

# On Walter Benjamin's World and Time

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**Abstract:** *Walter Benjamin thus defines the current social order as a manifestation of demonic forces with the rule of the current profane order under the Prince of this world Satan. The divine is thus not vested in the current order but in revolution towards the world to come with the inversion of the hierarchy where the first will be last and the last will be first. Benjamin argues that in this world divine power is higher than divine powerlessness as religious power does not liberate the weak at present but in the world to come the weak will be strong and will be more powerful than those who are currently powerful in a religious hierarchy. The weak and poor will be set free with the coming of the Messiah who will invert social organizations and class systems.*

**Keywords:** *World, Time, Messiah, Class, History*

*In the revelation of the divine, the world- the theatre of history- is subjected to a great process of decomposition, which time- the life of him who represents it- is subjected to a great process of fulfilment. The end of the world- the destruction and liberation of a dramatic representation. Redemption of history from the one who represents it. But perhaps in this sense the profoundest anti-thesis to 'world' is not 'time' but the world to come. (Benjamin, 1996: 226)*

Walter Benjamin thus sees history as a process of destruction and decomposition- where the present will give way to fulfilment in the future with the coming of the Messiah and the fulfilment of world history who will redeem the oppressed classes and present liberation for them. Thus for Benjamin the anti-thesis to world is not time but the world to come- the future kingdom of the Messiah who brings about the reign of his kingdom here on earth in which the oppressed classes will be liberated from their subordination and imprisonment under the elites of history or the privileged classes.

*Catholicism- the process and development of anarchy*

*The problem of Catholicism is that of the (false secular) theocracy. The guiding principle here is: authentic divine power can manifest itself other than destructively only in the world to come (the world of fulfilment). But that is where divine power enters into the secular world- it breathes destruction. That is why in this world nothing is constant and no organization can be based on divine power let alone domination as it supreme principle. (Benjamin, 1996: 226)*

Walter Benjamin says that Catholicism falsely presents a theocracy as the divine kingdom reflected here on earth already structured into a theological hierarchy of religious organization whereas this theological manifestation of the divine kingdom will only be present in the world

to come – when the Messiah returns and brings about equality for the oppressed classes. Where the divine enters the secular it destroys the secular. Hence no organization that is present will manifest the divine order or divine principle- this can only be authentically embodied by the coming of the Messiah who will liberate the oppressed classes and bring about freedom for those who have been losers in history subjugated by the elites and winners in history.

*My definition of politics: the fulfilment of an unimproved humanity. We would be wrong to speak of a profane legislation decreed by religion, as opposed to one required by it. The Mosaic laws, probably without exception, form no part of such legislation. Instead they belong to the legislation governing the realm of the body in the broadest sense (presumably) and occupy a very special place: they determine the location and method of direct divine intervention. And just where this location has its frontier, where it retreats, we find the zone of politics of the profane of a bodily real that is without law in a religious sense. (Benjamin, 1996: 226)*

Walter Benjamin thus defines politics as it is as a profane order that represents unimproved humanity who remain under the burden of class struggle. This class struggle can thus not be dealt justice by a profane legislation decreed by religion as the redemption of the oppressed classes can only come about in the world to come with the destruction of the profane order and the coming of the Messiah. The Mosaic laws are not part of profane laws but the foundation of direct divine intervention because they originate from God. At the frontiers of the Mosaic law we find profane law that is devoid of a religious sense and unable to represent the

politics and fulfilment of the world to come in which the poor will be set free and the elites will be judged for oppressing the poor.

*The meaning of anarchy for the realm of the profane must be defined from the locus of freedom in the philosophy of history. (A difficult matter to prove- this is where we find the basic question of the relation of the individual to the body. (Benjamin, 1996: 227)*

Walter Benjamin thus defines anarchy as the locus of freedom –what seems to be chaos- the liberation of the oppressed classes from the ruling elites- is the freedom that will be brought about in the world to come. The individual will be set free from society's body as an oppressed individual with the coming of the Messiah and the destruction of the profane order and politics in the secular world- the Messiah will bring about freedom for the oppressed classes and judgment for the ruling elites or winners in history.

*In its present state the social is a manifestation of spectral and demonic powers, often admittedly in their greatest tension to God their efforts to transcend themselves. The divine manifests itself only in revolutionary force. Only in the community nowhere in social organizations does the divine manifest itself either with force or without. (In this world divine power is higher than divine powerlessness, in the world to come divine powerlessness is higher than divine power) Such manifestations are to be sought not in the sphere of the social but in perception oriented toward revelation and last in language sacred language above all. (Benjamin, 1996: 227)*

Walter Benjamin thus defines the current social order as a manifestation of demonic forces with the rule of the current profane order under the Prince of this world Satan. The divine is thus not vested in the current order but in revolution towards the world to come with the inversion of the hierarchy where the first will be last and the last will be first. Benjamin argues that in this world divine power is higher than divine powerlessness as religious power does not liberate the weak at present but in the world to come the weak will be strong and will be more powerful than those who are currently powerful in a religious hierarchy. The weak and poor will be set free with the coming of the Messiah who will invert social organizations and class systems.

*What is at issue here is not the realization of divine power. On the one hand this process is the supreme reality, on the other divine power contains its reality itself.*

*The question of manifestation is central*

*'Religious' is nonsense. There is no distinction between religion and religious denomination but the latter concept is narrow in in most contexts peripheral. (Benjamin 1996: 227)*

Walter Benjamin thus contest that this inversion of social power is not the realization of divine power. It is a supreme reality which will supercede the profane world and be brought about with the coming of Messiah in the world to come. Religion as is currently manifested is divided into denominations which is nonsense and will mean nothing in the world to come with the rule of the Messiah

as the ultimate master of all religions and humanity in the world to come, liberating the oppressed classes and bringing an end to class struggle.

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