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# ERICH PRZYWARA AND GIORGIO AGAMBEN: RHYTHM AS A SPACE FOR DIALOGUE BETWEEN CATHOLIC METAPHYSICS AND POSTMODERNISM

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While Agamben is becoming an increasingly important thinker for theology,[1] he is nevertheless still regarded by some as one of the multitude of postmodern philosophers who have built their thought on ontological nihilism. Conor Cunningham, for example, in tracing a genealogy of nihilism, has said of Agamben that he attempts to set up a world of undifferentiated potential, in which there is no distinction between good and evil. He argues that Agamben inverts actuality and potentiality, such that what is potential is the real and what is actual is only mirage. Any actuality is simply the inhibition of potentialities, an 'ontological pretence' that prohibits the existence of what could be otherwise. Cunningham's conclusion is that Agamben would like to bring the world as we know it to an end, and he does not offer us a new one in its place.[2] As a result of criticisms such as these, a strict division has emerged between Catholic theology, such as the *analogia entis* of Erich Przywara and what has been characterized as postmodern, nihilist ontologies in general. John Betz has argued that theology's rejection of Przywara's *analogia entis* is the result of its acceptance of postmodern philosophy's predilection, inaugurated by Nietzsche, Barth, and Heidegger, for the sublime over and against the beautiful, that is, for force over and against structure,[3] and that this is one of the symptoms of nihilism. While Betz does not himself include Agamben in this list, Milbank reads Agamben along similar lines, arguing that the only option that Agamben seems to accept is an apocalyptic interruption that makes even more extreme Heidegger's lack of mediation between Being and beings. He argues that Agamben ought, instead, to be thinking the possibility of mediation according to Catholic theology.[4]

In contrast to these criticisms, this article puts forward an alternative reading of Agamben which does not reduce him to a moment in the genealogy of nihilism, but instead indicates a rhythmic proportion in his thought between time and eternity, meaning and suspension, and actuality and potentiality. I argue this by exhibiting Agamben's use of rhythm as comparable to Przywara's rhythmic metaphysics. The presence of such rhythmic proportion in Agamben's work calls into question the interpretation of those like Cunningham and Milbank who suggest that Agamben's aim is to liquefy all actuality into undifferentiated potential or to apocalyptically overturn our current reality. This in turn gives credence to a dialogue between theology and at least certain thinkers within postmodern philosophy that such strict delineations as Betz's tend to deny it. If the rhythmic proportionality of the aesthetic form of Przywara's *analogia entis* is comparable to that of Agamben, then the ability to hold structure and force in rhythmic proportion is still an option that remains available to postmodern thought. Betz's important project of making Przywara's *analogia entis* a significant concept in theology thus need not be an undertaking that opposes Przywara to the whole of the recent philosophical tradition, but one

that attempts to look for analogies between Przywara's own description of the *analogia entis* and other possible variations, descriptions, and extensions. This method of evaluation by comparison is helpful because while certain thinkers attempt to claim Agamben for theology, while others repudiate him on theological grounds, the system of theological evaluation used in both cases can be unclear. Such a comparison, on the other hand, provides a specific, theological system as a measuring-stick for evaluation, which will hopefully provide increased clarity albeit within the confines of that particular system.

I begin with Przywara's rhythmic metaphysics as it is laid out in his book *Analogia Entis: Metaphysik: Ur-Struktur und All-Rhythmus*. While this is not the only work in which rhythm appears, it is arguably his most developed use of the concept. In Przywara's earlier work, the term 'rhythm' is used to refer to the general movement of various metaphysical systems. In *Analogia Entis*, the term takes on a specific association with Przywara's analogical metaphyiscs, and it is this function of the term in which I am interested. After describing Przywara's use of rhythm, I will exhibit how Agamben's use of the concept is comparable to that developed by Przywara, and use it to address the charges laid against him.

## I. ERICH PRZYWARA: THE *ANALOGIA ENTIS* AS RHYTHM

Przywara frequently uses the word 'rhythm' as a way to describe the movement of certain metaphysical systems or of creaturely life in general.[5] He uses the term because he believes that every philosophical view corresponds to the nature of consciousness as a tension between its 'self-contained-ness (immanence)' and its 'stretching-beyond-itself (transcendence).' As such, metaphysical systems are not static structures, but oscillations between these poles, which produce fluctuating 'middles.'[6] However, 'rhythm' takes on a more specific meaning with respect to analogy,[7] and Christian analogy is an even more specific type of rhythm. *Analogia Entis* can therefore be read as an extended description of the nature of analogical rhythm. Przywara defines metaphysics as an enquiry into the 'ground-end-definition' that appears behind that which is grounded. The enquiry into this ground-end-definition is not independent of that which is grounded, but takes place in the 'in between' of the ground and the grounded.[8] At the level of creaturely metaphysics this is an enquiry between the creature's essence (its ground) and existence (its grounded-ness). Przywara argues that the form of all metaphysics assumes this duality of essence and existence, such that we might describe metaphysical rhythms as the nature of the relationship between the two poles. Creaturely metaphysics has the form of an oscillation between the two poles. Two movements flow into one another: becoming as the becoming of being, and being as unity in becoming.[9] This back-and-forth relationship is proper to the creature's nature as a striving towards the unity of being and becoming. The result is that the fundamentally rhythmic (rather than static) outline of the metaphysics of the creature is 'essence in-and-beyond existence,'[10] where 'essence-in-existence' corresponds to the creature's actuality and 'essence-beyond-existence' corresponds to its potentiality.[11]

Przywara names this in-and-beyond relationship 'analogy,' which he designates as an ordering that is distinct from both logic and dialectic. Logic is the belief in a single, immanent law governing the world. Przywara takes as examples of logic Hercalitus's immanent law that everything is a never-ending flux of oppositions on the one hand, and Parmenides' immanent law that everything is rest on the other. Dialectic, in contrast, is the violent opposition between two laws, in which identity is contradiction. Przywara says that these two alternatives in the end collapse into one another because both represent a desire for clear, immediate knowledge of the world, whether through the identification of a single law, or through the knowledge and ordering

of antitheses, which is also reduced to the single law of 'identity is contradiction.'[12] Analogy, in contrast, is the only ordered equilibrium, in that it transforms antitheses into tensions and polarities, allowing for rhythmic movement between them. Przywara works out his definition of analogy based on Aristotle's use of the term with respect to the relationship between actuality and potentiality. He states that 'Actuality and potentiality … sustain in their relationship towards one another an inner, oscillating rhythm, which Aristotle directly designates as analogy.'[13] The immanent laws of Parmenides' rest and Heraclitus' flux work at the level of potentiality alone. In them, everything is dissolved into a single law, and all opposites become identical.[14] At the level of potentiality, such an identity of opposites is appropriate because potentiality is a dynamic possibility towards everything indifferently. When we begin to talk about actualization, however, one choice is realized and enacted over others; reality is no longer a mere chaos of undifferentiated potential. These two things are related to one another through an analogy, which is an inner oscillating rhythm. This rhythm comes about because every actuality is finite with respect to the infinite possibilities that exceed it, while potentiality itself is always directed towards its own actualization as its *telos*. Thus, the creaturely rhythm of analogy manifests as an immanent dynamic middle (potential, flux) that is nevertheless directed towards an end (actualization, rest), which means both that actuality is prior to potentiality as a goal that moves it from within and is therefore presupposed in potentiality, but also that potentiality always exceeds actuality.[15]

However, this analogy is only that of creaturely metaphysics. In the specifically Christian analogy, the non-coincidence and non-divorce of the oscillation between the antitheses are preserved and held together in a 'beyond,' rather than in an immanent oscillation.[16] This is the form of analogy that Przywara identifies with the traditional *analogia entis*. For Przywara, an immanent creaturely rhythm that does not open to a beyond simply collapses into dialectic, an aimless oscillation between the two poles of potentiality and actuality. This is the criticism that Betz makes of Heidegger (as well as Kant, Nietzsche, and postmodernism). Heidegger's relationship between Being and beings is formally an analogical relationship of Being-in-and-beyond-beings, but this is overshadowed by a dialectic of truth as originary strife.[17] In the end, Heidegger identifies Being with Nothing, with the result that potentiality overturns actuality and existence overturns essence.[18] While Agamben does not go so far as to recognize a transcendent, at least explicitly, the criticisms of Przywara and Betz against an analogy that collapses into a violent dialectic do not apply to Agamben, as I will demonstrate below.

In the *analogia entis*, the oscillation of creaturely metaphysics is not a closed circle, nor a static equilibrium. The 'movement of becoming is a never-closed back-and-forth movement' by virtue of the form of the 'in-and-beyond.'[19] It is, rather, a striving for the unity of essence and existence which exists only in God, that is, beyond the creature. The creature is in an absolute state of flux, but by virtue of its *telos* towards actuality, it points beyond itself to transcendent measure.[20] This relationship is not simply a movement from the creature to God *(a posteriori*), nor a movement from God to the creature (*a priori*), but 'concerns the innermost rhythmic beat *between* God (as the absolute) and the created … , because and by which it is concerned with the innermost beat of becoming of the creature (between essence and existence).'[21] God is both beyond and within the creature in its becoming, through the oscillation of the essence-in-and-beyond-existence. That is to say, God is beyond the creature insofar as he is the only perfect coincidence of essence and existence, being and becoming etc., but he is within the creature insofar as the creature is a movement between these two poles that strives for this very unity.[22] The relationship is analogical. The creature is like God in that it has both essence and existence, but infinitely more unlike God in that the relationship between essence and existence is not one of unity but of tension.[23] The analogy between God and the creature is characterized as

similarity within an ever greater dissimilarity. Equilibrium, balance, and structure occur within the absolute dissimilarity between God and creature. The relationship cannot be subsumed under some larger genus or structure.[24] The shape of this relationship is God-in-and-beyond-the-creature. It is the vertical axis that intersects the horizontal axis of the metaphysical relationship of the creature to itself as essence-in-and-beyond-existence. Thus, there is an analogical relationship, not only within creaturely metaphysics as Aristotle identifies, but also between intra-creaturely analogy and the analogy between the creature and the divine.[25] Przywara describes it as an 'oscillating suspended middle' or a 'rest in motion' in which unity and movement are bound together in God.[26] The suspended-ness of the middle is what differentiates it from the oscillating middle of Aristotle's analogy. The oscillation is suspended in that it is not a self-contained movement unto itself, but it points above and beyond itself to the transcendent.[27]

With respect to potentiality and actuality, the divine origin is the eternal actual, that *telos* towards which creatureliness as pure potentiality strives. There manifests in the creature 'a kind of (active) "potency" of the creature "towards God," ' like an *entelechy* or inner *telos* that sets the creature into action.[28] However, this God who is *telos*, is also the source of the multiplicity of potentiality. The diverse plenitude of possibility is that which leads us to God as limitlessly representable.[29] So, while in creaturely metaphysics, actuality is prior to potentiality as its *telos*, here potentiality is also prior to actuality as its presupposition because God as *telos* is the origin of both the actual *telos* and the multitude of potentiality, such that both are co-original. In opening upwards, onto transcendence, the creaturely oscillation is not a closed system in which potentiality is contained by actuality, but a rhythmic oscillation between periodic actualizations and the excess of potentiality. Przywara describes potentiality by saying that 'potentiality oscillates between a potentiality towards the "possibility-of-non-being" and a potentiality towards the "impossibility-of-non-being." '[30] The nature of potentiality is such that because the creaturely is suspended in God, there is an abyss beneath it. There is no other ground of the creature. This is 'the night of "godforsakenness" ' that is nevertheless 'the decisive "God all in all." '[31] The creature is hereby validated in its provisionality. Analogical rhythm is a rhythm of that which is passing away, or flowing by. Przywara says that 'precisely the "passing away" is the sounding of the whole: just as a spoken work of art depends upon each verse, each syllable, each letter "passing away." '[32] Any limits of actualization that the creature receives are not fixed, but are halting points along the path of the creature's becoming.[33] The appropriate stance for us is to flow with what flows. At the same time, however, ' "the rhythm of the passing" is grounded as the manifestation of the deep mysteries of God: … the God who holds "the rhythm of the passing" in himself.'[34] God affirms and sustains the transient flow. [35] Our rhythm is directed towards an end that is not itself. It is suspended into God. Przywara states that 'The "sounding analogy" is made full in the "analogy of silence." '[36]

This manifests within time as the vertical axis of God-in-and-beyond-the-creature producing halting points within the horizontal creaturely oscillation between essence and existence. We can think about this in terms of the intersection between time and eternity: the rhythm between God as eternal and God as *kairos*, by which he enters into the world's flow of time, particularly in Christ. Przywara describes *kairoi* as those 'right' moments or *Augenblicke* which cut through the flow of time, and by which God enters into time.[37] Thus, the God beyond time comes to be in time while maintaining his eternity. In such *Augenblicke*, there is both a unity of creaturely time and divine eternity, as well as an ever greater division or dissimilarity between the divine full 'now' of rest, and the creaturely empty 'now' that flows between past and future but has no fullness of presence.[38] The *kairos* is both God himself, as well as the created 'here and now.' So the *kairos* takes on the character of a change-point, an interruption in the regular flow of

things.[39] God, in his relation to the world, is a rhythm between the 'all things in all things' and the point of change and interruption within the created.[40] The rhythm of creaturely life, whether viewed from the flow of time or the oscillation of metaphysics, is simultaneously sustained and interrupted by points of intersection between immanent and transcendent, in which the transcendent is manifest in a rhythm between the beyond that is 'all in all' and those points of change in which it appears within creaturely reality. God is that which is absolutely other, and yet is within the immanent as other, interrupting the continuity of the immanent flow.

## II. GIORGIO AGAMBEN'S POETIC RHYTHM

While Giorgio Agamben does not explicitly articulate a metaphysics, he nevertheless addresses such issues as the relationship between potentiality and actuality, universal and particular, and being and becoming. Moreover, the concept of rhythm bears upon his exploration of these traditionally metaphysical concepts. What follows demonstrates that the rhythm of creaturely existence described by Przywara and Agamben is formally compatible. While Betz acknowledges this same formal compatibility in Heidegger but then points to how this similarity is swallowed up by a violent dialectic, Agamben is different in this regard in that he maintains the importance of rhythm precisely over and against Heidegger's ontological strife. I argue that while Agamben's use of rhythm is not a part of a theological metaphysics of *analogia entis*, it is nevertheless part of what Przywara calls a 'creaturely analogy,' and furthermore that this creaturely analogy is open to a beyond.

As with Przywara, Agamben develops his conception of rhythm in explicit dialogue with Aristotle. He says that Aristotle understood number, or rhythm, to be an originary principle. It is not an immanent measure, but 'something radically other, that is, not an element that exists in the same way as the others … but something that could be found only by abandoning the terrain of division ad infinitum to enter a more essential dimension.'[41] This more essential or originary dimension re-appears later in Agamben's work as zones of indifference, caesuras, or remnants. We cannot straightforwardly identify this more essential dimension with transcendence. In fact, Agamben describes the remnant as a zone in which immanence and transcendence are indistinguishable.[42] But there is nevertheless a sense of 'beyond-ness,' of transcending divisions in order to reach something more originary.

This more originary dimension or remnant that rhythm opens up is also described in terms of Holderlin's caesura, which is 'the counter-rhythmic interruption,' which 'counter[s] the raging change of representations.'[43] The caesura is other than the flow of representations that it interrupts, but is not something other than rhythm itself. Agamben includes both the flow of time and the suspension of this temporal flow under the category of rhythm. Rhythm is thus ecstatic – it both gives time or representation and holds it back.[44] He describes this relationship using the metaphor of the knight asleep on a horse, in which the horse represents the rhythmic transport of the voice. Language or meaning is asleep on the horse, unaware of the voice that carries it. The caesura is the moment at which the horse stops and language awakens and is momentarily forced to contemplate the voice that carries it, to contemplate representation itself rather than the represented.[45] In other words, the interruption of rhythm causes us to think rhythm itself, rather than merely that which it makes possible. We recognize in the caesura the double movement of rhythm which introduces a stop in time or representation, while also making it possible for us to apprehend this rhythm.

In each description of this more originary dimension, its function is to open up spaces within a flow or system. The opposition between the Jews and the Gentiles in *The Time that Remains*,

for example, is a system of Law, which operates according to division. In order to render this dividing force inoperative, Agamben says that the apostle Paul institutes another division (flesh/breath) within the division that already exists.[46] The effect is to render the division ambiguous, thus creating a remnant or remainder within the division.[47] In describing the remnant, Agamben says that

> The problem is misunderstood from the very start when the remnant is taken as a numeric remainder or portion … A closer reading of the prophetic texts shows that the remnant is closer to being a consistency or figure that Israel assumes in relation to election or to the messianic event. It is therefore neither the all, nor a part of the all, but the impossibility for the part and the all to coincide with themselves or with each other.[48]

The remnant represents the impossibility of an immanent world closed in on itself and identical to itself. It holds things open because it brings to our attention the fact that the representations by which we comprehend the world are 'not all' of reality.[49]

The imagery of a division that is divided by another division brings to mind Przywara's description of an oscillation between poles that is not closed, but intersected by the vertical analogy between similarity and dissimilarity, or 'all' and 'change.' Przywara designates this '*kairos*' and says that it includes both God himself and the created here and now. Agamben too calls that which is within time but sufficiently different from the flow of time so as to introduce a disjunction into it, '*kairos*,' or Messianic time.[50] This is not another time, but the transformation of chronological time through its suspension, a time 'that pulses and moves within chronological time.'[51] It is 'the relation of every moment, every *kairos*, to the end of time and to eternity.'[52] Both thinkers' understanding of *kairos* include both human time and its relation to a beyond. Notice, moreover, that Agamben explicitly distances his account of Messianic time from any apocalypse. The apocalypse is situated at the end of time, while Messianic time operates in the 'between,' relating each *kairos* to the end.[53] Contrary to Milbank's accusations, *kairological* interruption is explicitly not a destruction and overcoming of that which is, but its relativization, suspension, and preservation in its relation to a beyond.

Furthermore, the 'beyond' in Agamben's work has a teleological flavour, illustrated by his thought on poetics. Poetry is marked by a non-coincidence between sound and sense which is absent in prose, represented by the phenomenon of 'enjambment' in which a metrical limit or pause is opposed to a semantic limit or pause.[54] The possibility of enjambment is that which differentiates poetry from prose. It is the movement from one line of verse to another in which the metre requires that one pause, while the semantic content of the poem overflows the line, pushing forward into the next line through an oscillating movement between sound and sense. However, this becomes a difficulty at the end of the poem, where there is no next line into which meaning could overflow, and thus no possibility of enjambment. Sound and sense must become one, and poetry changes into prose at the end of the poem.[55] Agamben says that the poem here 'collapses into silence … The poem thus reveals the goal of its proud strategy: to let language finally communicate itself, without remaining unsaid in what is said.'[56] The *telos* of the poem is found in something beyond its own rhythm: a silence. This 'beyond' is a unity between sound and sense, which manifests in the poem as a tension that propels it forwards towards this unity.

Remember that for Przywara, the rhythm of analogy manifests as a suspended dynamic middle that is both directed towards an end and intersected by this end. Analogy is rest in motion, which is to say that transcendent rest is manifested within the motion of immanence. In analogy, rhythm is both directed towards an end that is not itself, but is also a manifestation of the mystery of the transcendent within the immanent. Thus Przywara concludes the *Analogia Entis* by saying that 'The "sounding analogy" is thus made full by passing into the "analogy of

silence." '[57] For Agamben, likewise, the rhythm of the poem moves towards its own end, its silence. This silence beyond the poem represents the fulfilment, the *telos* perhaps, of the poem itself. Its purpose is not immanent to itself, but beyond itself. Furthermore, this rest or silence is not only a beyond at the periphery of the poem, but exists within the poem as the tensions of enjambent and caesura that maintain its rhythm. These structures of rest and suspension that exist within the rhythm of poetry both originate from its end, which is other to it, and are nevertheless that which make its rhythm possible.

Agamben makes explicit the connection between his analysis of poetry and his understanding of existence when he says that the caesura 'opens for [man] the space of his belonging to the world, only within which he can take the original measure of his dwelling on earth and find again his present truth in the unstoppable flow of linear time.'[58] This is reminiscent of Heidegger's own description of the origin of the work of art – a space for truth opened up within the immanent. However, while Betz rightly points out that a violent strife overcomes the secular rhythm of Heidegger's metaphysics, the same is not true of Agamben. For Heidegger, the space for truth is opened through the conflict of earth and world. Truth is primal conflict.[59] Agamben, however, conspicuously rejects Heidegger's primal conflict. The chapter in which Agamben explicitly considers rhythm is entitled 'The Originary Structure of the Work of Art,' a reference to Heidegger's own essay titled 'The Origin of the Work of Art.' Agamben acknowledges that art opens up a space for humanity to dwell in, but the difference is that the opening of this space does not occur through strife or struggle, but through rhythm. The space of truth in Agamben is associated with a weak messianic force, an empty *Augenblick*, which does not itself have any content, and thus does not violently overthrow order, but divides the divisions which themselves perpetuate violence, such that the immanent is not coincident with itself.[60] We might describe it as an 'immanent transcendent.'[61] As with Przywara, we have here the image of something other than the immanent flow or rhythm to which that immanent flow is directed, and which manifests itself within that flow, both interrupting and sustaining it.

This is the zone of indifference that Agamben perpetually seeks to open up in his work. Historically, ontology operates according to oppositions, such as between actual and potential, human and non-human, or immanence and transcendence. The zone of indistinction, variously known as caesura, bare life, the coming community, potentiality, infancy, the Messianic, the remnant etc. is a space in which these various ontological distinctions become indistinguishable. Yet it is a double-faceted, ambiguous space, in that it both gives distinction and irrupts into distinctions, blurring the lines between them. The most significant example for our discussion is perhaps Agamben's claim that the Messiah is said to introduce 'a zone of absolute indiscernability between immanence and transcendence, between this world and the future world.'[62]

It is in this zone of indistinction that Agamben envisions an alternative ontology, which he calls 'Whatever Being,' an acceptance of whatever is, rather than an interpretation of what is through a binary. It is the being of singularities, whose being cannot be distinguished from their manner, or their particularity from their universality. I suspect that this is the dimension of Agamben's thought which suggests to Cunningham that Agamben seeks to set up a world of undifferentiated potential. However, Whatever Being is not undifferentiated potential, but is the kind of being that is differentiated as singularities according to their being-such, rather than according to properties that would identify them as belonging to a particular group.[63] For singularities, 'The passage from potentiality to act, … from the common to the proper, comes about every time as a shuttling in both directions along a line of sparkling alternation on which common nature and singularity, potentiality and act change roles and interpenetrate.'[64] This is Agamben's interpretation of what he calls the medieval philosopher's description of the passage from potentiality to act as 'an infinite series of modal oscillations.'[65] Whatever Being is

remarkably similar to Przywara's assertion that because the creature is grounded in God alone, there is an abyss beneath it. The creature has no creaturely ground, but is affirmed in its provisionality. Consequently, Agamben's ontology has been described as creaturely, or as an ontology of poverty,[66] which is 'to think life as that which is never given as property but only as common use.'[67]

Significantly, Agamben describes this approach to ontology as analogical in nature, and distinguishes it from both logic and dialectic.[68] Analogy, for Agamben, is a movement between particulars via their similarities which, nevertheless, can never be subsumed under a more general, *a priori* similarity.[69] There remains a dissimilarity between them which prevents any similarity from becoming a universal principle. In other words, analogy is similarity within ever greater dissimilarity. Logical binaries are changed by analogy from dichotomies into forces in a field of polar tensions,[70] just as Przywara says that analogy transforms dichotomies into polarities. However, Agamben is not interested in reviving the Catholic tradition of the *analogia entis*. Analogy is not a way for Agamben to conceptualize the relationship between immanent and transcendent. Rather, analogy describes the relationship that exists both between singularities, and between a singularity and itself.[71] It is an intra-creaturely analogy.

This brings us to the criticisms of Cunningham and Milbank with which this essay opened. Cunningham argues that Agamben seeks to annihilate the current world of actualities and offers in its place only a world of undifferentiated potential in which there is no distinction between good and evil, through the inversion of actuality and potentiality. Likewise, Milbank reads Agamben as calling for apocalypse and an absolute overcoming of all mediation. These criticisms fail to take into account Agamben's refusal to participate in attempts to give an account of the whole, as he believes that it is precisely such attempts that lead to violence. Neither Deleuze nor Heidegger, for example, go far enough in their deactivations because they continue to attempt to give an account of the whole. The result is that Heidegger proposes an ontology that is based on strife,[72] and that Deleuze prescribes an immanent movement of self-preservation, both of which Agamben rejects.[73] Thus, while Cunningham argues that Agamben is attempting to set up a world of undifferentiated potential, Agamben nowhere makes the prescriptive argument that we must do away with actuality altogether, nor categories such as immanent and transcendent altogether. Adam Kotsko, one of Agamben's translators, for example, argues that Agamben never seeks to provide prescriptive visions for change. Rather, he pushes paradoxes, and it is this movement of pushing paradoxes that he calls 'Messianic.'[74]

However, Cunningham's criticism also misunderstands Agamben's potentiality. Agamben distinguishes between two sorts of potentiality: generic potentiality which has not yet been cultivated in any particular direction, and existing potentiality which requires no alteration through learning but is the possession of a faculty or ability that exists even when it is not being exercised.[75] Agamben is largely interested in this latter. He is concerned to show the enduring existence of potentiality in itself, rather than as a mere fore-runner to actuality. Like Przywara, Agamben too understands potentiality as including the identity of opposites. Broadly-speaking, these opposites are potentiality (to do) and impotentiality (to not do). In actualization, impotentiality is suspended into actuality, and potentiality is fulfilled. Agamben says that 'What is truly potential is thus what has exhausted all its impotentiality in bringing it wholly into the act as such.'[76] Actuality is not the abolition of potentiality. It rather fulfils and makes possible true potential by bringing impotentiality into itself. Agamben, like Przywara, therefore maintains that actuality is the proper goal of potentiality, not by overcoming and abolishing it, but in making it more itself. Even in Whatever Being, the singularity emerges through an oscillation between actuality and potentiality. Potentiality does not overthrow actuality as Cunninham suggests, but nor is potentiality abolished in actuality. Rather, Agamben puts forward singu-

larities which emerge along the line of sparkling alternation between actuality and potentiality,[77] just as in Przywara, the creature is essence-in-and-beyond existence as an oscillation effected by two movements: becoming as the becoming of being, and being as unity in becoming.

Finally, Cunningham fails to account for the difference between obliteration and suspension. Agamben is not seeking to obliterate all opposition, but is creating a zone of suspension in which the relations between these oppositions can be re-thought. This is not an abolition of all difference or division in which the world becomes an immanent soup of indifference, nor is it an overcoming of one side of a binary over another. Rather, these zones of indistinction are periodic interruptions of such binaries as actuality/potentiality or immanent/transcendent in which their forms are preserved, but the structural relationships between them are subverted and questioned.

## CONCLUSION

Our comparison between Przywara and Agamben has served as a platform to address some of the theological criticisms brought against him. I do not mean this comparison to suggest that the thought of Przywara and of Agamben are identical, nor do I intend to compromise the unique voice of either thinker. My aim is rather to point out an analogy between Przywara and Agamben: a similarity within an ever greater dissimilarity, perhaps. While it is difficult to know the full extent of the similarity or dissimilarity between Przywara and Agamben because there are certain questions to which we do not have the answers, such as how willing Agamben himself would be to associate the caesura with a kind of transcendence, the comparison between Przywara's and Agamben's uses of rhythm nevertheless goes some way to validating Agamben as a theological, rather than nihilistic, voice. His discussions of rhythm, time, and poetics draw attention to a beyond, something 'more originary,' that has teleological qualities. Thus, while Betz suggests that the postmodern sublime merely exposes the subject to a void that is like the transcendent, but is really only the creature's own potentiality, Agamben's 'beyond' is not a mere void, but is kairological and teleological in nature. Likewise, the creature's potentiality is for Agamben not a force or a void that obscures all else, but a recognition of the poverty, groundlessness, and provisionality of the creature. Moreover, this potentiality is not self-sustaining, but has its true character only as it passes over into actuality. The two poles are mutually dependent. All of these characteristics of Agamben's thought demonstrate proportion, over against interpretations that accuse him of overcoming proportion and structure with forces of nihilistic potentiality or apocalyptic violence. None of this proves that Agamben is a theologian; however it does demonstrate that Agamben is a voice that theologians who are sympathetic to Przywara's Christian metaphysics can, in good conscience, take seriously.

**Notes**

1 This is evidenced both by Agamben's own engagement with theological themes in books such as *The Kingdom and the Glory*, *The Time that Remains*, *The Highest Poverty*, *The Sacrament of Language*, and *The Church and the Kingdom*, as well as by the engagement of other theologians with his thought. Examples include Colby Dickinson's *Agamben and Theology*, articles with titles such as 'Thoughts in Potentiality: Provisional Reflections on Agamben's Understanding of Potentiality and its Relevance for Theology and Politics,' 'The Politics of Resurrection: Responding to Carl Schmitt on Law and Sovereignty,' 'Beyond Secularism: Towards a Post-Secular Political Theology,' and 'Critique and Promise in Paul Tillich's Political Theology: Engaging Giorgio Agamben on Sovereignty and Possibility,' and engagements with Agamben by John Milbank in *Being Reconciled : Ontology and Pardon* and 'Christ the Exception,' and Graham Ward in *The Politics of Discipleship*.

2 Conor Cunningham, 'Nihilism and Theology: Who Stands at the Door?' in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology and Modern European Thought*, Nicholas Adams, George Pattison, Graham Ward (eds) (Oxford: Oxford University, 2013), pp. 337–9.

3 John R. Betz, 'Beyond the Sublime: The Aesthetics of Analogy (Part 1),' *Modern Theology*, 21 (2005), pp. 367–411. See also Catherine Pickstock 'Music: Soul, City and Cosmos after Augustine,' *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, John Milbank, Graham Ward and Catherine Pickstock (eds) (London: Routledge, 1999) for another example of such an opposition between Catholic and postmodern forms.

4 John Milbank, Slavoj Zizek, Creston Davis and Catherine Pickstock, *Paul's New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2010), pp. 34–5.

5 See especially Erich Przywara, *Gottgeheimnis der Welt*, vol 2. of *Schriften*, (Einsiedeln: Johannes-Verlag, 1962) for examples of this.

6 Erich Przywara, *Polaritiy: A German Catholic's Interpretation of Religion*, A. C. Bouquet (trans), (London: Oxford University, 1935), pp. 12, 37.

7 Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis: Metaphysik: Ur-Struktur und All-Rhythmus*, vol. 3 of *Schriften*, (Einsiedeln: Johannes-Verlag, 1962), p. 210. Any translations of Przywara are my own, but have been influenced by the recent translation by John Betz and David Bently Hart (2014).

8 Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, p. 61.

9 Przywara, *Gottgeheimnis der Welt*, p. 226.

10 Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, pp. 27–8.

11 This form also applies to Przywara's epistemology as 'truth-in-and-beyond-history' (*Ibid*, p. 58), however this dimension of his thought does not require detailed explication in order to grasp the form his metaphysics. Nevertheless, it is of note that the noetic dimensions of Przywara's thought seem to be the site of much of the contention that existed between Karl Barth and Erich Przywara on the *analogia entis*. Rhythm specifically can be narrated in terms of Przywara's understanding of ontology, while reserving judgement on the epistemological dimensions of his system. However, even if we agree with Barth that the noetic effects of sin and therewith the centrality of justification are more thoroughgoing than Przywara explicitly recognizes, I do not believe this is an insurmountable barrier to accepting the basic form of Przywara's *analogia entis* for two reasons. First, while Przywara may not explicitly recognize that understanding the relationship between God and humanity is dependent upon any sort of justification or special revelation, the implication of the short-comings that he identifies in all philosophers outside the Christian tradition in contrast to the theologians that he draws upon implies that those inside the tradition understand something that those outside do not, and we can reasonably attribute this to some sort of special revelation or grace mediated through Christ and the Church. While the *analogia entis* may be in principle available to all through reason, we may no longer understand how to use that reason rightly due to sin, such that we require the intervention of Christ and the formation of Christian ways of understanding through our participation in Christ through the Church. Indeed, Przywara, in his later work, begins to consider the irreducibly christocentric nature of our unity with God. Second, even if, in the end, we cannot ignore the epistemelogical implications of Przywara's thought, it should be noted that he is only making very basic claims about the *form* of being and consciousness. Such an approach does not provide us with any claims about the character of God or about the historical and moral particulars of our relationship to God. There is space in Przywara's thought for affirming both the continuity of the relationship between creatures and God despite sin, as well as the corruption of that relationship through sin, requiring the justification and redemption of Christ. In this particular work, Przywara is simply not operating at the level of soteriology. He is only interested in describing a metaphysic which Christianity could accept. For Barth, on the other hand, everything is soteriological. The two thinkers are therefore simply operating at two different levels of theology, with differing, though not necessarily irreconcilable, concerns.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 102.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 114. All quotations are my own translations. However, they have been influenced by an early draft of the forthcoming translation: Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, John R. Betz and David Bentley-Hart (trans), (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming, 2013).

14 Aristotle, *Metaphysics Book IV*.

15 *Ibid*., pp. 113–7.

16 *Ibid*., p. 143.

17 Betz, 'Beyond the Sublime: The Aesthetics of Analogy (Part 1),' p. 400, and 'Beyond the Sublime: The Aesthetics of Analogy (Part II),' *Modern Theology*, 22:1 (2006), p. 16.

18 John R. Betz, 'Beyond the Sublime: The Aesthetics of Analogy (Part 2),' *Modern Theology*, 22 (2006), p. 16. Heidegger's identification of Being and nothingness can be found in *What is Metaphysics?*

19 Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, p. 60.

20 *Ibid*., pp. 117–8.
21 *Ibid*., p. 63. Italics mine.
22 Przywara, *Gottgeheimnis der Welt*, pp. 226–7.
23 Przywara, *Polaritiy: A German Catholic's Interpretation of Religion*, p. 32.
24 *Ibid*., pp. 137–40.
25 Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, p. 124.
26 *Ibid*., p. 65.
27 *Ibid*., p. 97.
28 *Ibid*., pp. 79–80.
29 *Ibid*., p. 126.
30 *Ibid*., p. 130.
31 *Ibid*., p. 171.
32 Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, p. 167.
33 *Ibid*., p. 131.
34 *Ibid.*, p. 167.
35 Much of this description is based on Przywara's interpretation of Augustine. Przywara develops this understanding of analogy in terms of Aquinas as well, but in this description he largely drops the language of rhythm, so I will not consider it here. He says in *Gottgeheimnis der Welt* that this is largely because Aquinas' *analogia entis* is described in static terms, that is, it falls on the side of essence. This is not inherently problematic, but he does suggest that this means that it ought to be balanced with the understanding of someone like Newman or Augustine. See Przywara, *Gottgeheimnis der Welt*, p. 242 and *All-Rhythmus*, p. 322.
36 *Ibid.*, p. 210.
37 *Ibid*., p. 504.
38 *Ibid*., pp. 514–5.
39 *Ibid*., p. 520.
40 *Ibid*., p. 522.
41 Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, Giorgia Albert (trans), (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 95.
42 Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, Patricia Dailey (trans), (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 25.
43 J. M. Bernstein et al., *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 195.
44 Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, p. 95.
45 Giorgio Agamben, *Idea of Prose*, Michael Sullivan and Sam Whitsitt (trans), (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 43–4.
46 Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, p. 49.
47 *Ibid.*, p. 51.
48 *Ibid.*, p. 50.
49 Colby Dickinson, *Agamben and Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), p. 90.
50 Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, p. 69. Notice that this is very similar to his definition of rhythm.
51 Giorgio Agamben, *The Church and the Kingdom*, Leland De La Durantaye (trans) (London: Seagull Books, 2012), p. 12.
52 Agamben, *The Church and the Kingdom*, p. 8.
53 Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, p. 62.
54 Giorgio Agamben, *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics*, Daniel Heller-Roazen (trans), (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 109.
55 Agamben, *The End of the Poem*, p. 112.
56 *Ibid*., p. 115.
57 *Ibid*., p. 226.
58 Agamben, *The Man without Content*, p. 101.
59 Martin, Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Albert Hofstadter (trans), (New York: Harper & Row, 2001), pp. 53–4. Like Betz, Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei in *Heidegger, Hölderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language* argues that the relationship between the Earth and World is one of violence and sacrifice and that this can be traced back to the Kantian sublime.
60 Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, pp. 23–5, Dickinson, *Agamben and Theology*, pp. 88–9.
61 This term is Maurice Blondel's. Maurice Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics ; &, History and Dogma* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), p. 181.

62 Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, p. 25.
63 Agamben, *The Coming Community*, p. 1.
64 *Ibid.*, p. 19.
65 *Ibid*., p. 18.
66 Dickinson, *Agamben and Theology*, p. 39, 104–5.
67 Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*, Adam Kotsko (trans) (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).
68 Giorgio Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method, Luca D'Istanto and Kevin Attell (trans)*, (New York: Zone, 2009), p. 19.
69 Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, p. 22
70 *Ibid.*, p. 20.
71 Agamben, *The Coming Community*, p. 2.
72 Besides Agamben's alternative account of the originary nature of art, Agamben also departs from the way in which he believes Heidegger to maintain the opposition between human and non-human. See Giorgio Agamben and Kevin Attell, *The Open : Man and Animal*, Meridian, Crossing Aesthetics (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 69 and Tracy Colony, 'Before the Abyss: Agamben on Heidegger and the Living,' *Continental Philosophy Review* 40, (2007), p. 6.
73 Agamben explicitly distances himself from the potentiality that leads to the immanentism of Deleuze in his essay 'Absolute Immanence' in which he says that 'the potentiality that constitutes life in the original sense (self-nourishment) coincides with the very desire to preserve one's own Being that, in Spinoza and Deleuze, defines the potentiality of life as absolute immanence' (in *Potentialities*, 237). He associates the notion of potentiality as self-preservation with the idea of bare life, which is a consequence of our divisions of life into categories and which Agamben believes to be politically problematic. See Erinn Cunniff Gilson, 'Zones of Indiscernability: The Life of a Concept from Deleuze to Agamben,' *Philosophy Today*, 51 (2007), pp. 98–106. Claire Colebrook also notes the difference between Deleuze and Agamben. Deleuze's program of creating a philosophy of 'higher deterritorialisation' and a post-organic future goes far beyond Agamben's less prescriptive attempts to 'describe the genesis of humanity, polity and lived worlds from the prior domain of potentiality.' Alex Murray and Jessica Whyte, *The Agamben Dictionary* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 57.
74 Adam Kotsko, 'How To Read Agamben,' *Los Angeles Review of Books*, June 4th, 2013.
75 Giorgio Agamben, 'On Potentiality' in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, Daniel Heller-Roazen (trans) (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 179.
76 Agamben, 'On Potentiality,' p. 183.
77 In *The Coming Community*, for example, Agamben puts forward a community of singularities which cannot be identified according to certain categories because the specificity of the particular singularity and the universal structures that it partakes of cannot be separated out. I cannot distinguish between that which makes my nose mine, and that which makes it a nose. Thus, existence does not overcome essence, but nor does essence function as a genus. See Agamben, *The Coming Community*, p. 18.