

## **MODERN SİYASETİN İKİ ELEŞTİRİSİ: AGAMBEN'E KARŞI RANCIERE**

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### **ÖZET**

Bu çalışma, çağdaş dönem eleştirel siyasal kuramına dahil iki etkili eser olan Giorgio Agamben'in *Kutsal İnsan*'ı ve Jacques Ranciere'in *Uyuşmazlık*'ın karşılaştırmalı olarak metinsel çözümlenmelerini sunar. Çözümleme, günümüz demokratik siyaseti açısından önemli olduğunu düşündüğüm iki temel önermeyi temellendirmek hedefindedir. Birincisi, siyasal eleştirinin iki farklı tarzı olduğudur. Agamben'in paradigmatic bir örneğini sunduğu üzere, birinci tarz, verili demokratik tahayyülün ve pratiklerinin radikal reddiyesini içerir. Diğer yandan, Ranciere'in takip ettiğini iddia ettiğim ikinci bir eleştiri tarzı, varolan demokratik tahayyül ve pratiklerin halihazırda içinde barındırdığı eşitlik vaadini derinleştirme ve güçlendirme talebini dile getirir. Temellendirilmeye çalışılan ikinci önerme ise, bu iki farklı eleştiri tarzının, demokratik siyasal pratiklerimizde bize kılavuzluk edebilme bakımından eşdeğer olmadıklarıdır. Bu bakımdan, Ranciere'in temsil ettiği, *içkin eleştiri tarzı* açık bir üstünlüğü haizdir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Agamben, Ranciere, Siyasal kuram, Eleştiri, Demokrasi.

## **TWO MODES OF CRITIQUE OF MODERN POLITICS: AGAMBEN VERSUS RANCIERE**

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper consists in a juxtaposition of detailed textual analyses of two influential works within contemporary critical political theory, namely Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer*, and Jacques Ranciere's *Disagreement*. In doing this, my principal objective is to underline two points which are considered to be significant for both the theory and practice of democratic politics in our age. First, there are two major modes of critique. These are a form of radicalism entirely dismissing the established outlook and practices of democracy (e.g. Agamben) on the one hand, and another mode of critique in the sense of demanding the further promotion of the democratic promise of equality in the real world (e.g. Ranciere) on the other hand. Second, it will be contented that these two distinct modes are not equivalent in their capacity to provide guidance

for our democratic political practices. That is, the immanent mode of critique represented by Ranciere's theory is much more significant in terms of its implications for political praxis.

Keywords: Agamben, Ranciere, Political theory, Critique, Democracy.

### **Introduction**

The resurrection of philosophical debates on democracy is certainly a mark of the intellectual climate of recent decades. In this resurrection, "critical approaches" challenging the mainstream politico-philosophical outlook have played an important role. Inspired by the late modern philosophical and theoretical figures such as Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Lacan, Foucault and Derrida, these approaches have conceptualized "what is politics" and "what is democracy" in the ways that are quite distinct from the way modern contractualist paradigm and its revised-contemporary versions (e.g. Rawlsian theory of justice) understand politics and democracy. One common tenet in these approaches, which justifies labeling them as critical, is thus their contention that modern contractualism and contemporary neo-contractualism have been far from presenting an adequate account of the phenomena politics and of the paradoxes inherent in modern democratic politics.

This paper consists in a juxtaposition of detailed analyses of two particular examples of such critical approaches, namely Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer*<sup>1</sup>, whereby a theory of politics as the situation of sovereign decision has been developed, and Jacques Ranciere's *Disagreement*<sup>2</sup>, whereby a theory of politics as the situation of disagreement has been developed. In doing this, my principal objective is to underline two points which I think important *vis-à-vis* contemporary democratic thought. First, there are two major modes of criticizing modern democracy. These are a form of radicalism entirely dismissing the established outlook and practices of democracy (e.g. Agamben) on the one hand, and another mode of critique in the sense of demanding the further promotion of the democratic promise of equality in the real world (e.g. Ranciere) on the other hand. Second, I aim to show, these two distinct modes are not equivalent in their capacity to provide guidance for our democratic political practices. That is, the immanent mode of critique represented by Ranciere's theory is much more significant in terms of its implications for political praxis.

Two legitimate questions may be raised up with regard to the scope and method of this paper. First, "why have I chosen to reflect upon particularly Agamben and Ranciere but not any

other contemporary radical thinker such as Slavoj Žižek or Alain Badiou?” Second, “why do I exclusively focus on *Homo Sacer* and *Disagreement* but not on the other works by the authors in question?” As for the first question, I may cite two basic reasons. First, in my view, among contemporary political thinkers, Agamben and Ranciere provide respectively pure models of two modes of critique I mentioned above. Hence, their theories have heuristic value in this respect. Second, these two authors seem to me providing least eclectic and most philosophically substantiated forms of critique. As for the second question, I may state that *Homo Sacer* and *Disagreement* are respectively the works whereby Agamben and Ranciere elaborate their politico-philosophical vision in a comprehensive and systematic mode. Hence, without regard to the question whether they might be treated as exhaustive for Agamben’s and Ranciere’s political philosophies, these two works providing comprehensive politico-philosophical visions on their own are eligible to (and worthy of) hermeneutical analyses.

### **I. Agamben’s *Homo Sacer* as a Critique of Modern Democracy**

In this chapter, I will examine Agamben’s *Homo Sacer* as a critique of modern democratic theory and practice. By following a strand of thought consisting of radical figures such as W. Benjamin and J. Derrida, Agamben argues that the clear-cut distinction between the norm and power (or, the law and violence) on which modern democracy is based is very debatable. Drawing on the works of Hobbes and Carl Schmitt, he develops a radical politico-philosophical framework from the standpoint of which whole modern democratic theory seems to be a crucial misunderstanding of the genuine nature of politics. Furthermore, he argues that, on the basis of his own politico-philosophical standpoint, it is fully explainable why the modern democratic project should have failed, i.e., why the project of emancipation should have turned out to be a gradual aggravation of the forms of dominations and exclusions. In line with this, Agamben claims to explain not only the essential link between violence and norm but also the hidden identity between modern democracies and modern totalitarianisms.

In examining Agamben’s theory with an intention to underscore his criticisms against modern democracy, I will first focus what he defines as the metaphysical task underlying western politics (part I.1.). Second, I will engage in his account of how this metaphysical task has given way to a form of politics he defined as the politics of the sovereignty (parts I.2 and I.3). Then, I will present his arguments on the aporia of modern democracy stemming from its

misunderstanding of the logico-formal structure of politics (part I.4). At the end, I will present a critical comment pointing out certain problems in Agamben's theory of politics.

### *I.1.The Metaphysical Task Underlying Western Politics in General*

In the beginning of *Homo Sacer*, Agamben refers to the concept of biopolitics introduced by Foucault. Biopolitics designates the form of politics in which the natural life (*zoe*) of human beings becomes the primary concern of political power. As such, biopolitics consists in the production and application of appropriate technologies creating "docile bodies" (*HS*: p.3). As the author argues, Foucault thought that biopolitics was a peculiarity of the modern era. For him as well as for Arendt, "the entry of natural life into the sphere of polis constituted the decisive event of modernity and signaled a radical transformation of the political-philosophical categories of classical thought" (*HS*: p.4). It is one of Agamben's basic theses that there is a crucial mistake in both Foucaultian and Arendtian restriction of the politics of natural life to modern era. According to him, the inclusion of natural life in the political realm is the original and constitutive act defining *any* political relation. In his view, Foucault and Arendt misled, because they could not see the fact that the exclusion of natural life from the sphere of ancient politics depicted by classical philosophers is indeed an "inclusive exclusion" aiming at producing the proper kind of life for *zoe*. That is to say, both Foucault and Arendt failed to grasp the metaphysical project underlying the whole history of western politics.

By referring to the famous passage from Aristotle's *Politics* where the proper place of politics is situated in the transition from *phone* (voice as the capacity of *zoe*) to *logos* (language/reason as the capacity of a normative being) , he maintains that we encounter here with an explicit exclusion of natural life (*zoe*) from the sphere politics. Yet, he argues that this exclusion is only apparent: in defining the locus of politics as the passage from *phone/zoe* to *logos/nomos*, Aristotle conceptualizes *zoe* as the very life that should transform into the good life. This certainly means that natural life had already had the paradoxical feature of being that whose exclusion founds the ancient city. Hence, *zoe* is the original raw material on which politics works out; and, to transform *zoe* into the good life is the metaphysical task underlying western politics from its very beginning. Accordingly, politics has, from the very beginning, designated "the activity of human living being who, in language, separates and opposes himself to his own bare

life and, at the same time, maintains himself in relation to that bare life in an inclusive exclusion” (HS: p.8).

*I.2. The Constitutive Political Act as the Sovereign’s Decision on Exception*

Up to now, it has been clear that, in the western paradigm, the fundamental political act which constitutes the political community conceived as the passage from the “(dis)order of natural life” to the order of *nomos*. Now, we should understand ‘what is the genuine nature of this political fundamental act?’ or ‘how is this fundamental act conducted indeed?’. Agamben states that this act is the sovereign’s decision (HS: pp.15-16). Sovereign’s constitutive decision has usually been conceived as the establishment of the order of law through leaving behind the pre-political situation of chaos. However, in the author’s view, the nature of this decision is much more complex than what it has usually been assumed to be. It can be truly understood only if it is also understood that, from the standpoint of the juridical order it establishes, the sovereign decision is a *state of exception*.

In order to explicate his point, Agamben draws on the insights of the post-structuralist theories of language (see, HS: p.25). He argues that every language is an attempt to establish a perfect equivalence between the set of meanings (i.e., the register of the signified) and the set of denotations (i.e., the register of the signifier). However, given the fact that there is always an excess of the signifier over the signified (i.e., the fact that a denotation can never be captured in one precise meaning), there is always a need for cleansing the linguistic system of the “excessive denotations” which disrupt the order of meaning. According to Agamben, in the case of political system, this linguistic cleansing of “excessive denotations” corresponds to the sovereign’s decision insofar as the latter concerns with ‘what is to be included’ and ‘what is to be excluded’ in the politico-juridical order.

However, what is vitally important to hold in mind is that any systemic attempt to reach a perfect order is always an impossible attempt (HS: p.25). This explains why the existence of the sovereign is identical to the continuous existence of a state of exception *within* the politico-juridical order: insofar as there is always “deviant/disturbing members”, the sovereign should always be the *supra-juridical* power of excluding these members. For Agamben, the peculiar paradox of the sovereign reveals at this point: the fact that the sovereign (who aims at reducing ‘all that is present’ to ‘a representation within the politico-juridical order’) should necessarily

posit both himself and some deviant members as the entities of an outer world (the pre-political world of *zoe* as a world of chaos) which he claims to have annihilated. In more simple words, the sovereign who decrees that the rule is *unconditionally* valid does also suspend the rule in a state of exception which is the necessary condition of the establishment and preservation of the space of law (HS: p.19).

In this way, the author underlines that “the exception [which establishes the politico-juridical terrain] is the originary form of any law” (HS: p.27). More precisely, “the rule [i.e., the politico-juridical order] lives off the exception alone” (HS: p.28). According to Agamben, this fact is especially clear in the primordial juridical decree that “the law allows equitable vengeance” (HS: p.26). This degree makes fully explicit that “the sovereign’s juridical order does not originally present itself simply as sanctioning a transgressive fact [i.e., the violence as the principle of the chaotic world of natural life) but instead constitutes itself through the repetition of the same fact without any sanction, that is, as an exceptional case” (HS: p.26).

Now, we can more exactly understand how the sovereign act includes the fact of natural life in the system of law through excluding it. The sovereign operation consists in decreeing the exceptional status of the natural life in the face of which the law should suspend itself. Agamben sees this as the establishment of a *relation of ban* between the fact of natural life and the order of law. The *ban*, a term derived from old German, “designates both exclusion from the community and the command and insignia of the sovereign” (HS: p.28). Accordingly, to be banned indicates not simply being set outside the law and made indifferent to the law, but rather being *abandoned* by the law, i.e., being exposed and threatened on “a zone of indistinction” between the outside (the chaotic nature) and the inside (the rule of law) (HS: p.28). In more simply words, the sovereign preserves his potentiality to act violently over those who are banned in the very act of excluding them from the community.

### *I.3. The Logico-Formal Structure of Western Politics: The Politics of Sovereignty*

Agamben argues that his foregoing arguments on the constitutive political act are indeed a restatement of the thesis which has been first announced by the Sophists: that *nomos basileus* (the constitutional law established by the most powerful man’s –i.e., the sovereign’s– act) is an enigmatic combination of *bia* (violence) and *dike* (justice). As he underlines, the way Pindar indicates this enigma is utmost striking: “*nomos basileus* [the most powerful man’s *nomos*] is the

threshold on which violence passes over into law and law passes over into violence, the point in which violence and law are inseparable” (*HS*: p.32). *Nomos basileus* designates the *power* of defining “the inside” as the sphere of right and “the outside” as the sphere of intolerable violence. Yet, insofar as this power itself is derived not from the law but from the mere efficiency of a historical fact, *nomos basileus* (which constitutes the sphere of justice) itself is no more than a specific form of violence. That is, in the view of Pindar and the Sophists, the nature (which is considered to be the sphere of violence) inhabits at the hearth of human community in the form of the *nomos basileus*.

According to Agamben, the fact that this thesis sounds extravagant to some modern ears is the continuous effect of what may be called Platonic turn in the western political thought. Platonic turn consists in the naturalization of the law in order to veil the element of violence embedded in law. By attributing a primordial and supreme status to the soul and all that belongs to the soul (i.e., intellect, *techne* and *nomos*) over the body, Plato asserted that ‘what is truly natural for man’ is not the life of the body (*zoe*) but the life of the soul as the life within the order of *nomos*. In this way, he could also assert that the constitution of *nomos* is in no way a violent act against ‘what is natural’ but rather corresponds to the realization of ‘what is natural for man’. Thus, by naturalizing law –a naturalization which, for Agamben, meant to mask the domination of *nomos* over natural life–, Plato denied the principle of the indistinction between law and violence and overshadowed the fact of the sovereignty.

An awareness concerning the principle of sovereignty could be resurrected only by Hobbes who provided an account of the absolute power of the sovereign on the basis of an identity between the state of nature and violence. For Agamben, what is most striking in this account is the insistence that, since his power is absolute, the sovereign (who preserves his all “natural rights”) represents the survival of the state of nature within the political society. Thus, similar to the Sophists before him, Hobbes underscored that “the state of nature is not truly external to *nomos* but rather contains its virtuality” (*HS*: p.35). Accordingly, the fundamental Hobbesian insight may be formulated as follows: the nature as the realm of violence (which is said to be exterior to the political system) does indeed occupy the center of the political system in the form of an absolute right to self-determination entitled only to the sovereign.

In line with this, Agamben suggests that following the Hobbesian insight may be the best way to reach an exact understanding of the logico-formal structure of western politics. In doing

this, the author draws on the ancient Germanic law which was probably a source of inspiration for Hobbes. According to him, the ancient Germanic law was based on the concept of *fried* (peace) and the exclusion of *friedlos* (the man who is without peace) from the political community (*HS*: p.104). *Friedlos* was used interchangeably with various terms such as the wrongdoer, the bandit and the outlaw. Yet, much more strikingly, it was metaphorically connected to the figure of “werewolf”. This figure designated a creature that lives at the “threshold of indistinction and of passage between animal and man, *physis* and *nomos*, exclusion and inclusion” (*HS*: p.105). As such, “werewolf” was the very figure that was the object of a politico-judicial ban issued on the basis of the sovereign’s decision that it is neither a man nor an animal but a creature dwelling within both spheres without belonging to the neither of them.

Agamben then makes his point that only in the light provided by the figure of *friedlos*/werewolf does Hobbesian conception of the state of nature acquire its genuine meaning. As Hobbes conceived it, the state of nature (in which “man becomes a wolf to men”) is not a real epoch prior to the establishment of the political society but a moment of the political society in which it is considered “as if it were dissolved” (see, *HS*: p.36, p.105). Relevantly, the principle of the state of nature (which is, as we saw, the principle of violence) is internal to the political society not only in the simple sense that a primordial violence founds the politico-judicial order but in the more complex sense that any political society is *always* and *already* caught with virtual violence. The reason for this is best explained in the fundamental proposition of the ancient Germanic law according to which werewolves always dwell in the city. Thus, insofar as there are always werewolves in the city, the state of exception in which these disturbing creatures (who represent a form of life lived at the zone of indistinction between the natural life and the social life) are exposed to the sovereign’s violent acts is not an event achieved once and for all but is always virtually operative in the political society.

In sum, Agamben’s arguments on the logico-formal structure of western politics culminates into the assertion that two principles are essential to the phenomena we call politics. These principles are: (1) the principle of the primordially of the constituting violence over the constituted law; and (2) the principle of *continuous* existence of violence within the politico-judicial order in the form of the sovereign’s decision.

For the author, these principles also explain why modern understandings of politics in terms of a social contract founded on citizens’ rights and free wills is extremely insufficient to

grasp the nature of politics. The genuine foundation of political power is neither the assertion of citizens' natural rights (the liberal contractualist view) nor the renunciation of these rights on behalf of the state (the contractualist view wrongly attributed to Hobbes). Rather, it lies precisely in the sovereign's power to ban arbitrarily, which Hobbes interchangeably called "the right to Punishing" and "the right to do anything to anyone" (HS: p.106). Furthermore, insofar as the sovereign decision concerns immediately with the life of the citizens, the genuine object of politics is the life (and not free will or consent) of the citizens. Hence, the conclusion Agamben draws from his overall arguments examined up to now is:

All representations of the originary political act as a contract or convention marking the passage from nature to the State in a discrete and definite way must be left wholly behind. Here there is, instead, a much more complicated zone of indiscernability between *nomos* and *physis*, in which the State tie, having the form of a ban, is always already also non-State and pseudo-nature, and in which nature always already appears as *nomos* and the state of exception. The understanding of the Hobbesian mythologeme in terms of *contract* instead of *ban* condemned democracy to impotence every time it had to confront the problem of sovereign power and has also rendered modern democracy constitutionally incapable of truly thinking a politics freed from the form of the State (HS: p.109).

To exactly understand this passage and his critique of modern democracy in general, we should now engage in Agamben's arguments presented in the third chapter of his book where he focuses the modern type of politics of the sovereignty underlying both modern democracies and modern totalitarianisms.

#### *1.4. The Aporia of Modern Democracy: The Enslavement of the Life in the Name of its Emancipation*

According to the author, what characterizes the politics of modern age is a promise for the vindication and liberation of the natural life as *zoe*. In this manner, modern democracy is an attempt to transform the life as *zoe* into a way of life, i.e., to establish the *bios* of *zoe*. As Agamben reads them, the declarations of rights which have founded the modern type of politics mark this modern promise and project. Above all, these declarations asserted that the care of the life and the fulfillment of the conditions necessary for its preservation and flourishing should be the basic task of the political authority. In other words, they meant nothing more or less than an

ever increasing inscription of the natural life into a political order which exclusively concerns with the following question: “which mechanisms or techniques are best suited for the task of assuring the care, control and use of bare life?” (*HS*: p.122). This modern process of the growing inclusion of the natural life in the mechanisms of calculations of political power is precisely what Foucault called biopolitics and what Karl Löwith called “the politicization of the life” (*HS*: pp.119-121).

Hence, the distinguishing feature of modern type of politics in comparison with the pre-modern type of politics may be stated as follows: in opposition to the pre-modern juridico-political order which concerns with the natural life only in the form of an “inclusive exclusion” (i.e., in the form of a state of exception), modern politics recall back the *zoe* into the realm of politics in order to liberate it from the violence to which it had been exposed in the pre-modern world. According to Agamben, here is precisely the point at which the aporia of modern democracy (which is crucially blind the genuine nature of politics) reveals: When modern democracy makes the natural life and politics (which were originally divided, and linked together by means of the moment of the sovereign violence expressed in the state of exception) identical, the moment of violence (which had previously been a state of exception) becomes the rule. This means that the principle of violence whose *virtuality* had founded and maintained the pre-modern city acquires a much higher degree of *actuality* in the modern political order. In the very process by which the natural life becomes the supreme value grounding the legitimacy of the political rule, the same natural life becomes an object whose *definition* and *formation* designates the primary task of political power. This is because the politicization of the natural life, which results from the valorization of life, necessarily implies a decision concerning the threshold beyond which the life ceases to be a value. More precisely, such a politicization requires the decision concerning ‘what forms and aspects of life deserves to be respected and preserved’ and ‘what forms and aspects of life are not so’. This means that the sovereign acquires an absolute right to give form to the life by eliminating the forms and aspects of life which he does not count as “lives deserving to live” (see, *HS*: pp.144-153).

In line with these, Agamben states that modern *biopolitics* (the politics of life) may also be defined as *thanatopolitics* (the politics of death). For him, it is true that modern democratic politics summons back the natural life which had been sent into exile by the pre-modern politics. Yet, in doing this, modern democracy does not *liberate* but radically *enslaves* the natural life. In

turn, this radical enslavement of the natural life culminates in endowing the political power with the absolute right to put the natural life under sentence of death. In this way, the modern political space becomes a platform in which “the care of life coincides with a continuous fighting against life” (*HS*: p.147). For Agamben, this space may be best defined by the concept of the *camp*. In the way he understood it, the *camp* is not a historical fact and anomaly belonging to the “deviant” totalitarianisms but the hidden matrix of whole modernity (*HS*: p.166). “The camp is the space that is opened when the state of exception becomes the rule. In the camp, the state of exception, which was previously a temporary suspension of the rule of law on the basis of a factual state of danger [coming from the abandoned realm of *zoe*], is now given a permanent spatial arrangement” (*HS*: p.168).

All these means that the history of modern politics is indeed the history of the replacement of the *momentous state of exception* (which had founded and maintained the pre-modern city) with a *permanent state of emergency* (in which the “natural law” of respecting and preserving the life is continuously suspended in the modern camp). Accordingly, Agamben concludes, the modern democratic project of the emancipation of ‘the people as the incarnation of a perfect body endowed with the supreme political power’ is identical to the continuous practice of the radical elimination of ‘the people as the bearer of the natural life that does not deserve to live’.

#### *I.5. A General Comment: The Troubles of A Gnostic Turn of Mind*

It is not a matter of debate that Agamben’s *Homo Sacer* presents a very thought-provocative approach to politics. Starting with the proposition of the primordially of the constitutive violence over the law, the author develops a philosophical vision culminating in the assertion that modern democracy is an essentially aporetic form of experience, which should be abandoned.

I think that despite its remarkable intellectual appeal, Agamben’s political philosophy is not eligible to be guidance for our political practices. This is because of the Gnostic turn of mind underlying his whole theory. The essence of Agamben’s argumentation lies in positing a certain ‘truth of politics’ (i.e. violence) in opposition to ‘political appearances’ (i.e. rights and consent). Then, the function of all ‘political appearances’ are considered to be reproducing the established order and the forms of oppressions and suppressions inherent to it. For Agamben, ‘political

appearances' cannot lead us to an improved state of affairs. In fact, the function of truth of politics is to reveal the futility of all politics. In other words, the truth of politics as Agamben conceives it reveals that nothing will really make matter, except a total collapse or termination of existing universe. For, Agamben seems to consider the existing universe, in quite Gnostic terms, as the kingdom of the devil, i.e. an order which is programmed to be under the reign of evil in any case. In such a universe only way-out (*exodus*) that is conceivable is a *Messianic* one, i.e. a divine or prophetic way-out brought forth by the intervention of an outer force.

In this way, the point into which Agamben's radicalism culminates is, indeed, the futility of politics as such. The abandonment of all the distinctions on which modern politics is based (i.e. the distinctions between norm and force, between consent and violence, between humanity/civility and animality/barbarism, and between freedom and domination) is tantamount to nothing less than casting out any meaning for political action. For, in the zone of such an indistinction between 'false appearances' which are nothing more than the veiled forms of their opposites, political action as such becomes completely meaningless. This is especially clear when Agamben refers to the figure of the *Muselmann* (a figure in the Nazi camp, who remains extremely indifferent in the face of the sovereign violence over his own body and over his companions) in an affirmative manner (see, *HS*: p.185). What Agamben's affirmation of the figure of the *Muselmann* illustrates is the fact that a 'politics of indifference' (i.e., apoliticism *par excellence*) is the only 'alternative' that the author could offer in 'challenging' what he calls the politics of sovereignty.

Such crucial shortcomings in Agamben's theory suggest that we should be aware of not only the deficiencies of modern democracy but also of the deficiencies of the critiques of modern democracy. I think that this is precisely the point where Jacques Ranciere's reflections become insightful.

## **II. Ranciere's *disagreement* as a response to two forms of the philosophical orientation to politics & democracy**

In his *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, Jacques Ranciere develops a critique of the philosophical orientations to democratic politics. As he elaborates, such orientations involve two main strands both of which are destructive for democratic politics. On the one hand, there is a *policing* orientation which aims at annihilating democratic politics by reducing it into what the

author calls the “logic of police order”. This version of philosophical orientations is today being pursued in the form of “consensus democracy”. On the other hand, there is a *metapolitical* orientation which claims the fundamental falseness of politics and the vanity of democratic practices. This version of philosophical orientations is today being pursued in the form of radical critiques of modern democracy. In opposition to both of these philosophizing positions, Ranciere suggests that our task should be to recall back the inner logic of democratic politics in the face of its double-evacuation by these positions.

In this chapter, I will examine first Ranciere’s account of the paradoxical relation between politics and political philosophy (part II.1.). This account will disclose why and how political philosophy (as a discipline of thought whose objective is said to be the comprehension of the phenomena called politics) has attempted to misrepresent and efface its phenomena. Second, I will examine the way Ranciere develops his own understanding of politics and democracy on the basis of the practical standpoint of democratic political subject (part II.2.). Then, I will consider his arguments against policing theories of democracy and metapolitical critiques of democracy (part II.3.). At the end, I will present a general comment on the virtues and vices of the philosophical perspective author provided (part II.4.).

### *II.1. Politics from the Standpoint of Ancient Philosophy: Scandalous Phenomena*

In his book, Ranciere starts with referring to the famous passage of *Politics I* where Aristotle founds the political community on *logos* (speech/reason). There, Aristotle argues that, as distinct from *phone* (voice) which is the basic animal capacity to express feelings of pleasure and pain, speech is the specifically human capacity “to indicate [and communicate] ‘what is useful’ and ‘what is harmful’ and so also ‘what is just’ and ‘what is unjust’” (DA: p.1). According to Ranciere, what is striking in this passage is not only the well recognized Aristotelian thesis concerning man’s eminently political nature signified by his capacity to speech. It is also that, for Aristotle, justice as the principal criterion of good politics and good city is derivable from the useful/the advantageous. As will be elaborated later, Ranciere thinks that this thesis designates philosophy’s initial response to political phenomena when the former first encountered with the latter.

As the author emphasizes, Aristotle’s thesis concerning the derivability of justice from the useful is based on an idea of natural harmony. By following Plato, he founds his whole

argumentation on the assumption that a “geometric equality” (i.e., an equality of proportion) lies under the harmonious order of natural things. This principle of geometric equality may be formulated as follows: each and all beings of nature partake in the common wealth of nature in accordance with their particular nature determined by their location in the hierarchical order of nature. Aristotle defines the task of politics as the application of the natural principle of geometric equality to the human society. Thus, he also defines a just (harmoniously ordered) city as the one in which each and every part of the city partake in the sharing of the common good in proportion to their particular natures. The particular nature of a part of the city is, in turn, determined by the *axia* (value) it brings to the city. This means that the supreme principle of a just political community is that each part should be given a share in proportion to the value (i.e., the amount of useful things) it brings to the common good of the community.

According to Ranciere, the foregoing clarification explains why the ancient philosophy set up the first stage of its political task as “a ‘true’ ac/count of community parts” in opposition to the “false” account said to designate the actual politics of Athens. As is pointed out by both Plato and Aristotle, the actual politics of Athens was based on a count of three parts of community and three *axiai* (values) corresponding to these parts. These were (i) the oligarchy bringing wealth into the city, (ii) the aristocracy bringing virtue into the city, and (iii) the demos (the people) bringing freedom into the city (*DA*: p.6). For both Plato and Aristotle, such a count was caught with a fundamental mistake. Because, the designation of freedom as the *axia* of the people was simply wrong in two sense. First, freedom was an “empty property” which does not deserve the name of *axia*, due to the fact that it is not “useful” for the city. Indeed, it has a destructive effect on the city. Second, freedom was an “improper property” of the people who has no positive qualification such as wealth or virtue. Identification of the people with freedom is nothing more than the appropriation of ‘what belongs to the community as a whole’ by a part of community. In turn, such identification had two basic consequences. First, by asserting freedom as their own *axia*, the people asserted their equality with those who are otherwise superior to them in regard of the useful things brought into the city. Second, by appropriating ‘what indeed belongs to the community as a whole’, the part(y) of the people also identifies itself with the community as a whole. In doing this, the people create an unsurpassable inner-division within the community: the division between the real community of the people and the false community of the masters.

Thus, Ranciere argues, it is not surprising that the Ancient philosophers deemed freedom (the empty and improper property of the people) as the *scandal of politics* or the *wrong* underlying actual way of politics. It is precisely because of this freedom, the imitation of the natural order of thing in the human society had been prevented. In this sense, actual politics meant, in the view of the ancient philosophers, nothing but a capricious human-interruption into the harmonious (and, of course, hierarchical) order of nature. In other words, actual politics was considered to be a deviant current that short-circuits the proportional regulation of things by the nature (*DA*: p.13). This is why political philosophy takes over the task of replacing actual politics with “a good politics” based on the thesis of the derivability of just political community from the common advantage of all its members. The primary objective of this task is to efface the litigious constitutive-element of actual politics by locating each part of society in its proper place and by distributing to each part the “proper” share of common good it deserves. In a sense, the project of political philosophy may be defined as a therapy of the people who “illegitimately” present themselves as the whole sum of the community in the political realm.

In this therapeutic project, the basic form of philosopher’s argumentation may be summed up as follows: ‘There is no part that may be equal to the whole of which this part is a part. Accordingly, the idea of the part(y) of the people as a whole is no more than an *appearance* which contradicts with the *essence* of things. Insofar as following the way of the essence of things is advantageous for you and for all, you should renounce your claim to be the whole of the community’. Yet, as we will see in the following parts, Ranciere thinks that this therapeutic treatment of the people is indeed an attempt to suppress/abolish “politics as such”.

### *II.2. Disagreement as the Form of Political Interlocution*

As is explicated in the previous part, the ancient philosophy deemed that the idea of freedom as the property of the people (which grounds the actual politics of the people) is a mere appearance contradicting with “truth”. What remains to be seen is the argumentative structure implicitly underlying the people’s own point of view in their self-assertion of freedom as their political property. Yet, in order to do this, we should first engage in Ranciere’s account of the form of any genuinely political relation.

For Ranciere, political relation consists in a certain kind of interlocution which may be best described by the term “disagreement” (see, *DA*: pp. x-xiii). As distinct from agreement,

misconstruction and misunderstanding, disagreement is a kind of speech situation in which there is a dispute both over the object of discussion and over participants' or one of participant's capacity to participate in discussions. If we return back to Aristotle's distinction between speech and voice (according to which some beings are capable of understanding and speaking of 'what is just' while some other beings can only have a noise in these matters), we may well understand 'in what processes a disagreement and thus a political action consists'. The function of Aristotle's distinction is to delineate the legitimate participants to the "political" discussions on the just allocation of the goods of society between parts of the city. Yet, Ranciere emphasizes that there is nothing political in this relation between "legitimate partners". Rather, a political relation comes into scene only when a party (which had been assumed to have only a noise up to then) interrupts the established interplay of arguments on 'what is a good allocation' (i.e., 'what is a just distribution') by asserting that it has a non-recognized (non-counted) capacity to speak of 'what is just' and 'what is unjust'. That is, politics emerges at the moment when a part(y) which is not counted as a part by the established political order declares the *unjustness* or the *wrongness* of the very interplay of justice regulated by the order of the city. According to this litigious part, the wrong underlying the city is the very fact of the misrepresentation of this part(y)'s speech as mere voice, i.e., the fact of the denial of this part(y)'s equality with the other parts that are recognized as the partners of the "political" interlocutions. In this way, the litigious party brings a very specific form of disputation in to the hearth of the city: on the one hand, there is the claim (of the people) that a party having *logos* speaks of a definite object of discussion (the wrongness of the city order); on the other hand, there is the counter-claim (of the superiors) that neither is this litigious party truly a speaking being nor is the foregoing object of discussion meaningful enough to be discussed. In more precise words, what emerges is a dispute over the existence and absence of both the object and the subject of a disputation. In the view of Ranciere, this is the situation of disagreement defining a genuinely political relationship.

We are now in a position to be able to understand the rationale implicitly underlying the people's political argumentation. This argumentation is based on an exposition of the paradox inherent in the superiors' arguments supporting inequality (or, in the words of philosophers, "proportional equality") embedded in the established social order. The superiors' argument may be now reformulated as follows: 'You, the people who do indeed not exist as a speaking being to be accounted for, should *understand* that some should posit the rules of the game and some

others should obey these rules. You should further *understand* that, given your incompetence with regard to reason, your compliance with the principle of “proportional equality” (i.e., inequality) inscribed in the city order is advantageous for yourself too’. The paradox (in more technical terms, “performative contradiction”) in this argument lies in the fact that it has already presupposed the people’s capacity to reason (understand) in the very speech act of telling them their deficiency in having reason and their advantage to be gained from obeying the alleged commands of reason enunciated by the superior citizens. In presupposing the people’s capacity to *logos*, the foregoing argument thus presupposed the “ultimate equality of anyone and everyone”, which stems from this capacity (*DA*: p.17). This presupposition of the primordial equality is the rational credential of the people’s political argumentation. By insistently declaring that they does not make a noise but speak of a definite object of discussion, the people underscores the *aporia* that the superiors can deny the equality of all with all only through presupposing this equality. Thus, from the point of view of the people, the very denial of their political arguments implicitly justifies them. Because, this standpoint makes explicit that ‘what Aristotle presented as an objective distinction *between logos* and *phone*’ is in fact an unfounded distinction *within logos*. As a result, it also points out the arbitrariness or sheer contingency of any established social order (*DA*: p.17). In this way, the people’s argument denaturalizes ‘what philosophy aims at naturalizing’: the proportional order of the city imitating the geometric order of cosmos.

In the light of our examination up to now, we may now differentiate two distinct logics opposing each other. On the one hand, there is the “logic of the police order” underlying the superiors’ argumentation (*DA*: p.28). The logic of police order (which was presented in its most elaborated form by the ancient philosophers) designates a mode of human-being-togetherness that locates each of the definite parts in their proper place and assigns their proper role to these parts in accordance with their “properties”. In Ranciere’s words, the police order is “a configuration of the perceptible” which determines and regulates each “counted” party’s way of doing, way of being and way of saying (see, *DA*: pp.28-29). On the other hand, there is the logic underlying the people’s argumentation. Ranciere calls this one as the “logic of politics”. This logic appears whenever a party breaks the tangible configuration of the perceptible by claiming its being a party that have no recognized part in the society (*DA*: p.29). As a counter-logic acting over the police order, the logic of politics brings about a litigation that makes society a political society by dividing it into two parties: those who are not accounted and those who are accounted. Thus,

politics, which is the form of activity stimulated by this counter-logic, may be best described as follows: the *reconfiguration* of an established configuration of the perceptible by a party which claims that it is miscounted or non-counted.

Two crucial aspects of these litigious reconfigurations of the police order (i.e., the phenomena called political actions) should be emphasized. First, as it should have already been clear, a political action is an act opposing the fundamental wrong (i.e., inequality) embedded in the city. As such, it is a destructive inscription of the principle of “ultimate equality” into the hearth of the police order which is, by definition, divisive to this principle. Second, a political action may be processed only through political actors’ self-assertion of the empty property of freedom. The latter point may be explained as follows: Because the police order locates each part of society in its “natural” place by *identifying* it as a particular element within the harmonious police order, any genuinely political action requires a capacity to *disidentification*. Only on the basis of such a capacity to disidentification can we conceive ‘how a party can challenge its assigned place or its lack of place in the society. Freedom as independency from the “natural” order of the city is the name for this capacity. This is why Ranciere argues that “the empty freedom makes the people political *subject*” (see, *DA*: pp.35-37). In his view, politics is the *evanescent moment of subjectification* in which the people’s empty freedom interrupts the regulated realm of identities in the name of equality. In this evanescent moment, the people as political subject is an “operator” that brings together two worlds that are and should forever be separate in the view of the superiors (*DA*: pp.40-42). In order to open up a space for equality (which remains imperceptible within the police-configuration of the perceptible), the people conjure up an imagined world where all speaking beings are counted as “ultimately (not proportionally) equal”. That is, they evoke “an aesthetic community of egalitarian logos” that dismisses any attempt to found a human-being-togetherness on an alleged *arche* (a starting point or basis) surpassing the principle of ultimate equality. Hence, the people set up themselves as the litigious subject of “a singular-polemical yet also universal project” (see, *DA*: p.42). This project is universal in the sense that it exposes the *wrong* (the fundamental injustice resulting from the infringement of the principle of equality of all speaking beings) underlying *any* social order. It is singular and polemical in that it brings disputation to a *particular* society by exposing its unfounded contingent character.

In this way, Ranciere provides an explication of the argumentative structure implicitly underlying the people's point of view in asserting freedom as their political property. For the author, the phenomena called politics (which is identical to democracy) exist only on the condition that there are modes of activities reflecting this argumentative structure. Now, what remains to be done is to examine 'how Ranciere connects this phenomenological account of politics with a critique of two modern forms of political orientations to politics'.

### *II.3. Ranciere's Critique of Two Modern Forms of Philosophical Orientations to Politics*

As Ranciere recapitulates them, his analysis discloses that there are three essential aspects in political phenomena. These aspects may be counted as follows: (1) Political community (i.e., democratic community) is a kind of community that opens up an empty sphere for the *appearance of the people* as a litigious party disturbing the established police order; (2) the people occupying this sphere is not a particular societal identity or the total sum of societal identities but *non-identary subject* interrupting the interplay of identities; and thus, (3) democratic community is a community where a *disputation* or *disagreement* is not only always probable but also recognized as legitimate (DA: pp.99-100).

According to Ranciere, the triumphant discourse on "consensus democracy" marks nothing but the evacuation of the abovementioned essentials of politics in the name of 'a *regime of the consents of all citizens*'. "Consensus democracy" defines itself as a system of institutions regulating the flux of the energies of individuals and groups who would find themselves expressed in this system. In doing this, it constructs itself as a closed-system where the people (conceived as the total sum of legitimate partners/identities) play the game of finding the optimal (the attainable common advantage). By following the advice of the ancient philosophy, this attainable common advantage is, in turn, defined as the just. In this way, "consensus democracy" surpasses the conditions of possibility of a political expression of the wrong. This means to say that "consensus democracy" casts out the genuine political subject (the people as the party of those who claim to be miscounted within the police order), since a political subjectification consists in nothing other than expression of the wrong. This is why Ranciere insistently declares that "consensus democracy" is not the triumph of democracy but an utopia of postdemocracy where democratic politics is fully evacuated through the perfect realization of 'what Plato called *sophrosune* (temperance)'. In the way Ranciere formulates it, the Platonic virtue of temperance is

“the fact of each person’s being in their place, going about their own business there, and having the opinion identical to the fact of being in that place and doing only what there is to do there” (DA: p.106). Against such a reduction of the democratic principle of equality to temperance, Ranciere dexterously argues that:

Democracy is not a regime or a social way of life. It is the institution of politics itself, the systems of forms of subjectification through which any order of distribution of bodies into functions corresponding to their “nature” and places corresponding to their functions is undermined, thrown back on its contingency... It is not their ethos, their “way of being”, that disposes individuals to democracy but a break with this ethos, the gap experienced between the capability of the speaking being and any “ethical” harmony of doing, being, and saying. Every politics is democratic in this precise sense: not in the sense of a set of institutions, but in the sense of forms of expressions that confront the logic of equality with the logic of the police order (DA: p.101).

Ranciere also argues that there is an inner paradox lying beneath this post-democratic utopia: in the very attempt for a community realizing the identity between the people and the population reflected in each person, “consensus democracy” creates the figures of extreme exclusion with whom it cannot tackle. These extreme figures are designated by the term “the other”. The other is the surplus identity that cannot transform itself into a political subject through a disidentification’. According to Ranciere, this is perfectly illustrated by the recent intrusion of racism and xenophobia into the consensus regimes. By casting out the political appearance of the people as the *symbolic other* of the police order, the consensus regimes have created the most archaic form of the otherness: the naked body of “immigrants” as the *real Other* of the consensus society (see, DA: p.121). Hence, the author concludes that consensus is not the cure but the disease of democracy: “It is the ‘reasonable’ and ‘peaceful’ effacing of appearance in the total exhibition of the real, of the miscount of the people in the breakdown of the population, and of the dispute in the consensus that pulls the monster of radical otherness back into line with the failing of politics” (DA: p.119).

This was a sketch of Ranciere’s critique of “consensus democracy” which he deemed as the continuation of the ancient philosophical project in the politico-social conditions of modernity. Yet, Ranciere insists that there is another variant of philosophical orientations which is specifically modern. The name the author gives to the latter is “metapolitics” (DA: p.81). As

we have seen, the mainstream philosophical orientation has consisted in the attempt to replace the false politics of the people with the politics of truth. From Plato to the contemporary theorists supporting the “consensus democracy”, the mainstream political philosophy has always suggested an “archipolitics” of modeling human-being-togetherness into a closed system imitating the order of the nature. Although metapolitics is a form of philosophical orientations to politics, it is quite different from this mainstream variant. For, while metapolitics converges with the latter in claiming to reveal the truth of politics, the nature of the truth it posits is at odds with the one posited by the other variant. In opposition to a supra-political truth of politics which would correct the actual way of politics, the truth metapolitics declares is the *truth of the falseness of politics*: the (alleged) fact that the symbolic processes of subjectification through which politics is processed is no more than collective fantasies or illusions overshadowing the “real movement of society”. Thus, by partly following the classical philosophical attitude to contrast political appearances with “underlying truths”, metapolitics asserts a truth of politics which “is no longer located above politics as its essence or idea, but located beneath and behind it, in what it conceals and exists only to conceal” (DA: p.82). In line with this, metapolitics concludes that politics is merely a mask of our non-egalitarian world consisting of relations of dominations, subordinations and exclusions. That is, it is a simple lie about the reality called society (DA: p.83).

The foregoing arguments also explain why metapolitics, like “consensus democracy” which is the modern form of archipolitics, affirms the end of the people’s “false” politics, i.e., the end of democratic politics. Where the mainstream variant applauds the coming of an age of worldly paradise, metapolitics applauds the end of the great lie of an egalitarian society. In the view of Ranciere, this further convergence between metapolitics (which is fully aware of the gap separating the persistent enslavement of the people and the idea of the sovereign people) and “consensus democracy” (which is blind to this gap) is not surprising, since the problem is not with being aware of the facts, but with the philosophical orientation towards these facts. Accordingly, metapolitics perceives the gap but interprets it only *speculatively*. It asserts that this gap is the sign of the untruth of the democratic ideal of the sovereign people (DA: p.87). From that moment, it defines the task as radically eradicating the play of democratic appearances. On the other hand, democratic political subjects interpret the same gap in *practical (non-speculative)* terms. Ranciere excellently accounts for this practical interpretation:

The fact that the people are internally divided is not, actually, a scandal to be deplored. It is the primary condition of the exercise of politics. There is politics from the moment there exists the sphere of appearance of a subject, *the people*, whose particular attribute is to be different from itself, internally divided. So, from the political point of view, the inscriptions of equality that figure in the Declarations of the Rights of Man or the preambles to the Codes and Constitutions, those that symbolize such and such an institution or are engraved on the pediments of their edifices, are not “forms” belied by their contents or “appearances” made to conceal reality. They are an effective mode of appearance of the people, the minimum of equality that is inscribed in the field of common experience. The problem is not to accentuate the difference between this equality and all that belies it. It is not to contradict appearances but, on the contrary, to confirm them. Whenever the part of those who have no part is inscribed, however fragile and fleeting these inscriptions may be, a sphere of *demos* is created, an element of the *kratos*, the power of the people, exists. The problem is to extend the sphere of this materialization, to maximize this power (DA: pp.87-88).

As this account makes explicit, democratic political subjects are not less aware of the power of the wrong inscribed in the modern society than metapoliticians are. Yet, unlike the latter, democratic actors are also well aware that equality is never merely an inversed appearance of the real enslavement of the people. To the extent that it is politically processed via democratic subjects’ empty freedom, equality has its practical truth in that it has always and already been inscribed in the society (in the form of the primordial equality of *logos*) and may be indefinitely inscribed (in the form of political actions making the *egalitarian logos* shine momentarily).

#### *II.4. A General Assessment of Ranciere’s Immanent Critique of Modern Politics*

Having completed the examination of the basic tenets of Ranciere’s phenomenological account of politics, as it is presented in his *Disagreement*, I may argue that most striking credential of this account is that it provides a standpoint which is both internal (immanent) and critical to politics. In opposition to such model of theorizing as we found in Agamben, Ranciere refutes to consider politics from a metapolitical level, which would make political categories insignificant. He insistently remains on the level of politics. Hence, his theory is internal or immanent to the very phenomena it is about.

Ranciere's immanent phenomenological account is equally critical, because it reveals that democratic politics as well as existing perspectives on democratic politics is troubled by an underlying contradiction between 'the logic of police order' (which consists in the hierarchical partition of particularities) and 'the logic of politics' (which consists in the universalistic declaration of equality). Even though Ranciere is well aware that such a contradiction may never be completely eliminated, he makes plain both the need and way to lessen the contradiction in question. The point he makes clear may be formulated as follows: the more 'the logic of politics' is promoted; the more democratic politics will take a consistent and improved form. This stems from the fact that modern democratic politics, and indeed any genuine politics, is founded on the presupposition of the equality of all who are within *logos*.

In sum, I think that Ranciere immanent critique of modern democracy and theories of democracy is an impressive one providing novel insights for reconsidering and tackling with the difficulties with which democracy is faced today. To illustrate such insights, I will complete this examination by a brief comment on his distinction between a better police order and a worse police order.

Ranciere persistently claims that every regime (i.e., any police order as a configuration of the perceptible) is, by definition, caught with the wrong (the fundamental injustice). Yet, Ranciere also maintains that there is a worse and a better police (*DA*: p.31). In his view, the better police is the one "that does not adhere to the supposedly natural order of society or the science of legislators, but the one that all the breaking and entering perpetrated by egalitarian logic has most often jolted out of its 'natural' logic" (*DA*: p.31). What should we infer from this? This argument implicitly draws a distinction between two forms of the configurations of the perceptible: the closed-configuration that does not permit any dislocation in the order of accounted parts; and the open-ended configuration that establishes an empty space (i.e., a space of politics) in which it is exposed to the challenging demands for reconfigurations. The latter one is the good and legitimate police order. Yet, what is crucial to underline is that such a police order is not legitimate in the *absolute* sense that the wrong is absent in it. No police order can be legitimate in this absolute sense. Rather, a police order might only be *relatively* legitimate, to the extent that it recognizes the validity of demands raised against itself in the name of equality, and permits its continuous reconfiguration on the basis of those demands. This means that the criterion of

legitimacy of the modern police should not stem from “consensus”, but rather from the preservation of the conditions of free expression of “dissension”.

### **Conclusion**

To make a conclusive judgment concerning Agamben’s and Ranciere’s political theories, we should reconsider on the meaning of ‘critique’ and ‘critical theory’, i.e. on the questions ‘what is genuine critique?’ and ‘what is the value of critique?’. Critique, which etymologically means the art of discerning, indicates to the philosophical strategy whereby contradictions inherent in particular situations and phenomena are disclosed. In the modern era, Kant introduced and championed this term. By the term ‘critique’ or ‘critical philosophy’, he meant a standpoint going beyond the notorious antagonism between ‘a purely affirmative standpoint’ and ‘a purely negating standpoint’. An affirmative theory takes as its task to vindicate ‘what exists’. The widespread perception of Hegel’s philosophy of history as a standpoint identifying ‘what is actual’ with ‘what is rational’ may be pointed out as a good example of affirmative theories. Quite reversely, a purely negating theory raises so strict objections to ‘what is given’ that it comes up, at the end, with suggesting to abandon the very situation or phenomenon it deals with. More precisely, such a standpoint puts at stake not simply the particular object of its investigation, but the general symbolic form to which the object in question pertains. For instance, a theory of arts which suggests going without the fundamental category constitutive for the phenomena called art, e.g. the category of aesthetic, or a theory of religion which suggests going without the category of sacred would be negating-theories. On the other hand, a truly critical theory takes a ‘judicative’ stance in the face of its theme. Like a judge delivering a verdict, it is not committed to a certain stance a priori. A critical stance is thus that of impartiality from which a balanced judgment of the theme is issued, and which endorses either negation or affirmation according to this balanced judgment. It reveals contradictions in a particular situation or phenomenon with the intention of attaining both a perspective for a perfect form of the situation or phenomenon in question at the theoretical level and an improved circumstance at the practical level.

The answer to the question ‘what is the value of critique?’ is already indicated in the very conception of ‘critique’ sketched above. The critique enlarges our perspective concerning a situation or a phenomenon. For, its basic function lies in giving its due to ‘what has, up to then,

remained subordinate or pacified or merely latent'. In this way, critique does not only provide a sharper perception of the situation or phenomenon in question. It also opens the world up, enriches it by broadening our horizons in both intellectual and practical senses. More precisely, it indicates to the possibilities or probabilities into which existing state of affairs can be improved.

Now, the question is whether or not Agamben's and Ranciere's political theories do hold to such credentials defining a genuine 'critique'. In my view, the examination presented in the first part of this paper indicates that Agamben's *Homo Sacer* provides a radical negation of democratic politics rather than a critique of it. From a metapolitical standpoint (i.e. a standpoint of speculation whereby all the constitutive distinctions of politics become insignificant), Agamben suggests to abandon democratic politics at all rather than challenging the structural defects in the current state of affairs. The problem with such a purely negating suggestion is that it does not bring about a new, broadened perspective. Quite reversely, it brings about a situation of horizonlessness. Agamben's affirmation of the *Muselmann* (who is extremely indifferent in the face the sovereign's violent acts over himself and his companions) do indeed evidence how a vision of completely closed world, in which human capacity to say 'yes' or 'no' is neither possible nor relevant, arises out his pure negation of democratic politics. In such an extreme situation of horizonlessness, we, the human subjects, do nothing to do, but to simply hope and wait for a prophetic intervention which is believed to explode the existing state of affairs.

On the other hand, Ranciere's political philosophy as it is developed in his *Disagreement* deserves to be appreciated in its genuinely critical orientation to democratic politics. Through a phenomenological analysis of the form of human experience called politics, Ranciere reveals that there is the interplay (i.e. the competition) of two competing 'logics' within this form, i.e. 'the hierarchical logic of police order' and 'the egalitarian logic of politics'. He then evokes that democratic political sphere will be much more congruous with its practical promises once it is made more responsive to the popular challenges raised out of 'the egalitarian logic'. Hence, Ranciere's political philosophy indicates not an exodus from the space of horizon constituted by democracy. Rather, it provides an account of the latent possibilities and probabilities of the space of democratic politics. Thereby, Ranciere provides a broadening and deepening of democratic political perspective, which may be a key for the achievement of an improved state of affairs in the end.

To recapitulate, the basic point is that going beyond the existing state of political affairs is possible not by metapolitical negations, but by immanent critiques of ‘what exists’. For, the burden of emancipation should not be invested upon a divine-prophetic force that would intervene into the world from an outer place, but to the progressive (egalitarian) forces already existing within the real world.

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**END NOTES**

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<sup>1</sup> Agamben, Giorgio. 1998. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford: Stanford University Press. In the following, this text will be referred shortly as *HS*.

<sup>2</sup> Rancière, Jacques. 1999. *Disagreement : Politics and Philosophy*, trans. by Julie Rose, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. In the following, this text will be referred shortly as *DA*.