

**"Speaking Boldly:  
The Prophetic in 20th Century Political Thought"**

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At the beginning of one of his later books, *FIRST AS TRAGEDY THEN AS FARCE*, Slavoj Žižek makes a vigorous claim that today, facing the financial crisis and new global wars, we shall no longer feel ashamed to stand on the left. Evoking the title of Jacques Lacan's *Journal sicilet* meaning 'you are allowed to know', Žižek makes a vigorous appeal to his audience:

„Today, our message should be the same: it is permitted to know and to fully engage in communism, to again act in full fidelity of the communist Idea. Liberal / permissiveness is of the order of *videlicet* – it is permitted to see, but the very fascination with the obscenity we are allowed to observe prevents us from *knowing what it is that we see*. The moral of the story: the time for liberal-democratic moralistic blackmail is over. Our side no longer has to go on apologizing: while the other side had better start soon.”<sup>1</sup>

This position might reflect what some of us felt during the last decades: A radical discontent even astonishment that the zeitgeist of the nineties and the beginning of the new millennium was anti-leftist in that any left political thought got a somewhat outdated flair. Remarkable in Žižek's counter critique is his combination of reflection and appeal. For his approach is a voluntaristic one, it implies a certain contingency, even irony. To say that the time for liberal democratic blackmail is over is not quite the same as saying either that this blackmail is simply wrong or stating that the time for communism has come again. Žižek's communism differs from classical one in that he no longer uses the rhetoric of historical necessity straightforwardly, but only in a fractured way: The time has come now – to stop apologizing. If there is historical necessity, it does not determine the situations but opens it again: it asks for a decision and it allows a decision again, after years of 'there is no alternative'. This appeal to decision is furthermore, addressed to us, to 'our side' – despite all irony, it claims to be representative for a certain group.

This seems to be an important feature of different recent political theories: They do no longer refer to an elaborated theory of historical development, but nevertheless, or may be even all

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<sup>1</sup> Žižek, *First as Tragedy, then as Farce*, London 2009, p. 7-8

the more so assumes to speak in ‘the name of’ a certain community. Thus, in terms of representation, we see a tension which might be specific for twentieth century political thought: On the one hand, those texts do no longer refer to a theoretical fundament, be it philosophical or historical to validate their claims. On the other hand though, they make strong appeals and claims as their addressees are concerned, namely they claim to represent them, to ‘speak in the name of’ a certain Group. Actually, both moments might actually belong together. For one might define the political moment of contemporary theory by a post-fundamental approach to truth: Theory becomes political in the very moment it recognizes that there is no theoretical fundament of discourse and that every truth claim has to be negotiated, i.e. everything is political. This fundamental nature of politics coincides with the presupposition that there is no representation of the world which might be consensual or uncontested. But this very assumption does not lead to a situation of anything goes, but rather to the contrary, to very strong appeals as the one Zizek makes, appeals which are vigorous because they are unstable. Political theory, so to speak, becomes performative.

Today, I am interested in this performative turn, namely in what it means to speak ‘in the name of’ in twentieth century political thought. To face this endless and boundless question, I will focus on a certain figure or genre of speech, namely the prophetic posture, which is, as I hope to show, quite widespread in political discourse and reveals paradigmatically the problem of speaking in the name of. In contemporary theory, the idea of the prophetic is mostly related to the messianic or more generally the religious dimensions of political theory that is so remarkable even in recent theory, most notably in the latest revival of Paul in Alain Badiou, Giorgio Agamben, Eric Santner, and Slavoj Zizek, but also in other references to the religious e.g. in the late Derrida, in Jean-Luc Nancy and Claude Lefort. What I will try today, is on the one hand to trace these references back to early twentieth century thought, namely to the German discourse of the early Weimar years where the issue of Messianism and had already been strongly debated. On the other hand, by the figure of the prophetic, I will focus on the very speech-act of political theory, i.e. the act of speaking in the name of a certain community but also of announcing a certain doctrine. I hope to show, that the figure of the prophetic and the prophetic rhetoric is able and apt to unfold the complexity and even the paradox character of these acts which at the same time claim an utmost authority and dismantle this very claim by irony, ambiguity, and hyperbolism.

I will proceed in three steps: In the first and longest part of my paper, I will focus on Max Weber and his use of the figure of the prophet both in his theoretical and political text and in

his historical analyses of ancient Judaism. Second, I will turn to the Theologian Karl Barth who exhibits particularly clearly the paradox of the prophetic rhetoric and has, moreover, fundamentally changed the way in which religion is referred to in twentieth century political thought. Finally, I will delineate, rather sketchy, the afterlife of these figures of prophetic speech, namely how they determine also contemporary positions of political theory.

### 1. Weber

The primal scene of twentieth century prophetic politics may be seen in Max Weber's *Science as vocation*, delivered as a speech in 1917 and appeared in print in 1919. At the end of this speech, Weber stresses

that for the many who today tarry for new prophets and saviors, the situation is the same as resounds in the beautiful Edomite watchman's song of the period of exile that has been included among Isaiah's oracles:

He calls to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning comes, and also the night; if you will inquire, inquire, and come again.

The people to whom this was said has enquired and tarried for more than two millennia, and we are shaken when we realize its fate. From this we want to draw the lesson that nothing is gained by yearning and tarrying alone, and we shall act differently. We shall set to work and meet the 'demands of the day,' in human relations as well as in our vocation. This, however, is plain and simple, if each finds and obeys the demon who holds the fibers of his very life.<sup>2</sup>

Thus there are neither prophets nor saviours nor leaders to wait for, as Weber stressed throughout his speech. Especially, one should not expect leadership in the name of science itself – this form of *Kathedersprophetie*, professoral prophecy is actually what Weber detests most. For science, according to his important and highly influential distinction, can only be a science of facts, but is not able to establish values, which have to be chosen by everyone himself.

The longing for prophets that Weber opposes here, is not an arabesque in the German academic tradition, for the Weimar time will abound in intellectual prophecy. At least since Nietzsche, the prophetic posture had become an option of criticism, – namely the radical and

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<sup>2</sup> Max Weber, *Science as a Vocation* (1919), in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. Heinz H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge, 2002), 129-156, here 156.

authoritative critique of present culture and society, often with a decidedly biblical outlook, as in Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*. Since 1914 and again since 1918, the prophet of coming salvation as of doom is overly present in German discourse, as is the longing for leadership which in some way or other could replace the moral authorities. This longing can be explained by the social and political distress in Germany, but it is also symptomatic for a new discourse, which considered the usual forms of intellectual and public communication as being insufficient. Especially the war at first aroused the tradition of the German *Bildung* once more but later ruined its reputation: the professoral prophecy still worked well in 1914 when German *accademians* foresaw the emergence of a new, organic, and superior nation and culture. By the end of the war, however, these expectations proved to have failed, and so have the academic institutions and the political parties, including the alternative public sphere e.g. of the youth movement or the social democratic party.

Weber's critique of science and of scientific politics is therefore highly symptomatic. It tries to situate science, and especially political science, in a world where its place is no longer clear. However, his critique is also slightly paradox since it is brought forward by a scientist. I, as a professor, tell you: Don't believe any professor in moral questions. The only reason why this statement is not a straightforward contradiction is the I, i.e. the reference to its own utterance. And this reference is actually decisive for Weber's text, which stages the act of speech in distinctive ways, as by talking not only of himself, but also of his audience, of its expectations and its possible disappointment as well as of its duties. The appellative character of the text is, in its ending quoted above, underlined by a quotation, namely the quotation of Isaiah 21,11-12, the oracle against Edom, one of the many obscure passages from biblical prophecy. This quotation, however, does make the closing argument even more complex. For Weber quotes a prophet to warn us not to wait for prophets.

This warning, and especially the figure of the prophet actually epitomizes the problem of political theory in Weber's thought as in so many other Weimar thought. To understand that, we must however step back to the Weber's historical work on Hebrew prophecy which he undertook during the war and which were later published in the posthumous essay on ancient Judaism. This work obviously implies a strong commitment, since Weber saw himself a prophet of doom who foresaw the Germanic catastrophe without being heard. Weber thus gave the reading of prophecy a decidedly political turn, compared with the protestant tradition: for him, the prophet is no longer a pious individual, but a politician, more precisely,

a model of intellectual politics, i.e. a politics that has no means of power apart the power of speech.

Weber's reading of the prophets mostly follows contemporary protestant biblical criticism, which had began to read the prophets politically by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Before, in Romanticism and idealism, the biblical prophets were conceived as individuals, as proponents of religious progress, even as genius and exemplary men. Since the 1880ies, however, a new interpretation became dominant which focused on Israel's political history. Julius Wellhausen and his pupils in particular stressed that it had been the political catastrophe of Israel and then of Judah which provoked prophecy as a radical call for a new order. However, the prophet's radical critique of the existing political institutions, especially the monarchy contributed no small part to the de-politization of Israel's religion which ended up in the radical separation of religion and politics in exile. This conception of prophecy was highly influential e.g. for Nietzsche's idea of the reevaluation of values. It made prophecy in general a paradigmatic place to negotiate the relation of morals and politics. For Ernst Troeltsch, the friend and Colleague of Max Weber, the prophets represent an aporia, since the prophetic ethos is both political and apolitical: "Their whole world of religious ideas emerges from politics which has become so important for them. But this politics is not exactly politics, but firm faith ... and a specific exclusion of any compromise with alien cultures."<sup>3</sup> The prophetic politics originates from a political situation but actually transcends or even ignores it. It is neither pure utopianism, i.e. some form of philosophical idea, nor pure politics, i.e. an actual practice of rulership, it is rather anti-politics in that it acknowledges and ignores the relevance of the political at once.

Weber too reads the Prophets as political demagogues or ideologues who are anything but realists. They are provoked by politics and brought forward concrete political aims, but despise any compromise and avoid any negotiation with the actual political powers,. As sociologist, Weber relates their ethos to their social position: Originating from of a demilitarized warrior caste, the prophet are private persons who lack any office but nevertheless claim to speak for the community. However, as Weber stresses repeatedly, they usually were neither understood nor supported by their audience, but remained lonesome, and

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<sup>3</sup> Ernst Troeltsch: „Glaube und Ethos der hebräischen Propheten“, in: ders.: *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 4, hg. v. Hans Baron, Tübingen (Mohr Siebeck) 1925, S. 34-64, hier S. 45. Cf. Wendell S. Dietrich: *Cohen and Troeltsch: Ethical Monotheistic Religion and Theory of Culture*, Atlanta (Scholars Press) 1986.

it is due to this very isolation that their critique became more radical and bold than that of other similar ancient institutions.

The prophets claim charismatic leadership, that is, according to Weber, a leadership that is founded neither on habitual traditions nor on rational grounds or political power, but on the personal virtues of the leader by which he is seen to be entreated with supernatural authority. This idea of Charisma is already critical towards a liberal understanding of politics, since it insists, that politics cannot be reduced to rational consent alone, but requires, at least occasionally, an additional moment, namely the moment of decision, of speech, and of vocation. Obviously, the prophet is a paradigm of these moments, and, the other way round, obviously Weber modeled the idea of charisma in no small part according to his readings of the Hebrew Prophets. However, one step further, the prophets rather exhibit the tragedy or irony of Charisma, namely that its claim can be dismissed and ignored as it is usually the case with the biblical prophets. Prophecy is therefore an ambivalent power: it is the politics of the powerless, a politics of purity and boldness which both generates its effects and endangers its political consequences not only due to the suffering of the unheard prophet but in that the radical critique finally helps to dissolve not only the present state of conditions but the basic political condition which the prophet presupposes. This is what actually happened in ancient Israel, when the prophetic critique of the present kingdom helped to destroy the state in general and to transform the political religion of Ancient Judaism into the exilic religion of Judaism: “it was only the boldness of prophecy which made Israel to this unique extent to a people of expectation and tarrying”.<sup>4</sup>

If we go back to the end of *Science as Vocation* we have to bear in mind this ambivalence of prophecy. For if Weber warns his audience, “that nothing is gained by yearning and tarrying alone”, he actually refers to the threat that Germany, after being defeated in the war, might lose its political power as did the ancient Judaic Kingdom. It is, according to him, exactly the apocalyptic rise of hopes for a renaissance of a new German nation and Culture, which blinded the German people and finally hindered it to consider its political interests in a rational way. To warn against mere utopianism is the task of the day, even if it is necessary to evoke yet another prophecy, namely to quote Isaiah against the all too easy prophets of salvation.

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<sup>4</sup> Max Weber: *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, Bd. 3, hg. v. Marianne Weber, Tübingen (Mohr) 1988, p. 249 (my translation).

However, beyond this warning, the prophetic posture does also exhibit an epistemic ambivalence which is highly characteristic not only for Weber but for the entire interwar discourse. As mentioned, Weber distinguishes between facts and values and stresses that Science can only claim to judge about facts, but not about values. At the end of *SCIENCE AS VOCATION*, this goes along with a strong appeal to his audience that they should not await decisions from any leaders let alone from any professors, but decide for themselves. This appeal, too, is rather paradoxical, since Weber claims on the one hand that science is unable to speak about values, but on the other makes strong valuing comments as in this appeal. We can see this ambivalence in another famous passage which interestingly too culminates in quoting a prophet, namely the end of his study on *PROTESTANT ETHICS AND THE SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM*. Here, Weber stresses that the individual decision *SCIENCE AS VOCATION* asked so vigorously for, is nowadays fundamentally endangered. He depicts an apocalyptic scenario of a mechanical culture which might be the result of technical progress, an 'iron cage' where individuality will no longer play any role:

No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development, entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance. For of the fast stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: "Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved."

But this brings us to the world of judgments of value and of faith, with which this purely historical discussion need not be burdened.<sup>5</sup>

Again, Weber quotes a phrase but then counters it with an argument, namely that he does not want to value, but to argue purely historical. What he quotes is Nietzsche, or rather Pseudo-Nietzsche, since the exact phrase can actually not be found in Nietzsche's writings. Nietzsche is quoted as a radical cultural critic, as an authority, and as a voice that transgresses the limits of science, thus, precisely according to the prophetic posture which was ascribed to Nietzsche by Weber's contemporaries. By his quotation, Weber does not simply adopt Nietzsche's

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<sup>5</sup> Max Weber: *The protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Translated by Talcott Parsons, ed. with a foreword by R. H. Tawney; New York, Scribner 1958, p. 182.

judgement, but rather marks the limits of his own argument: Since a scientific text is not able to make claims on values, it needs a prophet to do so.

This is all the more symptomatic in the Protestantism-Text, since Weber's argument waqs, essentially, that modern rationality is not self-sustained, but needed something else, a religious 'spirit' which mainly consisted in the idea of profession as vocation.

Thus the endings of *Science as vocation* and of the *Protestant Ethic* are formally similar, but they also contrast each other: Whereas in the Protestantism essay Nietzsche is evoked to counter liberal optimism, *Science as Vocation* refers to Isaiah to warn against the yearning for new prophets or leadership, in a word: against Nietzsche. It is a metaphrothetic warning but not, or not only, by argument, but by a form of counter-exorcism, by another quotation. Against a prophet, one is tempted to argue with Hans Blumenberg's theory of myth, only a prophet can help, against Nietzsche, only Jesaja can resist. Prophecy, which is never a single utterance but belongs to a prophetic chain, is always counter prophecy; it is therefore highly dialectical and thus able to express the numerous paradoxes of political theory. At least for the Weimar years, this complex form of prophecy as counter-prophecy proved as being extremely fruitful.

### **Barth**

Weber's essay provoked an intensive debate about the relation between science and culture which deeply influenced the idea of the Humanities in the Weimar time. It's influence reached far beyond those who explicitly referred to Weber and included a series of text about the task of the scientist, or the intellectual, or the translator facing the current crisis. These texts are important for us, since they are concerned with the question what it does mean to speak in the name of an authority, a discipline, a text in a situation when hierarchies of disciplines and epistemic structures are radically put into question.

One of these texts is Karl Barth's *THE WORLD OF GOD AS TASK OF THEOLOGY* from 1922, a programmatic statement for the so called dialectical theology, that is the theology of Crisis which emerged during World War one and which is one of the most important symptoms of the rupture in intellectual discourse. In our context, this text is not only important since it focuses on the prophetic speech act explicitly, but also since Dialectical theology had a deep influence on the concept and rhetoric of religion including its relation to politics. Namely, it stresses a moment of radical otherness in all discourses, be they political or religious.

As Weber's *SCIENCE AS VOCATION*, Barth's text is a speech to fellow professionals, which stresses the current crisis of all institutions, including the Church, a crisis which Barth describes with a wide range of catastrophic, some say expressionist metaphors of destruction, abyss, explosion, attack, obviously going back in no small part to the experience of the war. In the last instance, however, Barth insists that the hardship of theology does not consist in the crisis of culture, but in the very task of theo-logy, namely to speak of God, not of culture, ethics, or whatsoever. The *task* to speak of God is difficult or even impossible for us, and we may clearly hear the ambivalence of the German *Aufgabe* meaning both Task, Obligation and Abandoning, Giving up, since for Barth, God is radically different and cannot be grasped by human speech. Saying the word of God is therefore always already losing it, be it dogmatically or critically to a human concept. Truly to speak of God would mean to speak the Word of God, i.e. to speak in the name of God, a task which is – given the abyssal difference between God and man – impossible. Barth gives a telling example here:

“We remember the word of the oldest of our referees: “Ah Lord God, I do not know how to Speak”. He left it in his speeches, even since he had preached for 23 years ... as a headline for all what he said afterwards: I cannot speak. And Jeremiah was sanctified and anointed by God himself”.<sup>6</sup>

Barth quotes Jeremiah, namely from the Callstory Jeremiah 6, to argue that the task of the theologian is a prophetic task and his vocation is actually a call. Barth, so to speak, re-literalizes Weber's metaphor of the profession as a vocation by referring to its original meaning in the most straightforward way, to the vocation of being a messenger of God, which is the content of the prophetic call story. This vocation however, does not only legitimize the prophet respectively the theologian, but also questions him in a radical way: His Call, the word of God which the theologian has to repeat, authorizes his word but also empties it of all definite authority. The ambivalence of the figure of the prophet, which Weber had described in historical terms, is thus reformulated as an essential trait of his speech, which is constituted by a radical truth-claim but also by the knowledge that every attempt to realize this claim, to represent truth in speech, must become paradox.

Barth's turn opens a new stance to religious language, as language of paradox and of the wholly other, which, as I have stressed, is fundamental for any rhetoric of religion in the

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<sup>6</sup> Karl Barth: „Das Wort Gottes als Aufgabe der Theologie“, in: ders.: *Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie*, München (Chr. Kaiser) 1929, S. 156-178, here p. 165 (my translation).

twentieth century, including any political theology. But it has also more straightforward political consequences, a immediate theological politics, so to speak, which is most obvious in the last chapters of Barth's commentary to Paul's LETTERS TO THE ROMANS. Here, Barth emphasizes the importance of the seemingly secondary practical problems and political consequences of Christianity. According to him, they are essential since they can actually never be completely dissolved by human efforts: "When the kingdom of God is seen in organic development or under construction, it won't be the kingdom of God but the Tower of Babel."<sup>7</sup> Here, we see how Barth's radical theology fuels an iconoclastic approach to politics, which actually insists that no human undertaking can escape the paradoxes of politics. The radical distinction between man and God, as the radical distinction between facts and values in Weber, thus put into question what Barth call the ethical 'positions' namely, state, law, society. Moreover, even the negative positions, namely revolution, are in themselves problematic. Despite his revolutionary rhetoric, Barth insists on an neither – nor towards any standpoint, including that of revolution. He even argues, somewhat paradoxical, "that revolutionary titanism is much more dangerous and godless than the reactionary one since the former is essentially much closer to truth".<sup>8</sup> Here Barth takes it for granted, that the revolutionary impulse is right in so far not only the existing, but in fact every human order is problematic. Nevertheless, even the revolutionary does not escape the human hybris of negation and his aim to erect a new order actually fails in realization., since he too mixes heaven and earth, he too falls prey to the prophetic irony, that is always the counterpart of critique.

For Barth, the true dialectical position combines radical critique and radical suspension of judgement - a combination which is expressed by a composite term "Non-Revolution" which Barth develops in a reading of Romans 13,1 the stumbling block of all Paulinian political theology: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God." Barth reads the "hypotasseto", usually translated as "to obey" grammatically correct as a passive "to be subject" or even "to subject oneself" and stresses that it is, in ethical terms, a negative concept: to subject oneself does not mean to act, it is" a stepping back, an evasion, the Non-indignation, the non-Rebellion".<sup>9</sup> Accordingly he reads the second half of the verse "There is no power but of God" not as a justification of the existing order, but as a relativity of all powers in relation to God, not as 'every power is of God' but as 'there is no power apart

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<sup>7</sup> Karl Barth: Römerbrief (1922), Zürich 198, p. 455 (my translation)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 503.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 507,

from God'. Thus, the basic political action would be to recognize that neither any existing power nor any revolution may claim to be 'true' power, it consists in the basic plea against any conflation of the realms, which is, for Barth, a prophetic gesture according to Isaiah 55,8, one of his favorite passages: "For my thoughts are *not* your thoughts, neither are *your ways my ways, says the LORD*".

This basic distinction is for Barth the basic political Gesture: „Politics ... becomes *possible* in the very moment when the essentially playful character of those affairs is obvious, when it is clear that one cannot speak of an objective right here, when the absolute tone has disappeared from the theses and antithesis.”<sup>10</sup> The critical moment of the prophetic critique thus opens up a political realm, not only by referring to the individual's decision, as in Weber, but also by a critique of the absolute tone which nonetheless does not simply fall back to liberalism or relativism. As Barth himself is concerned, let me at least mention that this political rhetoric did not stay mere theory, for he would actually oppose both National Socialism and Cold War Anticommunism.

### **Critical political Theology**

Both in Barth and in Weber, it is a radical difference which constitutes a new form of political thought – the difference between facts and values, or science and morals in Weber, the difference between the human and the divine in Barth. Obviously, these difference resonate strongly in Weimar and even in contemporary political thought.

In Weimar, Carl Schmitt continues and radicalizes Weber's critique of liberalism and his concern with charismatic leadership in postulating the radical priority of politics in so far any decision implies a contingent moment. Remarkably, Schmitt relates this idea of politics back to theology, namely in his political theology which claims that politics is equivalent to theology in historical and structural terms. This relation, however, seems to somehow contradict Schmitt's own program since on the one hand he would be claiming that politics is fundamental in that it cannot be reduced to any other discourse, whereas on the other hand, it is described as somewhat derivative from theology. This ambiguity informs quite a few of Schmitt's statements, e.g. when he claims that in normative respect, the sovereign decision emerges out of nothing, he explicitly states the priority of decision whereas implicitly relates it to a theological paradigm, namely to creation. Thus, the theological political ambiguity continues to haunt political thought and undermines its status.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 516,

In Weimar, there is also a left wing political theology, which, in some ways, continues the anarchist tradition as well as the iconoclast thread in Western Culture, a thread of Sacred discontent to quote a title of Herbert Schneidau. But here, again, a dialectical understanding of religion complicates this relation. When Walter Benjamin, in his Critique of violence, evokes the idea of a divine violence which interrupts the usual course of political power, he does no longer want to found a political order, even a revolutionary one, on this very violence and does not even claim to represent it in his own discourse: Benjamin insists on the indeterminability (unbestimmbarkeit) of divine violence, which might take place but which can never be foreseen. Implicitly critical to the Schmittian Political Theology, Benjamin thus stresses not only that the divine and the human or the political and the theological are different but that this difference deeply affects the theoretical discourse itself. It is, in my eyes more than probable that this move goes back to Barth's dialectical understanding of theology.

The otherness of religion as stressed by dialectical theology does play a central role in Levinas and in the late Derrida. In Levinas, the otherness of the other undermines every attempt of a rational politics by radical ethical obligation. Thus, we confront again the permanent problem of the relation between ethics and politics, in it, theological figures as the absoluteness of the other have a constitutive function. In Derrida, difference itself affects the discourse in undoing all its oppositions; remarkably enough, the late Derrida increasingly turns to religion which he, in his earlier writings, usually simply identified with metaphysics, a gesture which he adopted from Heidegger. Especially since the 1990, Derrida speculates in line with Levinas, but also with Maurice Blanchot and Walter Benjamin about the Messianic as a form of the indeterminate event at the limits of religion and politics. This figure of the messianic has indeed inherited important moments of the prophetic rhetoric I analyzed even if it is recently rather discussed in relation to Paul than to the Hebrew Prophets.

It is important to stress that Derrida never simply adopts theological language, he always reflects about its discursive conditions as well, e.g. when speaking about the apocalyptic tone in an essay of 1980 and thus upon apocalyptic discourse, which is another heir of the prophetic one. Derrida actually reads revelation here and unfolds the complicated structure of the text in which a radical and elementary truth is brought forward by a complicated and highly nested structure of John quoting angels who quote the savior. According to Derrida, it is precisely this complication and ambiguity, which is basic for the apocalyptic tone: "From

that moment when one does no longer know any more who is speaking or writing, the text becomes apocalyptic.”<sup>11</sup>

This indeterminacy has, to sum up, proven as essential as the radical distinction for the prophetic gesture I have analyzed so far. For the prophetic moment always consist in two movements which somewhat paradoxically seem to belong together. As we have seen in Weber and Barth, the prophetic does not consist in making the epistemological or theological distinction alone, namely the distinction between the two realms of facts and values or the human and the divine, but in bridging them by their own discourse and announcement, i.e. performatively. They do not speak about politics any more but in the name of a political group and of political aim, even, as in recent debates, in the name of the political itself, as a category different from politics. In any case, what they represent, what it is, in whose name they speak, is hard to define. Their Boldness, their radicality, is a complement of their uprooted nature for they communicate in a situation where there is neither a sufficient philosophical ground nor a political situation which will guarantee them being heard. It is this, radical as well as complex situation that I have been trying to describe by the categories of the prophetic.

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<sup>11</sup> Derrida, Jacques: *Of an apocalyptic tone recently adopted in philosophy*, trans. by John P. Leavey, in: *Oxford Literary Review* 6/2 (1984) 3—37, here 27.