understand to be a possible meaning of this ascetic temporality. I justify the turn to Benjamin because Benjamin establishes the temporal qualities of secular politics and secularization. As such, he is the scholar to turn to on the temporal destabilizations of the politics of secularism.

CHAPTER II

THE PROBLEM IN FOUCAULT: MODERN POWER OPERATES ON LIFE THROUGH
THE BODY

Foucault theorized power, especially its changes from the pre-modern to the modern, and

its operations on the body of the subject. For Foucault, sovereignty in the pre-modern was the

capacity to determine life through controlling its death. He writes, "The old power of death that

symbolized sovereign power was now carefully supplanted by the administration of bodies and

the calculated management of life."[7] In order to understand Foucault's theory of modern power

and its operation on life and configuration of death, I introduce passages on disciplinary and

biopower. From his discussion of disciplinary power, I emphasize the role of the body in the

exercise of this mechanism of power and the organization of a temporal experience. From his

discussion of biopower in his final section of *History of Sexuality: Volume I*, I address the

difference between the sovereign regulation of death and the biopolitical regulation of life, the

configuration of the body as the object of biopower, and the way that death is the limit of modern

biopolitical power.

Foucault provides a definition of disciplinary power in his work *Discipline and Punish*

which reads: "these methods, which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of

the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of

docility-utility, might be called 'discipline.'[8] This succinct definition presents the key point of

disciplinary power: it is a 'method' that secures 'control of the operations of the body.' Foucault

elaborates the place of the body in the political operation of disciplinary power in the following

passage:

> The historical moment of the disciplines was the moment when an art of
> the human body was born, which was directed not only at the growth of its
> skills, nor at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a
> relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes
> more useful, and conversely. What was then being formed was a policy of
> coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its
> elements, its gestures, its behaviours. The human body was entering a
> machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A
> 'political anatomy', which was also a 'mechanics of power', was being
> born; it defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so
> that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one
> wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one
> determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies,
> 'docile' bodies.[9]

In this passage, Foucault identifies the function of disciplinary power in its operation on the body

as 'a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviours.' The purpose of

disciplinary power is to thoroughly, comprehensively intervene in the human body such that it

becomes the vehicle for the constitution of a modern subject. Politics and political regulation can

thus be considered as the 'art' of constituting political subjects through the disciplining of their

bodies. I recall a final passage on the question of disciplinary power that demonstrates how a

temporal experience is constructed by disciplinary power and serves to constitute subjects. The

passage reads:

> The disciplinary methods reveal a linear time whose moments are
> integrated, one upon another, and which is orientated towards a terminal,
> stable point; in short, an 'evolutive' time. But it must be recalled that, at
> the same moment, the administrative and economic techniques of control
> reveal a social time of a serial, orientated cumulative type: the discovery
> of an evolution in terms of 'progress.' The disciplinary techniques reveal
> individual series: the discovery of an evolution in terms of 'genesis'.
> There two great 'discoveries' of the eighteenth century – the progress of
> societies and the geneses of individuals – were perhaps correlative with
> the new techniques of power, and more specifically, with a new way of
> administering time and making it useful, by segmentation, seriation,

synthesis and totalization. A macro- and a micro- physics of power made possible, not the invention of history (it had long had no need of that), but the integration of a temporal, unitary, continuous, cumulative dimension in the exercise of controls and the practice of dominations. [10]

The disciplinary power which operates through the intense control of human bodies for the purpose of constituting political subjects includes a temporal question. The nature of this temporal organization presented here by Foucault is as Asad describes: the progressive, teleological secular model of time. The relationship between this model of time and disciplinary power can be identified in the final section of the above passage which reads: 'a […] physics of power made possible […] the integration of a temporal […] dimension in' disciplinary power. This form of power, its 'physics' was such that a temporal experience could be part of the 'exercise of controls.' In other words, disciplinary power allows a temporal experience to be integrated as a political mechanism for the constitution of subjects. An implication of this passage is that an unassimilated, alternative temporal experience might be as destabilizing in the constitution of a political subject as, for example, improper bodily operations. In his discussion of disciplinary power, Foucault identifies its material object as the human body and one of its 'tactics'[11] as the construction of a temporal experience. In his discussion of biopower, Foucault similarly identifies the way modern mechanisms of power work on the body, and also addresses the location of death in this political operation.

Foucault defines "*bio-power*" as "what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life."[12] The biopolitical is the organization of life; life and the body are the objects of biopolitical governance. Because biopower works on life itself, death is a moment of limit for biopower. Thus, the fallen life that constantly decays presented by Benjamin in his theory of natural history

is a form of life that exceeds biopolitics. The body, though at once the object of biopower, also essentially exposes and exceeds the limits of this power.

Foucault's discussion of the rise of biopower demonstrates the historical shift in the operation of power from the threat of death to the regulation of life. He states, "power would no longer be dealing simply with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death, but with living beings, and the mastery it would be able to exercise over them would have to be applied at the level of life itself."[13] For Foucault, sovereignty in the pre-modern was the capacity to determine life through condemning it to death. He describes "the old power of death that symbolized sovereign power"[14] in the following:

> In its modern form – relative and limited – as in its ancient and absolute form, the right of life and death is a dissymmetrical one. The sovereign exercised his right of life only by exercising his right to kill, or by refraining from killing; he evinced his power over life only through the death he was capable of requiring. The right which was formulated as the 'power of life and death' was in reality the right to *take* life or *let* live. Its symbol, after all, was the sword.[15]

In this passage, Foucault describes that sovereign power operated through its capacity to end or allow life. He writes, 'the sovereign exercised his right of life only by exercising his right to kill, or by refraining from killing; he evinced his power over life only through the death he was capable of requiring.' By this, Foucault suggests that the way that sovereign power controlled life was through the impending threat of death it held over life. However, the power over life was not characterized by a regulation of the life of the subject through the body of the subject. Rather, the sovereign power described here was 'capable of requiring death' and thus regulated life in allowing acceptable life to remain and killing unacceptable life.

Foucault stresses the mechanism of this form of sovereign power was not constitutive like his notions of disciplinary and bio-power. Rather, sovereign power was primarily repressive;

"power in this instance was essentially a right of seizure: of things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself; it culminated in the privilege to seize hold of life in order to suppress it."[16] The mechanism of regulation was a 'right of seizure.' Violations were punished by loss. This is in contrast to the mechanisms that mold, regulate, and form subjects through shaping, inciting, and determining their own actions. This is the category of mechanisms employed in Foucault's theory of biopower, which seeks to regulate 'life itself.' Foucault describes, "methods of power and knowledge assumed responsibility for the life processes and undertook to control and modify them."[17] He continues:

> Power would no longer be dealing simply with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death, but with living beings, and the mastery it would be able to exercise over them would have to be applied at the level of life itself; it was the taking charge of life, more than the threat of death, that gave power its access even to the body.[18]

When biopower is 'applied at the level of life itself,' the material object on which power operates is the human body. Biopolitics work on the very body of the subject, as Foucault writes, "taking charge of life […] gave power its access even to the body."[19] Foucault expresses the way that constitutive power operated as the regulation of life in the case of disciplinary and biopower. He writes:

> Power over life evolved in two basic forms; […] one of these poles […] centered on the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capacities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility […] the second, formed somewhat later, focused on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health.[20]

Foucault describes that disciplinary power regulated life itself through operating on the body. Disciplinary power concerned itself with the body 'as a machine,' i.e., how it exerts its 'capacities,' and aims to make life more 'useful and docile' through the organization of the

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body's actions. In this passage, Foucault also explains how biopower operates on the object of the body. In this case, the body provides the potential domain of power. As such, biopower grooms and cares for the bodies of the population to found its domain. Both disciplinary and biopower are 'over life' and regulate life through the regulation of the body.

Bio- and disciplinary power seem devastating because there is no immediate or obvious 'way out' of this regulation. When the regulation is on life itself, then there is nothing outside of biopower's domain. The subject only escapes biopower after his or her death; there is no relief from biopower while living. This is unique to constitutive power, in contrast to sovereign power. In the schema of sovereign power, the symbolic decapitation of the king closes the sovereign threat of death. In constitutive power, the force of power is reiterated as it is obeyed so that the very source becomes more difficult to identify and more difficult to end. However, political sovereignty and biopolitics have in common the control of death. Death, as a unique freedom, is not within the grasp of the subject. Rather, under the governance by political sovereignty of biopower, death is the decision of the governance, and not the citizen.

Thus, death, which is the limit of biopower, is conceived of in a way that seeks to contain and locate it so that it does not threaten (but rather supports) the biopolitical maintenance of life. Talal Asad, who follows methodologically from Foucault, demonstrates this location of death in secular modernity in comparison to suicide bombing. For Asad, death is located in a way that is riddled with contradictions yet allows for a 'modern project' to perpetuate. As cited in the introduction, violence and death are acceptable when scrutible according to progressive secular history or for the benefit of the nation-state. I present here two examples given by Foucault which explain how death could be positioned in a way that furthers the modern project of

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maintaining and regulating life. Foucault describes how death is figured in the circumstance of war in the biopolitical context:

> Wars are no longer waged in the name of a sovereign who must be defended; they are waged on behalf of the existence of everyone, entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of a wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity: massacres have become vital. [21]

War, the context where one regime of power confronts another, is perceived according to the mechanisms of the regime of power itself. When the state is governed by sovereign power, then war is "waged in the name of a sovereign who must be defended." When the regime of power is sovereignty, the defense of that regime is the defense of sovereignty. Likewise, if power operates biopolitically, the defense of this regime of power is the defense of biopower. Where sovereignty defends the source of power in one person, the sovereign; biopower defends the entire population which participates in the mechanisms of biopower. In turn, the threat to the political regime of biopolitics arises from the entire population of the opposing state. As a result, the defense of a political regime of biopolitics consists of slaughter of opposing populations. As Foucault writes: 'entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of a wholesale slaughter.' In this case, death is permissible when it is the death of another population for the purpose of protecting the life in one's own population. Thus, death is permissible here because it maintains the life of the political subjects upon which biopower depends.

In another passage, Foucault describes the way death figures within a population. He writes: "death was ceasing to torment life so directly. But at the same time, the development of the different fields of knowledge concerned with life in general [...] a relative control over life averted some of the immanent risks of death."[22] Fields of knowledge, which operate politically for Foucault, were "concerned with life in general." In other words, fields of knowledge operate on life, i.e. on the object of biopower. The "risks of death" that are always present were averted

by these field of knowledge. The knowledge-production in biopolitical contexts might serve to sustain, maintain, and perpetuate the power base of biopolitics, the living bodies of the subject in the population. Again, death figures in biopolitics in a way that supports these politics.

Because biopower operates on the body, it is limited by the body also; the limits of the body are the limits of power. For finite life, i.e. life that ends with death, the body exceeds the capacity of biopower. Death is outside the limits of biopower because biopower's object is that material life, the body. As a result, the death of the subject reveals the limits of power. Foucault elaborates the finitude of life as exceeding the governance of biopower: "now it is over life, throughout its unfolding, that power establishes its dominion; death is power's limit, the moment that escapes it."[23] Because biopower operates on life, the end of life, i.e. death, is always outside of its limits. Death is inherent to the body and life. Foucault points to the moment of death as an excess of politics that always persists. He writes: "it is not that life has been totally integrated into techniques that govern and administer it; it constantly escapes them."[24]

In this early work, Foucault does identify death as the limit of biopower, which further establishes and explains the way that biopower operates on life, and thus requires life in order to operate. However, Foucault does not indicate that this limit of power might provide some kind of potential for the subject to respond to biopower. Of course not – because it is only death that presents this limit and death is precisely the moment in which a person cannot perform any action – disciplined or otherwise. In much later work, Foucault seems to recover a moment in which the subject can determine values autonomously. This moment relates to death, but it is not dying itself. Rather, it is the contemplation of death in the *askēsis* of *premeditatio malorum* and *melete thanatou*. This contemplation of death introduces a temporal experience which allows a dislodging of the subject from the imperative of norms, however Foucault does not describe the

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temporal aspect that accomplishes this in full. I suggest that we can look to the work of Pierre

Hadot, who influenced Foucault's late thinking on *askēsis*. Hadot expands the notion of

temporality to which I think Foucault is referring. This also gives a clue where to look in order to

understand how temporal experience works in Foucault's *askēsis*, and why turning to Benjamin

can help us understand the critical potential of this practice against secular modern time.

ASKĒSIS AS A RESPONSE TO BIOPOLTICS AND THE TEMPORAL QUESTION OF THE CONTEMPLATION OF DEATH

I am interested in reading Foucault's theory of *askēsis* as a response to the modern

regulation of the body (by secular time). In Foucault's theory of modern articulations of

disciplinary and bio-power, the body is the material object on which power operates. As a

response to the operation of power on the body, in his late works, Foucault turns to antiquity in

order to develop a theory of *askēsis,* which he defines as the mental and physical practices that

orients one to an ethical telos, or (historical) notion of the ideal person. Foucault ends his

discussion of *askēsis* with a discussion of *premeditatio malorum*, which includes a temporal

orientation. However, Foucault discusses only very briefly what this means. I suggest that

Arnold Davidson points us to the influence of Pierre Hadot on Foucault as a way to understand

what Foucault meant by the temporal orientation in this writing on *askēsis*.

Arnold Davidson introduces the relationship between Michel Foucault and Pierre Hadot

in *Foucault and his Interlocutors*. Davidson's piece, "Introductory Remarks to Pierre Hadot,"

serves "to provide a context for Hadot's inaugural lecture, by way of summary of his major

work, and, more specifically, to sketch the profound importance that Hadot's writings had for the

last works of Michel Foucault."[25] Davidson outlines the main points of Hadot's *Exercices*

Spirituels et Philosophie Antique: philosophy was a way of life in ancient schools[26] which included "a transformation of one's vision of the world and a metamorphosis of one's personality, these exercises had an existential value, not only a moral one."[27] Davidson continues that Hadot understands Socrates as conducting this practice through dialogue, which formed the person through the exercise and created relationships to oneself and others. Davidson also describes that Hadot treats Stoicism and Epicureanism as controlling the passions (which cause suffering).[28] For Hadot, Stoicism pays attention to the present as part of the effort not to attend to what are out of one's control (i.e., both the past and future).[29] Epicureans sought to alleviate tension by enjoying life. Finally, Davidson describes that for Hadot, philosophy was "training for death"[30] that tried to move from an individual to a universal perspective.[31] Davidson also noted Hadot's argument that in the Middle Ages, practice/exercise was separated from philosophy, which became discursive.[32] Davidson points out that Hadot's reading of antique philosophy as a way of life influenced Foucault's later projects on sexual ethics in Greece, governing oneself, and *askēsis*. He writes:

> Foucault first approached Hadot at the end of 1980 and recommended that Hadot present his candidacy for election to the Collège de France. By this time, Foucault has already been a careful reader of Hadot's work, including his major essay on spiritual exercises originally published in 1977.[33]

Davidson outlines the goal of his introduction is to point out the influence of Hadot in Foucault's work. Following from his reading of Hadot, Foucault was interested in the "self's relationship to itself"[34] and the historical change from the antique emphasis on spiritual exercise.[35] Because Foucault turned to *askēsis* with the influence of Hadot, I suggest that Hadot's outline of the temporal experience in ancient philosophy might indicate an accurately expanded

picture of what Foucault meant in his discussion of the contemplation of death. I turn to Hadot's

work that influenced Foucault in order to present a reading of this theory of *askēsis*.

Pierre Hadot develops a reading of antique philosophy in his work *Philosophy as a Way*

of Life. In this work, the strain that garnered continuity with Foucault (as pointed out by Arnold

Davidson) is the spiritual practice of ancient philosophy and the way that philosophy as practice

was historically displaced by philosophy as discourse. For the sake of this paper, I read passages

from Hadot's work in order to recall his influence on Foucault's theory of *askēsis* and to draw

attention to salient features of his reading of antique philosophy, especially the ethics of temporal

orientation. Hadot outlines a response to Foucault's reading of his own '*Exercises Spirituels,*'

with attention to the concepts of spiritual exercise as a style of life, the change from philosophy

as practice to philosophy as discourse, and the Christian adoption of certain ascetic practices.[36]

One interesting difference Hadot points to between his understanding of ancient philosophy and

that of Foucault is the role of the self. Hadot writes:

> For [Seneca], human reason is nothing other than reason capable of being
> made perfect. The 'best portion of oneself,' then, is in the last analysis, a
> transcendent self. Seneca does not find his joy in 'Seneca,' but by
> transcending 'Seneca'; by discovering that there is within him – within all
> human beings, that is, and within the cosmos itself – a reason which is part
> of universal reason. In fact, the goal of Stoic exercises is to go beyond the
> self, and think and act in unison with universal reason.[37]

Hadot describes here his understanding of the self as different from that of Foucault. Hadot

thinks that Foucault privileges the individual self. In contrast, Hadot points out that the spiritual

exercises are done on the self in order to overcome this self. In this moment where Hadot and

Foucault present different formulations of the role of the self, Hadot points to a commonality in

their method in reading these ancient texts. Hadot points out that even though he and Foucault

are reading the texts differently, they are both reading them with the goal of "offer[ing]

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contemporary mankind a model of life." Hadot suggests that this goal is prioritized over the

accuracy of the historical "study," and this might give rise to Foucault's reading. Hadot writes:

> I can well understand Foucault's motives for giving short shrift to these
> aspects, of which he was perfectly aware. His description of the practices
> of the self – like, moreover, my description of spiritual exercises – is not
> merely an historical study, but rather a tacit attempt to offer contemporary
> mankind a model of life.[38]

I would like to pause on this passage and consider Hadot's point that Foucault is 'perfectly

aware' of some aspects of *askēsis*, yet deliberately gives them 'short shrift.' Hadot suggests that

Foucault makes this move in order to accomplish his goal in taking up the question of *askēsis*:

the presentation of an ethical scheme. This ethics is not merely a suggestion of how ethics were

understood at a certain historical moment, 'but rather a tacit attempt to offer contemporary

mankind a model of life.' In this turn to *askēsis*, Hadot suggests, Foucault seeks to offer an ethics

to humankind in the modern context.

Hadot argues that in order to accomplish this, Foucault deliberately does not elaborate

some qualities of *askēsis* that he understands full well. I suggest that following from Hadot's

reading of and influence on Foucault, we might better understand the temporal question in the

askēsis of *premeditatio malorum* and *melete thanatou*. Firstly, we might see that Foucault was

thinking of Hadot's understanding of temporal experience from *askēsis*. Secondly, we might

think that Foucault was thinking of this temporal question and deliberately not elaborating this in

order to streamline and clarify his argument in his project of offering an ethics to "contemporary

[hu]mankind."

In a second point of disagreement, Hadot points to Foucault's reading of the temporal

quality of the ascetic practice of "writing of the self." Hadot describes Foucault's account of this

practice:

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This exercise was supposed to allow one to turn back towards the past. The contribution of the *hypomnemata* is one of the means by which one detaches the soul from worries about the future, in order to inflect it towards meditation on the past.' Both in Epicurean and Stoic ethics, Foucault thinks he perceives the refusal of a mental attitude directed toward the future, and the tendency to accord a positive value to the possession of a past which one can enjoy autonomously without worries. It seems to me that this is a mistaken interpretation. [...] Stoics and Epicureans had in common an attitude which consisted in liberating oneself not only from worries about the future, but also from the burden of the past, in order to concentrate on the present moment; in order either to enjoy it, or to act within it. From this point of view, neither the Stoics nor even the Epicureans accorded a positive value to the past. The fundamental philosophic attitude consisted in *living in the present*, and in possessing not the past, but the present.[39]

For Hadot, Foucault misunderstands the temporal organization of this *askēsis*. Hadot believes that the *askēsis* is meant to sustain an attitude of 'living in the present,' rather than focusing on the past or the future. Hadot believes that Foucault emphasizes attention to the past rather than the future, which is incorrect because it pays too much attention to the past. However, in a passage on the *premeditatio malorum,* and in particular the *melete thanatou* from "Hermeneutics of the Subject," Foucault describes precisely this temporal orientation to the present. However, it is very cursory, and I wonder if Foucault spends less time on the temporal question in order to emphasize the ethical model he puts forward. The temporal orientation Foucault describes in the *premeditatio malorum* is very alike the temporal orientation Hadot described of 'living in the present.' I suggest that even if Foucault did not extensively elaborate the temporal question in *askēsis*, he might be using Hadot's reading of *askēsis* as 'living in the present.' Along the lines of Hadot's suggestion, this may have arisen from a commitment to emphasize the ethical model of *askēsis*.

I think it is not coincidental that Foucault mentions the temporal question of *askēsis* in the discussion of the *premediation malorum* and death meditation. The brief remarks on temporal

experience Foucault notes on these might be seen as complimentary with Hadot's reading of death and temporal experience in the lecture that influenced Foucault to turn to *askēsis*. The inaugural address given by Hadot invokes the question of death and temporality in ancient philosophy in summary:

> Linked to the meditation upon death, the theme of the value of the present instant plays a fundamental role in all the philosophical schools. In short it is a consciousness of inner freedom. It can be summarized in a formula of this kind: you will need only yourself in order immediately to find inner peace by ceasing to worry about the past and the future. You can be happy right now, or you will never be happy. Stoicism will insist on the effort needed to pay attention to oneself, the joyous acceptance of the present moment imposed on us by fate. The Epicurean will conceive of this liberation from cares about the past and the future as a relaxation, a pure joy of existing. [40]

In this passage, Hadot describes that the meditation on death turns attention to the present apart from the past or future. Foucault states the purpose of *premeditatio malorum*: "this exercise consists not in contemplating a possible future of real evils, as a way of getting used to it, but in neutralizing both the future and the evil."[41] Perhaps in the discussion of the contemplation of death as an ascetic practice, Foucault is using Hadot's understanding of the ascetic temporal experience as located in the present. If so, perhaps also this offers a response to the biopolitical schema of power that operates on the living body. In order to understand this as a highly political and revolutionary, critical and disrupting move, we might return momentarily to Asad's discussion of secular time as a Foucaultian type of disciplining and at length to Benjamin's discussion of secular time and secularization of natural history.

Asad's discussion of secular modernity accepts that time is one of the mechanisms through which the nation-state operates in order to regulate subjects and discipline them into properly ordered modern bodies and subjects. As shown in Foucault's writing on disciplinary power, temporal experience is one of the mechanisms of power through which subjects are

constituted. Foucault's theory of *askēsis* names practices that constitute the subject. However, in the contemplation of death, the practice allows an experience of time that dislodges the subject from the secular time that is homogenizing, normalizing, and disciplining.

Walter Benjamin founds this notion of secular time that Asad recognizes as a mechanism of the state's exercise of power. In addition, Benjamin discusses temporal orientations, such as that in natural history, which disrupt the homogeneity and force of secular time. I turn to an early work of Benjamin in order to discuss the temporal quality of secularization and how this has a disrupting operation. I hope, through this discussion of Benjamin, to present a way to understand the political implications of Foucault's *askēsis* and 'living in the present' as a radically critical act. In order to elaborate this explanation, I will address how Benjamin's theories of secularization and its time demonstrate the radical condition of living in the present, and how this disrupts secular time.

Like in Foucault's theory of biopolitics, Benjamin's theory of secularization demonstrates how death is a rupture in a political governance, in this case, political sovereignty. Although biopolitics and sovereignty operate differently, both dissociate at the collapse of 'progressive secular time.' In this way, the temporal disruption in Benjamin can illuminate how the temporal experience in the *premeditatio malorum* disrupts the disciplining of the modern subject according to hegemonic norms.

CHAPTER III

BENJAMIN: SECULARIZATION AND THE TEMPORAL EXPERIENCE NOT
ASSIMILATED INTO SECULAR TIME

Benjamin's early work, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, was written to present a

literary criticism of German baroque mourning plays. In this work, Benjamin argues that

sovereignty cannot exceed natural history, i.e., the state in which the world is not meaningful

according to its determination from an external, transcendent, or sovereign source. The condition

of natural history that no longer allows sovereignty also characterizes life in its finitude.

Secularization is the process which transforms the world into this "graceless" state. Through

secularization, the world is stripped of metaphysical meaning, and anything that could give this

meaning (history, sovereignty, art) are all reduced to material conditions that experience time

spatially instead of chronologically. This temporal experience maintains a strict relationship to

the present and the decaying material world. The results of this process of secularization are that

political sovereignty no longer obtains and that life is characterized as "fallen," "creaturely," and

dying.

Secularization, a process Benjamin theorizes as the loss of transcendent meaning for the

world, is the process that renders the experience of time as natural history and the condition of

life as its finitude. Both of these results of the process of secularization pose fundamental

problems to the governing mechanisms fueled by the logic of secular time. As noted in the

introductory remarks on Asad, the modern project seeks to homogenize and assimilate

temporalities into a single streamlined homogeneous time. Natural history breaks apart the neat

succession of events, leaving instead a pile of history as ruin, presenting precisely the temporality that challenges the homogeneity of secular time in the modern project. Life experienced in its finitude, or death, also challenges politics which seeks to capture and control death, reigning it into the domain of its control.

Benjamin writes, in natural history, time is "secularized in the setting."[42] Through this process, time no longer moves chronologically into a past or future. Rather, time is represented spatially, i.e., materially and in the present. The material world is left to its materiality, and its only projected future or meaning is decay. In the context of natural history where secularization contains life within the present, the subject experiences an irreducible relationship to her own body in the present and its material corporeality. Benjamin describes natural history's "form of life" as "the experience of the destructive effect of time, of inevitable intransience, of the fall from the heights."[43] In the 'experience of the destructive effect of time,' 'life' in the form of the human body, experiences time as its own decay, i.e., as the mortality of the body. Thus, the temporality of natural history characterizes life as finite, or, promised to death. As natural history attends to the very corporeality of the body, natural history has to attend to the certainty of death because the experience of the body as decay points to the finitude of human life. Benjamin's description of 'secularization' in this argument thus founds the critical force of *askēsis*, where the material body is an object used to exploit the finitude of life as the limit of biopolitics.

Walter Benjamin's work on the *Trauerspiel* is methodologically a literary criticism. In order to understand the process of "secularization" presented in this work, we might observe the philosophical problem of representation for Benjamin. Because Benjamin presents this question of secularization through a theory of allegorical representation, it is possible to understand the temporal aspect of the contemplation of death in Foucault's *askēsis* through Benjamin's theory

of allegory. In his theory of allegory, Benjamin establishes the temporal quality of natural history in which political sovereignty loses its force and life is 'fallen,' in other words, in which normative politics that operate on the grounds of secular time (and through the control of the right of death) are destabilized. Natural history, i.e., history that occurs simultaneously and spatially rather than chronologically, leaves one to experience time in the strictly present and in confrontation with the material world in its decay. Natural history arises from the process of secularization. Benjamin defines secularization[44]:

> Where it is a question of a realization in terms of space – and what else is meant by its secularization other than its transformation into the strictly present – then the most radical procedure is to make events simultaneous. The duality of meaning and reality was reflected in the construction of the stage.[45]

Time conflated into space as secularization happens in the 'radical procedure […] to make events simultaneous.' This is a temporality that denies a past or future. If events are simultaneous, they do not happen before or after one another: they are in the "strictly present." This "strictly" denies the possibility of an alternative; the present is the only option. However, in this present is the 'duality of meaning and reality,' which means the difference between an object and its representation. If they are different, then they cannot be reduced into just the metaphysical meaning in its relationship to past and future events. One does not explain the other; their relationships are irreducible. The irreducibility of the object and its representation is evident in allegorical representation. The simultaneous representation of an object and its irreducibility to that representation is the purpose of allegory. For Benjamin, secularization is a form where time cannot be made into history (as history is traditionally understood as narrative, i.e., 'empty homogeneous time'). Secularization does put in place a different notion of history, which Benjamin calls "natural." In this history, one meaning does not determine events, and time

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need not be homogenous. Secularization shifts history from its transcendent position and

'scatters [it] like seeds over the ground.' Benjamin writes:

> For the decisive factor in the escapism of the baroque is not the antithesis of history and nature but the comprehensive secularization of the historical in the state of creation. It is not eternity that is opposed to the disconsolate chronicle of world-history, but the restoration of the timelessness of paradise. History merges into the setting. And in the pastoral plays above all, history is scattered like seeds over the ground. […] If history is secularized in the setting […] chronological movement is grasped and analyzed in a spatial image.[46]

The state of creation is a state in which objects in the world are not assigned a transcendent

meaning by a transcendent (sovereign) origin. Narrative does not determine meaning of the

world; rather, the world "absorbs" history. Benjamin writes:

> Whereas the Middle Ages present the futility of world events and the transience of the creature as stations on the road to salvation, the German *Trauerspiel* is taken up entirely with the hopelessness of the earthly condition. Such redemption as it knows resides in the depths of this destiny itself rather than in the fulfillment of a divine plan of salvation"[47]

The baroque *Trauerspiel* focuses on the "earthly condition," the condition of the state of

creation. Redemption of objects in this earthly world is not achieved through their 'fulfillment of

a divine plan.' In other words, the world and its objects are not organized according to another,

transcendent, other-worldly meaning as in the case of the Middle Ages cited above. In the

Trauerspiel, 'redemption as it knows,' rather, is located in the very earthly condition. The

'redemption' is qualified because it is different than redemption conventionally conceived of as

received from an external, transcendent source. Baroque redemption is secularized history:

Benjamin's natural history. Benjamin cites a 'decisive factor of the baroque' is the

"comprehensive secularization of the historical in the state of creation."[48] For the notion of

secularization, history is not lost, but secularized. This means that the world absorbs history in its

earthliness, and history no longer can assign meaning to the world from outside of it.

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Secularization is the removal of transcendentally assigned meaning to history, or, narrative. His natural history of the secular allows the irresolvable tensions that history tries to eliminate to come into focus. Secularization reveals the object outside of history. Allegorical representation shows the irreducibility of the object to its image, and of the world to narrative. In this way, it resists the homogenizing capacities of secular homogeneous time.

Benjamin elaborates the condition of life in natural history in terms of allegory because allegory is a form of representation that takes place in baroque theater that displays natural history and immanent life. For Benjamin, philosophy is a question of representation, and allegory is the representation suited to life because of allegory's temporal orientation to materiality and death. The definition of allegory is a representation of an object that makes no attempt to recover the object it represents in the representation. Rather, allegory is the form of representation that purposefully maintains the difference of the object from its concept, particularly in its development over time, and allows the portrayal of this difference.[49] The object is separated from its representation temporally, and allegorical representation exposes the difference between the object represented and its representation. Benjamin describes allegory:

> Everything that the *Trauerspiel* represents is not what it represents. There is no world–order change that takes place, the […] purpose of the *Trauerspiel* is to mourn the loss of meaning, the decay of nature. It thus does not use meaning to put a redemptive narrative in place, but calls attention to the artifice of the show itself as a redemptive process for art. This process is the corrective of pointing out the allegorical nature of representation and the way that language is used to show this allegory.[50]

In this passage, Benjamin explains that the 'loss of meaning' that takes place in the process of secularization is precisely what allegory shows. Because the representation is false, nature does not have meaning; it only decays.

This passage also indicates the philosophical question of representation for Benjamin. Because the allegorical representation of the *Trauerspiel* reveals the artifice of artistic representation itself, there is a redemptive process for art. Benjamin describes the moral capacity of art is understood negatively, as the failure of art to represent that moral capacity of the human, i.e., life itself that is subject to death.[51] Allegory is the form of representation that points to this difference between life and representation. When art points to the impossibility of representing what is moral, are has a moral role. Benjamin contrasts allegory with symbol:

> Whereas in the symbol […] the transfigured face of nature is fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption, in allegory the observer is confronted with […] history as a petrified, primordial landscape. Everything about history that, from the very beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, is expressed in a face – or rather in death's head. […] This is the heart of the allegorical way of seeing, of the baroque, secular explanation of history as the Passion of the world; its importance resides solely in the stations of its decline. The greater the significance, the greater the subjection to death, because death digs most deeply the jagged line of demarcation between physical nature and significance. And if nature has always been subject to the power of death, it is also true that it has always been allegorical. Significance and death both come to fruition in historical development, just as they are closely linked as seeds in the creature's graceless state of sin.[52]

In this passage, death in allegory demonstrates the temporality that results from the process of secularization. The 'symbol' which tries to redeem and 'transfigure' nature is gone. Rather, allegory sees the world as dying, and thus most pointedly 'digs most deeply' between 'nature and significance.' Death, or the promise of death, is the only future for nature, and thus its only present; death thus separates nature from its significance because it limits nature to its materiality. Allegory is the representation that is appropriate to this state of (natural) history because it leaves the materiality of the object to decay even in the representation itself. When (fallen) life is just decay, then representation is allegorical. Allegorical representation is the appropriate representation of life as decay because allegorical representation always recalls the

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time that separates the object from its metaphysical representation. Life is decay because it is subject to time, which always culminates in death. Because life always culminates in death, its representation is allegorical, the representation of the time that separates the object or person from their metaphysical transcendent position.

There are two results of secularization and the temporality of natural history that are important in this argument. Firstly, sovereignty is disarticulated. Secondly, life is experienced in relationship to death, and the resulting temporal experience resists homogeneous time. On the disarticulation of political sovereignty: with this theory of natural history, Benjamin founds a concept of life and demonstrates how sovereignty cannot regulate this form of life. In order to understand the disarticulation of sovereignty, it is necessary to understand the temporal change that occurs in the process of secularization. In addition, the question of political sovereignty in Benjamin's work could be understood in relation to Carl Schmitt's theory of sovereignty.

In his "On the Concept of History" of 1940, Benjamin states: "the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule."[53] In these theses, Benjamin addresses history in regards to his historical political context – the fascism rising in Germany. In order to comment on his political context, he employs the very vocabulary through which Schmitt defines the sovereign and state, and against which he theorizes the sovereign in the *Trauerspiel* work. To assert that the 'state of emergency' is 'the rule' is to assert that history is not a form in which a norm continues until an interruption, in which case the sovereign restores the norm. Rather, history takes a form where there is no interruption or exception because there is only interruption, or 'state of emergency.' There is no state of the norm. There is a temporal requirement for Schmitt's theory of sovereignty to obtain, and Benjamin's notion of natural history abandons this temporality. The notion of history on which Schmitt's sovereignty depends

is precisely the 'empty homogeneous time' to which Asad refers. This temporality depends on

the experience of time as discrete, causal moments. For example, Schmitt's theory of sovereignty

depends on the understanding that the state of exception is absolutely separate from the state of

the norm. If they were the same, they could not be separated into discrete moments, related only

through the sovereign's narrative. The claim that there is an absolute separation between the state

of exception and the state of the norm also demonstrates the necessity of the sovereign in that his

decision is the only way to restore the state of the norm and that the sovereign creates the

narrative.

Political sovereignty is disarticulated in Benjamin's theory in two respects. The first

respect is the temporal confinement to the 'strictly present' does not allow the possibility of the

form of history (as secularism/secular time) on which Schmitt's political sovereign relies. The

temporality of natural history, in which time is spatialized, does not allow the singularity and

discrete-ness of the sovereign decision because there can be no decision in simultaneous events.

Weber writes that in Benjamin's natural history:

> The sovereign is incapable of making a decision, because a decision, in the
> strict sense, is not possible in a world that leaves no place for
> heterogeneity: the inauthentic 'natural' history of the baroque allows for
> no interruption or radical suspension of its perennial interruptions.[54]

For Benjamin, the "modern concept of sovereignty" is different from his disarticulated

sovereign in natural history. Benjamin writes:

> Whereas the modern concept of sovereignty amounts to a supreme
> executive power on the part of the prince, the baroque concept emerges
> from a discussion of the state of emergency, and makes it the most
> important function of the prince to avert this.[55]

In natural history, the transcendent sovereign is subsumed into the state of nature. This results in

the disarticulation of the sovereign by a history that cannot be aligned into singularly determined

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moments that absolutize time and events. History for Benjamin in the *Trauerspiel* is natural and

constantly interruptive. Without the possibility of interruption or exception, the sovereign

decision is impossible. Natural history leaves the baroque sovereign to the state of exception

over which he has no control. In contrast, Schmitt preserves narrative secular time: the decision

links events in narrative, and the sovereign remains intact. In natural history, Benjamin's

sovereign is not absolute, transcendent, and singularly exceptional to the world around him. He

is immanent to the state of nature, subject to it, and cannot perform the political act of the

decision.

The second respect in which political sovereignty is disarticulated in natural history arises

from the process of secularization rendering the world as mere material decay, including human

life. In this way, the body of the king is never more than creature. So, the sovereign malfunctions

because he is a mortal human among mortal humans. The finitude of everyone's life – ruler and

ruled – deprives politics of any force when politics rely on maintaining an external position.

Everyone is in the world, mortal. Weber explains the condition of the sovereign in the state of

nature after secularization:

> In this perspective, the 'function' of the sovereign to 'exclude' the state of
> exception conforms fully to the attempt of the German baroque to exclude
> transcendence. But the very same desire to exclude transcendence also
> condemns the function of the sovereign to malfunction: for unlike the
> political –theological 'analogy' of Schmitt, the baroque sovereign – and
> particularly, the German baroque sovereign – is defined precisely by his
> *difference* from god, just as baroque imminence sets itself up in
> contradistinction to theological transcendence."[56]

The disarticulation of the sovereign is the necessary result of the exclusion of transcendence, or,

secularization. The sovereign in the *Trauerspiel* "malfunctions." Once the sovereign enters

"baroque imminence" he no longer has the capacity to stand outside of the world to maintain

order, act, or determine. Without this capacity to determine, the sovereign no longer has sovereignty. Imminence "condemns the function of the sovereign to malfunction."

Weber writes on the disarticulation of the sovereign as a 'malfunction: for unlike the political –theological 'analogy' of Schmitt, the baroque sovereign – and particularly, the German baroque sovereign – is defined precisely by his *difference* from god, just as baroque imminence sets itself up in contradistinction to theological transcendence.' When the sovereign is different from god (or, immanent to nature, or, lacking transcendence), he or she cannot perform the decision, and sovereignty is impossible.[57] Benjamin describes the sovereign in the immanent state of natural history. Like history itself, the sovereign is absorbed into the "state of creation," and cannot exist but on this level. As such, it does not matter to the question of immanence whether he is the sovereign or one of the creatures he governs. No matter where the sovereign is in relation to other creatures, he is still immanent to the world. When immanent, the sovereign cannot create meaning or narrative from outside and above the world, and thus, can no longer be sovereign. Where Schmitt understands the decision of the sovereign to determine the state of exception, the sovereign determines the state and has the control to change this. In this way, he stands outside of the world: it is from outside of the world that he can determine it. For Benjamin, the sovereign, who is defined by this decision, no longer stands outside of the state of things. He is *subsumed into* the state of things. As a result, he is not able to make a decision, and his sovereignty is "disarticulated."[58] The temporality of natural history disarticulates the sovereign in two ways. The strict present excludes the possibility of a sovereign decision that is singular. Also, the creaturely state of life condemns the sovereign to creatureliness, a position from which he cannot govern. Besides the end of political sovereignty, the temporality introduced by secularization acts on (all, besides the king's) life itself.

Benjamin's concept of 'fallen life,' or life experienced in terms of its decay and death, must also be understood in terms of the temporal shift that occurs in the process of secularization. In the following passage, Benjamin describes "life" in the condition of natural history. In this case, life has undergone the process of secularization, like history (which becomes natural), the world (which becomes decay), and representation (which becomes allegory). Secularization introduces a temporal experience in which time is experienced in a strict present and results in the confrontation with the material (which resonates with the critical force of Foucault's *askēsis* in terms of living in the present). Benjamin describes life in natural history as: "the form of life opposed to it was something else; it was the experience of the destructive effect of time, of inevitable intransience, of the fall from the heights."[59]

Benjamin elaborates the moral nature of life in baroque natural history in a passage which indicates that this "fallen life" is also "creaturely" for Benjamin. He writes:

> The prohibition of representation of the human body obviates any
> suggestion that the sphere in which moral essence of man is perceptible
> can be reproduced. Everything moral is bound to life in its extreme sense,
> that is to say where it fulfills itself in death, the abode of danger as such.
> And from the point of view of any kind of artistic practice this life, which
> concerns us morally, that is in our unique individuality, appears as
> something negative, or at least should appear so.[60]

This passage indicates that 'where [life] fulfills itself in death,' or, in the secularized state in which its only temporal orientation directs attention to the decay one experiences in the present, is what is 'moral' about life. Once again, the temporal structure of natural history gives rise to the form of 'fallen life' that cannot be determined by political sovereignty. For Benjamin, the moral capacity of life is precisely the fact that it dies. The decay of natural history does not lack redemption in a conventional sense because it is immoral. The decay is precisely what reveals its moral quality.

What is moral about life is also what offers the possibility of temporalities besides 'empty, homogeneous time.' As secular time and political sovereignty operate dominantly, secularization presents a temporality that might be occupied which also breaks apart hegemonic homogeneous time. The sovereign cannot govern this life (in natural history) because, first of all, the sovereign figure is as subject to the passions as are his subjects, and his creaturely human state prevents him/her from holding the external position from which the sovereign decision is made. i.e., the sovereign is not god (as Weber points out). Secondly, natural history disarticulates sovereignty because the sovereign decision is only possible in homogeneous time, narrative time, or historicism. In natural history, the discrete temporal moment of the sovereign decision cannot obtain because time is spatialized. Events occur simultaneously, and do not determine one another causally. In this notion of time, the sovereign decision's temporal requirements are not there to found the capacity of sovereignty itself. In addition, Benjamin's notion of natural history founds a form of life which is characterized by death, and through this characterization of life as finite, Benjamin presents a temporal experience in which one is dislodged to some degree from secular time and politics.

The body – in its promise to death – always presents a fact of excess beyond the political regulation of that body. Benjamin does not elaborate the mechanisms through which power operates on this finite body. However, following from this reading of Benjamin's notion of secularization and its way of disrupting secular time, we can see how the ascetic 'living in the present' matters at all. Benjamin's theory of secularization introduces a temporal experience that responds to political hegemony that relies on a secular narrative form of time and introduces a constant contemplation of death. In these ways, the process of secularization is destabilizing to modern secular politics that intend to homogenize an experience of time for political ends.

Let me revisit Talal Asad's argument on secular time and death to suggest the significance for Benjamin's theory of secularization and natural history in contrast with secular time. Asad follows Foucault's theory of how power operates to discipline subjects, and pays particular attention to the way secular modernity holds disciplining mechanisms, as Foucault describes, in order to constitute secular modern subjects. Asad discusses both Foucault and Benjamin in order to make his argument on the anthropology of secularism. Asad sees that secular time, as Benjamin describes, 'empty homogeneous time' is a homogenizing, normativizing process. Secular time is a mechanism of history-making; and it constitutes secular modern subjects. In this project, we see how secular time is a disciplining process. Here, Asad demonstrates how Benjamin's theory of secular time operates as a Foucaultian 'mechanism of power.' In this, Asad sets up the relationship between Foucault and Benjamin that allows us to see the critical force of *askēsis* on temporal grounds. If secular time is a mechanism of power, and secularization disrupts secular time, then we can see how 'living in the present' as a comparison with secularization has critical force.

CHAPTER IV

FOUCAULT'S *ASKĒSIS* AND THE CRITICAL FORCE OF THE TEMPORAL NATURE OF
THE CONTEMPLATION OF DEATH

Considering Benjamin's theory of secularization, it follows that an experience of time

can have significant political implications. In the case of Benjamin's natural history, i.e. the

temporal experience that arises from the process of secularization, political sovereignty is

disarticulated and a subject experiences life precisely in the capacity that exceeds modern

politics: their own finitude. I argue that Foucault's theory of *askēsis* of meditation on death is an

ethical practice which is meant to introduce the possibility of constituting a subjectivity in

response to normative modern politics. Benjamin's notion of 'empty homogeneous time' as

discussed by Asad is an operation of modern disciplinary power. The *askēsis* of contemplating

death considers the ethical practice of experiencing a certain temporality which interrupts politics

that rely on a hegemonic normative temporal experience.

The potential for an ethical formation to disrupt political norms are elaborated by Edward

McGushin in his book *Foucault's Askesis*. McGushin argues that *askēsis* are practices

undertaken in face of, or against, the practice of the subject in hegemonic politics. For example,

where flattery was the common practice of the democracy in the city-state, Plato presented

parrhēsia, speaking the truth, as an ethical practice (*askēsis*) that would improve the politics of

the state by improving the ethical formation of its subjects.[61] In this final chapter, I describe this

ethical model of *askēsis* in Foucault, which has the potential to disrupt politics. Finally, I propose

a reading of the temporal aspect of the *askēsis* of contemplation of death and its political

significance in modern secular politics that operate through the organization of a temporal experience.

I consider the following the main line of argumentation in Foucault's theory of *askēsis*: *askēsis* is a management of life through the cultivation of our own bodies.[62] Foucault describes *askēsis* of ethical formation as: "the means by which we can change ourselves in order to become ethical subjects […] you can do different things to the self […] which I call the self-forming activity [*pratique de soi*] or *l'ascetisme*.[63] The person forms herself into an ethical subject through adopted *practices*. These practices use oneself, for example one's own body, as the medium to constitute one's own subjectivity.[64]

The object of *askēsis* is to relate to an ethical telos. For Foucault, the ethical telos is the "being" which the subject becomes through the practices of *askēsis*.[65] In "Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," Foucault describes the component of ethical formation, *askēsis*:

> What are the means by which we can change ourselves in order to become ethical subjects? […] What are we to do, either to moderate our acts, or to decipher what we are, or to eradicate our desires, or to use our sexual desire in order to obtain certain aims such as having children, and so on – all this elaboration of ourselves in order to behave ethically? In order to be faithful to your wife, you can do different things to the self. That's the third aspect, which I call the self-forming activity [*pratique de soi*] or *l'ascetisme – asceticism* in a very broad sense.[66]

This component of *askesis* addresses the means by which the person forms him or herself into an ethical subject. This component focuses on the *practices* that the subject adopts and the way these practices relate to the fourth element, telos. Foucault describes telos:

> The fourth aspect is: what is the kind of being to which we aspire when we behave in a moral way? For instance, shall we become pure, or immortal, or free, or masters of ourselves, and so on. So that's what I call telos.[67]

The telos relates to the mode of subjectivation Foucault describes. The moral obligations one is motivated to pursue are related to the telos in that the fulfillment of the moral obligations would result in the "being" defined in the telos. The telos is not always the same, or essential. Foucault names a variety of ethical telos. One "kind of being to which we aspire" is an "immortal" being. An ethical formulation that promises an afterlife following a life characterized by certain moral actions would have this telos. A "free" being might be the telos of secular liberal ethics, as Asad describes them in his essay on blasphemy, having freedom of speech.[68]

One example of a historical ethics and its *askēsis* is discussed in Foucault's "Hermeneutic of the Subject," in which he elaborates the historic ascetic practices at Seneca. He addresses the relationship between *askēsis* and the telos in his ethical scheme and attends to the role of the body in this ethical formation. He writes:

> The cultivation of the self comprised a set of practices designated by the general term *askēsis*. It is appropriate first to analyze its objectives. […] we do not have to perform feats on ourselves (philosophical *askēsis* looks with suspicion on these figures who point to the marvels of their abstinences, their fasts, their foreknowledge of the future). Like a good wrestler, we must learn only what till enable us to bear up events that may occur; we must learn not to let ourselves be thrown by them, and not to let ourselves be thrown by them, and not to let ourselves be overwhelmed by the emotions that they may give rise to in ourselves.[69]

In this passage, Foucault identifies the telos of this ethical formation at Seneca as a self-mastery in which one is not emotionally impacted by the external world. The 'kind of being to which [one] aspire[s]' is one that controls their emotions in face of events. The moral obligation is 'not to let ourselves be overwhelmed by the emotions that [events] may give rise to in ourselves.' This ethical formation is a cultivation of the self that has mastery of his or her emotions in the face of external events.

The relationship of the *askēsis* to their telos is stressed in that the *askēsis* are not performed in their own right, as an end in themselves. Foucault points out, 'philosophical *askēsis* looks with suspicion on these figures who point to the marvels of their abstinences.' The *askēsis* are not practices directed at the demonstration of the skillful execution of the practices. Rather, *askēsis* are directed at the telos of mastery of emotions. Foucault explains the internalization of truthful discourses was an ascetic practice to this end. He writes:

> Seneca suggests instead […] the absorption of a truth imparted by a teaching, a reading, or a piece of advice; and one assimilates it so thoroughly that it becomes a part of oneself, an abiding, always-active, inner principle of action. In a practice such as this, one does not rediscover a truth hidden deep within oneself through an impulse of recollection; one internalizes accepted texts through a more and more thorough appropriation.[70]

The truth which allows the subject to master his or her emotions is not inherent to the subject his or herself; it is not 'hidden deep within oneself,' but external to the subject. It is 'imparted by a teaching, a reading, or a piece of advice.' Through the *askēsis*, the subject internalizes these externally-originated truths. The subject 'assimilates it so thoroughly that is becomes a part of oneself.' This is the telos of the practice, to make the truth a part of oneself that dictates one's actions. However, because the truth is not intrinsically inherent to the human, the subject can only achieve this telos through *askēsis*. Foucault stresses this point that the truth does not originate from within the subject:

> It is not a matter of uncovering a truth in the subject or of making the soul the place where truth resides, through an essential kinship or an original law, the truth; nor is it a matter of making the soul the object of a true discourse. We are still very far from what would be a hermeneutic of the subject. The object, rather, is to arm the subject with a truth it did not know, one that did not reside in it; what is wanted is to make this learned, memorized truth, progressively put into practice, a quasi subject that reigns supreme in us.[71]

The hermeneutic of the subject that this ethical scheme does *not* have is the human as a bearer of truth. The telos of this ethical scheme is a subject who has internalized given truths so completely that the truth 'reigns supreme' and directs the subject to ethical action. Foucault addresses the specific physical and mental *askēsis* used in this ethical scheme at Seneca. The physical *askēsis* include fasting and demonstrate the way *askēsis* relate to an ethical telos. Foucault describes the physical *askēsis*:

> In the cultivation of the self, these exercises have another meaning it is a matter of establishing and testing the individual's independence relative to the external world. […] One engages in athletic activities that whet the appetite; then one takes his place before tables laden with the most savory dishes; and, after gazing upon them, one gives them to the servants while taking the simple and frugal nourishment of a poor man for oneself.[72]

The telos of these practices is a subject whose emotions are mastered in face of events in the world and who is able to do so because they have internalized truth. The practice is enacting this mastery in face of events. One enacts his or her 'independence' in order to prove that they are independent. Foucault gives the example of fasting even when one does not need to. First the person 'engages in athletic activities that whet the appetite' and 'takes his place before tables laden with the most savory dishes.' These two actions ensure that the person is both hungry and has delicious food available. As a result, the decision to take only: 'simple and frugal nourishment' is not due to a lack of desire to eat. Rather, the person has the desire to eat; yet this desire is one he can master. He does not eat on order to prove that he can master the feeling of hunger; he can choose not to eat if he so wishes. The point is "to establish […] that he is fully capable of bearing it"[73] by undergoing the trial to prove that he can bear it. The body, through *askēsis*, is worked upon or performed so that the subject fits his or her ethical telos

One particular mental *askēsis* Foucault presents at Seneca, the *premeditatio malorum*, relates the subject to a temporality that allows us to see how Foucault's *askēsis* respond to

biopolitics because it organizes (a temporal orientation to the present and) the body around death, or, the body's excess of modern governance. The possibility of death is always present with the body in each moment. In the *premeditatio malorum*, the temporal organization that sustains attention to a present (apart from its future and past) locates attention on the corporeality of the body. In the attention to the materiality of the body, one sees the finitude of life and limits of politics. The finitude of the body becomes the center of an ethics, or way of life. Because one's own death is a moment where the subject exceeds politics, the contemplation of this moment has critical potential as a response against modern biopolitics and secular time**.**

The mental *askēsis* of the *premeditatio malorum* are meditations in which a subject imagines him or herself without a future, or, in the certainty of death. Foucault describes the *praemeditatio malorum* as: "systematically imagining the worst that might happen […] these things should not be considered as a possibility in the relatively distant future, but envisioned as already present, already occurring."[74] Instead of imagining possible events in the future, one imagines them "as already present, already occurring." Possibilities, such as "the worst," are thus in each moment, as the present. One could not act on the basis of the argument that the action could cause something undesirable to happen in the future. Everything undesirable, 'the worst,' is in the present. If 'the worst' is in each present moment, then there was no good, or better, moment before the 'worst.' As such, there was no action that changed the condition of the person from that of a 'good' moment to 'the worst' one after. As a result, the present cannot be seen as the result of an action in the past.

This temporal orientation is very alike the temporal orientation Hadot described of 'living in the present.' I suggest that even if Foucault did not extensively elaborate the temporal question in *askēsis,* he agreed with Hadot's reading of *askēsis* as 'living in the present.' As Hadot

suggests, this may have arisen from a commitment to emphasize the ethical model of *askēsis*. The brief remarks on temporal experience Foucault notes on the *premediation malorum* and death meditation might be seen as complimentary with Hadot's reading of death and temporal experience in the lecture that influenced Foucault to turn to *askēsis*. As mentioned above, the inaugural address given by Hadot invokes the question of death and temporality in ancient philosophy: "linked to the meditation upon death, the theme of the value of the present instant plays a fundamental role in all the philosophical schools."[75] In this passage, Hadot describes that the meditation on death turns the attention to the present apart from the past or future. Foucault states the purpose of *premeditatio malorum*: "this exercise consists not in contemplating a possible future of real evils, as a way of getting used to it, but in neutralizing both the future and the evil."[76] This temporal orientation/practice that pays attention to the present and one's own body as an object that dies is a temporality alike to one experienced in Benjamin's natural history. Through this connection, it is evident how *askēsis* has an explosive critical and ethical potential as a practice in modern life.

Benjamin's theory of secularization as presented in his work on the *Trauerspiel* demonstrates how the temporality of natural history fractures and dislodges hegemonic homogeneous secular time. This secular time is always broken apart because it cannot ever encompass life in its material, decaying, and chaotic form. Even Carl Schmitt recognized that life explodes through the torpid structure of the modern state law. Likewise, Foucault points out that biopolitics is always exceeded by life itself; even as it seeks to maintain life against death – the limit of biopower – death will always escape biopolitical regulation. Natural history escapes political regulation because it destabilizes the secular time on which it rests, and locates life precisely in death, outside of the domain of modern political regulation.

As Talal Asad demonstrated, secular time operates politically and seeks to encompass and subsume other temporalities within its overriding framework. It is precisely these alternate temporalities which operate to pull apart secular homogeneous time. If Foucault's theory of the contemplation of death as an *askēsis* that forms an ethical person as a response to political norms is one of these alternate temporalities, it is precisely a response to the politics which rely on 'empty homogeneous time.' Furthermore, Foucault's argument on *askēsis* as a temporality which orients one to 'living in the present' presents a response to modern regulation of life insofar as this can be compared to the temporality of natural history. Natural history allows a temporal experience in which the subject experiences her own death and decay as characteristic of life itself. In this way, death, which is the excess of modern political regulation of the body, becomes a focal point through which a subjectivity is constituted. In this way, there is a possible contemplation which is a response to modern articulations of power.

ENDNOTES

[1] Weigel, Sigrid. *Body- and Image- Space: Rereading Walter Benjamin.* Trans. Georgina Paul

[2] Asad, Talal. *Formations of the Secular.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003*,* 5.

[3] Ibid., 13

[4] Asad, Talal. *On Suicide Bombing*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007*,* 8.

[5] Ibid., 88.

[6] Ibid., 67.

[7] Foucault, Michel. *History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1990, 139-140.

[8] Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1995, 137.

[9] Ibid., 137-8.

[10] Ibid., 160.

[11] Ibid., 167.

[12] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 143.

[13] Ibid., 143.

[14] Ibid., 139-140.

[15] Ibid.*,* 136*.*

[16] Ibid., 136.

[17] Ibid.,142.

[18] Ibid.,143.

[19] Ibid., 143.

[20] Ibid.*,* 139.

[21] Ibid., 137.

[22] Ibid.,142.

[23] Ibid., 138.

[24] Ibid.,143.

[25] Davidson, Arnold I. *Foucault and his Interlocutors*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997, 195.

[26] Ibid., 195.

[27] Ibid., 195.

[28] Ibid., 197.

[29] Ibid., 197

[30] Ibid., 197

[31] Ibid., 198

[32] Ibid., 199.

[33] Ibid., 200.

[34] Ibid., 200.

[35] Ibid., 201.

[36] Ibid., 206.

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[37] Hadot, Pierre. *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. Ed. Arnold I. Davidson. Malden: Blackwell, 1995*, 207.

[38] Ibid., 208.

[39] Ibid., 209-210.

[40] Ibid., 69.

[41] Foucault, Michel. "Hermeneutic of the Subject," *The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, Ed. Paul Rabinow, Trans. Robert Hurley and Others, New York: The New York Press, 2000, 103.

[42] Benjamin, Walter. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, New York: Verso, 2009, 92. The full passage reads: "The form of life opposed to it was something else; it was the experience of the destructive effect of time, of inevitable intransience, of the fall from the heights. Remote from high things, the existence of the *beaus ille* must therefore be beyond the reach of all change. And so for the baroque nature is only one way out of time; and the baroque does not know the problems of subsequent ages. On the contrary: what is peculiar about the baroque enthusiasm for landscape is particularly evident in the pastoral. For the decisive factor in the escapism of the baroque is not the antithesis of history and nature but the comprehensive secularization of the historical in the state of creation. It is not eternity that is opposed to the disconsolate chronicle of world-history, but the restoration of the timelessness of paradise. History merges into the setting. And in the pastoral plays above all, history is scattered like seeds over the ground. […] if history is secularized in the setting […] chronological movement is grasped and analyzed in a spatial image."

[43] Ibid., 92.

[44] I would argue for Benjamin 'the secular' can form a narrative history via "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" and "Critique of Violence." In the "Work of Art" essay, he points to the continuity of the work of art even in its secular stage as opposed to secularization. Secularization, which does have critical force, was achieved in art with the advent of photography, which recalls the failure of absolute narrative representation through its form, like allegory. Likewise in his "Critique of Violence," the secular is a narrative enacted in law. As narrative history, the secular has a logic of representation in which events are linked to one another. In this piece, Benjamin points to divine violence which is not rationalized in a means-ends narrative relationship, perhaps a secularized violence. This would be opposed to the secular violence of the law as it perpetuates itself in a narrative. Thus, the secular can still have a narrative and act politically. In fact, as it is tied to modernity, it must have a narrative and a politics for scholars such as Talal Asad.

[45] Benjamin, *Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, 194.

[46] Ibid., 92.

[47] Ibid., 81.

[48] Ibid., 92.

[49] I suspect this has a compelling resonance with the following passage from Asad's *On suicide Bombing:* "The significance of this process lies not in an awareness of approaching death or of weakening powers but in the *irresistible dissociation between self and body*, between, on the one hand, the stationary image of an embodied identity built up in one's full vigor and, on the other hand, a body less and less able to respond adequately to the routines and expectations attached to that self-image. Memory mocks the present. If memory is the reproduction of the past in the present, there is a parallel process in an aging body that reproduces the future in the present.

Physical and mental decay are not merely anticipated intellectually but embodied in the present as extensions: failing eyesight, hearing, and strength; the loosening of skin and muscle; the distortion of body and rotting of flesh. Passion, attention, and memory are together attenuated: unassisted, life declines into nonlife. Whereas the past is lodged in uncertain memories and is thus increasingly uncertain, the future acquires an increasing physical reality. *Inscribed in the body is an image of the future that is nothing more than a continuous unbinding or emptying.* Repressed horror typically attaches to that process," 83.

[50] Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* 233.

[51] Ibid.,105.

[52] Ibid., 166.

[53] Benjamin, Walter. "On the Concept of History." *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 4.* Ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2006, 392.

[54] Weber, Samuel. "Taking Exception to Decision: Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt." *Diacritics,* Vol. 22, No.3/4, Autumn-Winter 1992: 5-18, 14-15.

[55] Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 65.

[56] Weber, "Taking Exception to Decision," 14.

[57] Conversely, a secular sovereign has replaced the assignment of meaning by god with their own assignment of meaning, but they are structurally the same and perform the same political function.

[58] Weber, "Taking Exception to Decision," 9.

[59] Benjamin, *Origin of the German Tragic Drama,* 92.

[60] Ibid., 105.

[61] McGushin, Edward F. *Foucault's Askesis: An Introduction to the Philosophical Life.* Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007.
The full passage reads: "In Plato's problematization of *parrhēsia* the democratic assembly cannot speak or hear the truth because the individuals who gather there do not structure their lives according to the presence of rational discourses, the *logoi*, in their souls. For political life to fulfill its function, which is to let truth emerge in the assembly in order to govern the city, the individuals who engage in politics must first allow truth to emerge in their souls and their lives. Now we can anticipate how Plato will reinvent *parrhēsia*. Because the political sphere is closed off as the area for frank discourse, it is in the relationship of oneself to oneself that philosophy will intervene as a cure for the failure of political and ethical life.

[62] Foucault, "Hermeneutic of the Subject," 103.

[63] Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," 265.
The full passage reads: "What are the means by which we can change ourselves in order to become ethical subjects? […] what are we to do, either to moderate our acts, or to decipher what we are, or to eradicate our desires, or to use our sexual desire in order to obtain certain aims such as having children, and so on – all this elaboration of ourselves in order to behave ethically? In order to be faithful to your wife, you can do different things to the self. That's the third aspect, which I call the self-forming activity [*pratique de soi*] or *l'ascetisme – asceticism* in a very broad sense."

[64] Foucault, "Hermeneutic of the Subject," 99.

[65] Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics," 265.

[66] Ibid., 265.

[67] Ibid., 265.

[68] Asad, Talal. "Free Speech, Blasphemy, and Secular Criticism." *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech.* Berkeley: The Townsend Center for the Humanities, 2009. 20-64, 27.

[69] Foucault, "Hermeneutic of the Subject," 99.

[70] Ibid.,101.

[71] Ibid., 102.

[72] Ibid., 103.

[73] Ibid., 103.

[74] Ibid., 102.

[75] Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life,* 69.

[76] Foucault, "Hermeneutic of the Subject," 103.

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