Non-Apophantic Logos as Model Ontology

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Abstract

In recent years Giorgio Agamben within his "Homo Sacer" project has elaborated the theory of "two ontologies", in which his challenging and crucial assumption was the juxtaposition of the ontology of ἐστί (to be or is) to the ontology of ἔστω (ought). At first glance, this central claim of Agamben can be seen as innocent and neutral for any kind of philosophical discourse. However, His archeological investigation of the concepts of duty and commandment turns out to be the mere preliminary stage for his explosive hypothesis, according to which ontological machine and entire philosophical tradition of the west oppressed and ignored the so called modal ontology of commandment. The main aim of this article is to ascertain the meaning, field and function of non-apophanitic discourse, which can be placed beyond propositional truth and falsity. We are going to analyze three forms of non-apophantic discourse, namely, prayer, commandment and oath which according to their essence, is linked to the modal ontology. Another purpose is to demonstrate that in modern structurally differentiated and secularized societies, non-apophantic logos is a concealed form and source of power.

Keywords: Agamben, non-apophantic logos, commandment, ontology, power

Introduction

In the winter semester of 1929-1930 Martin Heidegger delivered a lectures which bears the title: "Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt-endlichkheit-einsamkeit" and in the paragraph of 72 he referred to apophantic-logos and to its relation to prayer. This section of the book then will become the matter of reflection for Jacques Derrida in his seminars entitled "Beast and Sovereign", in which he tried to deconstruct Giorgio Agamben's distinction of Zoe and Bios, and the connection of bare life to the sovereign decision. Heidegger making the distinction between man and animal in that particular text by declaring that animals are essentially "zoion alogon" had to use Aristotelian distinction of apophantic and non-apophantic

utterances. Derrida analyzing this passage from Heidegger writes, "Prayer, for its part, a human thing, is a logos semantikos but not apophantikos, it speaks but could neither lie nor tell the truth. A prayer says nothing that could mislead. It cannot and could not be shown to be false. . . . The logos apophantikos, for its part, is also human discourse, but one that can always mislead and lie. The logos apophantikos can speak the truth and make the truth only by withdrawing from deceit, lying and retreat, or even from error as such" (J. Derrida 2009: 230).

Heidegger did not refer to non-apophantic logos, which for Derrida is quite crucial, which means that for him logos apophantikos is determined by non-apophantic logos. According to Michael Naas "Heidegger seems to have forgotten, says Derrida in an aside, that "even the enunciative proposition, insofar as it is addressed to someone, indicates some prayer, a 'listen to me, I say to you'" (BS 2 217/304). Hence, Derrida can suggest contra Heidegger, or contra this Heidegger, that a certain prayer, a certain performative of prayer, is at the origin of all discourse, constative as well as performative. And all this, recall, will have been motivated in large part by Heidegger's attempt to distinguish the beast from the sovereign, to show that "the animal is alogon . . . it can neither speak, nor pray, nor lie" (M. Naas 2015: 118).

Archeology of non-apophantic logos and commandment:

Once Giorgio Agamben noticed, that philosophical archeology as a methodological tool is the shadow directed from the present to past. In case of Foucault, this shadow lasted to 17th and 18th centuries. For Agamben this shadow is longer and goes back to medieval and ancient intellectual history.[117]

In recent years Giorgio Agamben within his "Homo Sacer" project has elaborated the theory of "two ontologies", in which his challenging and crucial assumption was the juxtaposition of the ontology of ἐστί (to be or is) to the ontology of ἔστω (ought). At first glance, this central claim of Agamben can be seen as innocent and neutral for any kind of philosophical discourse. However, His archeological investigation of the concepts of duty and commandment turns out to be the mere preliminary stage for his explosive hypothesis, according to which ontological machine and entire philosophical tradition of the west oppressed and ignored the so called modal ontology of commandment.

Agamben assumes that despite the concealment of this ontology of commandment, it has been functioning as latent form of political power. By unveiling the structure of imperative and identifying it with the source of

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[117] See: Giorgio Agamben: IL Regno e La Gloria: Per una genealogia teologica dell'economia e del governo, Neri Pozza Editore, 2007.

power, Agamben evokes and brought back to philosophical reasoning Aristotle's notion concerning non-apophantic discourse, which he developed in "De Interpretatione" and which can be also easily compared to speech acts theory. According to Aristotle, "Every sentence is significant, but not every sentence is a statement-making sentence, but only those in which there is truth or falsity. There is not truth or falsity in all sentences: a prayer (εὐχὴ) is a sentence but is neither true nor false" (Arist; De Interpr. 16b33.) Non-apophantic discourse does not reveals, shows or demonstrates something which can be true or false, rather it is a singular self-manifestation, which is neutral and indifferent to binary opposition of logic and can be placed beyond propositional truth or falsity.

There are several forms of singular expressions, which structurally are very similar to performative utterances such as an oath, prayer, curse, advice, suggestion and of course imperative or commandment. Imperative does not refer to objective world, it lacks the force of denotation and the description. Agamben stated, "One understands, from this perspective, why juridical-religious formulas (of which the oath, command and prayer are eminent examples) have a performative character; if the performative, by the single fact of being uttered actualizes its own meaning, this is because it does not refer to being but to having-to-be. It presupposes an ontology of esto and not of esti" (G. Agamben 2013: 119).

What connects one of the most significant concept of the western metaphysical thought "beginning" (ἀρχή) to the commandment? In old Greek language ἀρχή designated both, commandment and the beginning respectively. According to Giorgio Agamben, the verb ἄρχω expresses the commencement of something by someone, ἄρχων designated the person who gave the order (commandment), and by doing this, something new had been started. This identification of commandment and the beginning gives to Agamben a chance to make a radical claims and theoretical assumptions, which is typical for him. According to Agamben commandment was always linked to the beginning. "In the beginning (ἐν ἀρχῇ) God created the heavens and the earth" [Exodus. 1:1]. An act of creation is intertwined with the will, as well as with commandment, because God said "Let there be light! (γενηθήτω φῶς) and there was light [Exodus. 1:.3]. Moreover, Agamben takes much more radical step further by assuming the possibility of different translation and understanding of the opening words of John's Gospel. It is clear, that Agamben plays here and makes an anti-dogmatic decision in order to pave the way for his own discourse. "In the beginning was the Word (ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ Λόγο), and the Word was with God" [John 1.1], can be understood in a different way. If we assume that instead of the "beginning" was "commandment", it turns out to be that "in the commandment was the word".

According to Agamben, in the western philosophical tradition in contrast to the phenomenon of obedience, systematic and intentional reflection on the commandment never took place. He named the work of La Bouasie "De Discours de la Servitude Volontaire", in which the reflection on commandment was absolutely missed. However, it would be hard to agree with the critique of Agamben, because "voluntary slavery" does not implies by necessity the notion of commandment.

Commandment belongs to the category of non-apophantic discourse and nothing in an objective world corresponds to it. An imperative act does not disclose truth or falsity; rather it is a type of eloctionary utterance, which is well known by Austin's theory of speech acts. If an imperative "go" or "walk" does not tell us something on the subject and therefore is out of the binary system of truth and falsity, its only function and purpose is the force of utterance itself and resulted consequences, which are produced by this event. If we substitute an imperative with the third personal indicative, we will have an example of Aristotle's apophantic discourse. "X is going" could be true (if this person is really going) or false (if he is not walking). Apophantic discourse refers to the state of things, to the world on which something could be said. It reveals the condition and nature of that particular subject. An imperative "walk" is non-descriptive utterance, which does not refer to being and its different regions.

"The order, for instance, given by an officer to his soldiers, is accomplished, is perfect, by the mere act of its utterance. The fact that the soldiers obey or disobey does not put in question the validity of the commandment. The commandment is perfect in its mere utterance. We must therefore admit that the commandment does not refer to something existing. Nothing in the world as it is could respond to the imperative. And this is why people say that the imperative does not imply, does not refer to an "is", but rather to an "ought"…"

"Power is not defined only by its capacity to be obeyed but, first of all, by its capacity to give orders and commandments, even if those orders are not totally obeyed. A power does not fall when it is no more obeyed or completely obeyed, but when it ceases to give orders. A power, [which] continues to give order [s], will always find someone, perhaps a few persons that will obey. But if a power ceases, if it is unable to give orders, this the only moment when a power [will] collapse" (G. Agamben 2013: 31-32).

This quoted passage is problematic. Is it possible to imagine or conceive of an imperative independently, without obedience and completeness of an action? How legitimate is to consider as a holder of power Strategos or officer whose orders are no longer in force, no one obeys his commandments and nobody wants to fulfil an ordered task? Is he the real officer or not? Agamben thinks that power is no longer the power; it ceases

to be a power as such, when it rejects to issue a new orders or commandments. However, this thought is problematic, because if being rejected and refuted, power still maintains its force, what consequences we will face in case of general non-violent strike? In that non-violent general strike imperatives, orders and legal regulatory system of norms are temporally suspended and do not have a force in order to exert an influence due to the unwillingness of those, who are no longer obeys. If we assume that power, will reproduce itself and will find out the ways of its realization we will inevitably obtain the paradoxical result. Unfortunately, Agamben does not refers to the general strike and civil disobedience; it would be interesting how efficacious will be the relation of power and commandment in the condition of its absolute neutralization. However, Agamben is oriented on the investigation of the modality and semantic meaning of the commandment and following the steps of Aristotle, he places this singular commandment under the category of non-apophantic logos. What is an intention of Agamben will become clear by analyzing the modal dimension of an imperative.

As we have already noticed imperative does not have any descriptive function. For the description of something, it should refer to the present temporal mode and to the state of things. However, it does not imply something, which is said by the verb "to be"; rather it is directed towards the future to come and its modality. Imperative aims not at the actual presence, but at the coming modal future. In order to determine and ascertain the meaning and essence of an imperative, Agamben evokes the works of Emile Benveniste and Antoine Meillet. According to Meillet, there exists a morphological similarity between the verb in indicative form and imperative. Due to this Meillet assumes that imperative could be the primitive and primordial form of the verb.[118] According to Benveniste "imperative is non-denotative and the purposes of it is not the expression of content. Rather it has pragmatic character and its aim is to exert the influence on the listener" (G. Agamben 2013: 42). Agamben is real archeologist, who excavated and discovered many conceptual artefacts, which were abandoned and forgotten. He found out very interesting definition of the imperative in Benveniste. According to Benveniste imperative is the "nude semanteme" (le sémantème nu) which expresses the pure ontological relation between world and language.[119] Therefore, imperative which describes nothing guides as into the field of non-apophantic logos. In which it represents itself as self-manifested phenomenon. Imperative transmits and shows only itself. Which kind of ontological relation means Agamben? If imperative does not refer to

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[118] See: Giorgio Agamben. Opus Dei: An Archeology of Duty, Stanford University Press, 2013, page 118.
[119] See: Giorgio Agamben. What Is to Rule? GRUNDRISSE, 2013, 42.

something, which "is", on what type of ontology are we speaking about? "Imperative does not describe the relation of language and the world; rather it governs and reign over them". (G. Agamben 2013: 44). It refers to the modal verb "must", or to the expression "let it be", which founds or gives birth to something. According to its structure imperative has performative character and it possess the perlocutionary force of utterance. Agamben, by doing his archeological investigations gradually get closer to his aim, that is to say to the disclosure of the secret source of power and take glimpse on the functioning of entire western political apparatus.

Risky and provocative hypothesis of Agamben refers to the status and determination of ontology. According to him, western cultural and philosophical tradition knows two different ontologies, which paradoxically intertwines with each other. Agamben calls fists ontology as apophantic ontology, which is by its nature indicative. The second is an ontology of commandment, which is imperative. Binary system of ontology is constituted by indicative and imperative. To the first ontology corresponds Greek „ἐστί", and to the second „ἔστω". According to Agamben, an ontology of "to be" functions in the philosophic and scientific discourse, whereas imperative ontology of "esto" acquires its power and meaning in the field of morality and religion and governs them. What then Agamben does may seem to be the concrete manifestation of theoretical violence over the foundational formula of western metaphysical tradition. However, his main aim is not the distortion of something but the representation of an ambivalent machine of the western ontology. As we have already noticed, western culture entirely abandoned the ontology of commandment, which according to Agamben's assumption have been remaining latent and governing structure of philosophical and political paradigm of the west. Agamben has altered one word from Parmenides's poem and obtains different meaning. Parmenides's formula „ἔστι γὰρ εἶναι"has been changed by "there is indeed being" "let there be being".

"That in our contemporary societies the ontology of commandment is not only eroding the primacy of the ontology of the ἐστι but also slowly overcoming and replacing it. This means that, in a sort of returning of the repressed, religion, magic and law [and all] the domain of non-apophantic logos, which has been neglected and pushed in the background, are secretly beginning to govern the function of our secularized society. In our so-called democratic societies commandment[s] are given usually in the form of advice, suggestion, invitation, advertising, or you're asked by reason of

security to co-operate, and people do not realize that these are just commandments disguised in the form of suggestion, advice..." [120]

Genealogical and archeological investigations of Agamben eventually links with each other the phenomenon of the commandment and non-apophantic logos.

The Oath as non-apophantic logos

An oath is another form of non-apophantic logos, which was one of the central problems for the construction of the speech acts theory. Oath was politically laden phenomena, for example according to Lycurgus "The power that holds together [to synechon] our democracy is the oath" (G. Agamben: 2011, 2) and according to the neoplatonic philosopher Hierocles "We have previously shown that the law [nomos] is the always uniform operation by means of which God eternally and immutably leads everything to existence. Now we call oath [horkos] that which, following this law, conserves [diaterousan] all things in the same state and renders them stable in such a way that, as they are held in the guarantee of the oath and maintain the order of the law, the immutable stability of the order of creation is the completion of the creating law" (G. Agamben. 2011: 3). Both quoted passages concerning the essence and the function of the oath are very similar with each other. In both cases the oath does not have constitutional power, it does not creates something. "The oath does not create anything, does not bring anything into being, but keeps united [synecho] and conserves [diatereo] what something else (in Hierocles, the law; in Lycurgus, the citizens or the legislator) has brought into being" (G. Agamben, 2011: 3). An oath does not refer to the semiotic and cognitive functions of the proposition; rather it just provides effectuality of utterance and its claims on truth. Philo of Alexandria in his "allegorical interpretations" which was cited by Agamben wrote that, "Now men have recourse to oaths to win belief, when others deem them untrustworthy [apistoumenoi, lacking in pistis, that is, in credibility]". (G. Agamben 2011: 4). It is clear from that passage that the oath has been using due to the enhancing the credibility of assertion, because it does not refer to the state of affairs therefore it could not be considered as criterion for truth and falsity. It is another problem. If in the moment of swearing one is not going to fulfil his self-imposed obligations.

Maybe an intention of one who swears is not the keeping of promise at all. Anyway, its main force is the produced effect, or effectuality as such. Let my quote another passage from allegorical interpretation "You mark that

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[120]   https://waltendegewalt.wordpress.com/2011/04/01/giorgio-agamben-what-is-a-commandment-

God swears not by some other thing, for nothing is higher than He, but by Himself, who is best of all things. Some have said, that it was inappropriate for Him to swear; for an oath is added to assist faith [pisteos eneka] and only God ... is faithful [pistos]. ... Moreover, the very words of God are oaths [hoi logoi tou theou eisin horkoz]… No, we may be content if we are able to swear by his name, which means (as we have seen) the interpreting word [tou ermeneos logou]" (G. Agamben 2011: 20). According Philo, there is no interval between God's saying and creating, he writes "God spoke and it was done, with no interval between the two rho theos legon ama epoiei],) the oath of men is thus the attempt to conform human language to this divine model, making it, as much as possible, pistos, credible." (G. Agamben 2011: 21). Philo in this context seems to be the something like an ancestor of speech acts theory, despite the fact that he was operating in the field of exegetical theology. Therefore, an oath is non-apophantic logos, moreover non-apophantic also implies that it has some performative character, it refers to something, which should be. Here there is not divergence or split between ontology and praxis, between ousia and oikonomia, which emerged in the writings of the church fathers. "The econ- omy through which God governs the world is, as a matter of fact, entirely different from his being, and cannot be inferred from it. It is possible to analyze the notion of God on the ontological level, listing his attributes or negating, one by one--as in apophatic theology-all his predicates to reach the idea of a pure being whose essence coincides with existence. But this •will not rigorously say anything about his relation to the world or the way in which he has decided to govern the course of human history" (G. Agamben 2007: 70).

"[The oath] is a particular modality of assertion, which supports, guarantees, and demonstrates, but does not found anything. Individual or collective, the oath exists only by virtue of that which it reinforces and renders solemn: a pact, an agreement, a declaration. It prepares for or concludes a speech act which alone possesses meaningful con- tent, but it expresses nothing by itself It is in truth an oral rite, often completed by a manual rite whose form is variable. Its function con- sists not in the affirmation that it produces, but in the relation that it institutes between the word pronounced and the potency invoked" (G. Agamben 2011: 81-82).

Conclusion

By investigating the function and meaning of non-apophantic logos and identifying its three significant components, we draw the conclusion that singular and self-manifested utterances can be pushed and articulated in the field of modal ontology. Commandment, prayer or oath according to their structure have imperative character and are contradictory to the indicative. In addition, we can say that in analytic philosophical tradition, in the context of

speech acts theory, modal ontology has swallowed indicative ontology of presence. However, Agamben's intention is absolutely different and bringing back into the current philosophical reflection Aristotelian non-apophantic logos, we wants to disclose hidden operative machine of political power, which is disguised by the mask of non-apophantic discourse.

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