

Article

## **TOWARDS AN AKAIROLOGICAL POLITICS: REREADING NEGRI ON THE BIBLICAL BOOK OF JOB**

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### **Abstract**

This essay engages with an unfamiliar Antonio Negri, one who engages in biblical interpretation in *The Labor of Job* (2009). The analysis focuses on two key themes: *kairós* and measure/immeasure. Concerning *kairós* I critique Negri's relatively conventional approach - creative and opportune time - by identifying its inescapable moral and class associations with ruling ideology in ancient Greece, where it designates, through its basic sense of measure, the right time and right place. In response, I pursue an akairological position, one that draws upon Negri's complex treatment of measure and immeasure. While Negri seeks a reshaped and creative measure, I suggest we tarry with immeasure, for it overlaps with what is opposed to *kairós*. The article closes by asking why Negri should be interested in the Bible. The answer: he is able to do so, as his studies of Spinoza show, through a radical relativising of the absolute truth claims of theology.

### **Keywords**

Antonio Negri, immeasure, *kairós*, Labour of Job, measure

### **Mots-clés**

Antonio Negri, imméure, *kairós*, mesure, Travail de Job,

“What a sublime and, at the same time, sordid vocation this theological discipline has”  
(Negri 2009, 29).

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My major concern is an unfamiliar Antonio Negri, one who engages in some biblical criticism in his recently translated *The Labor of Job* (2009), which is a detailed philosophical exegesis of the ‘marvellous’ biblical book of Job (Negri and Defourmantelle 2004, 157).<sup>2</sup> Two features of Negri’s analysis stand out: the oppositions of *kairós* and *ákairos*, and measure and immeasure. However, before I explore those oppositions in some detail, two preliminary comments are needed. At the heart of the book is what I would like to call a radical homiletics. A discipline much neglected these days, homiletics is really the art of connecting a text like the Bible with the realities of everyday life, moving from the intricacies of textual analysis to the application to life. Negri’s homiletics is radical for two reasons, one political, resting on Marx, and the other textual, reading Job as a pre-eminent document for our time. Job both describes our time and offers a way through the impasse of Left action. Further, the commentary on Job is a philosophical commentary. Caught in the rough ground between two camps – radical philosophy and biblical criticism – it is not conventional biblical criticism, if such a thing actually exists. Negri does not come to the text with all of those unquestioned assumptions, methods and skills that characterise all too many of your garden variety biblical critics. Is he then a lone philosopher making a foray into biblical analysis? Without a sense of what may be called the ‘mega-text’ of biblical criticism, is he bound to trip up? Not quite, for there is another patchwork tradition of what may be called philosophical exegesis or commentary. Some texts of the Bible – Genesis 1-11, the letters of Paul, Job – continue to call forth commentary from philosophers and sundry Marxist critics (for example, Badiou 2003, 1997; Agamben 2005). Negri’s text falls in with this group.

### **Kairós and ákairos**

*Religion is a big rip-off in itself, but it can also be a great instrument of liberation* (Negri and Scelsi 2008, 205).

What does this philosophical commentary find in Job? I focus on two key features: the opposition between measure (*misura*) and immeasure (*dismisura*) and the question of *kairós*. Briefly put, for Negri (im)measure is the thread – much like a necklace – that strings together value, labour, pain, ontology, time, power, evil, theodicy, creation and

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<sup>2</sup> The secondary literature on Negri is, as one would expect, immense. For more general philosophical engagements with Negri, one cannot go past the two volume collection, *The Philosophy of Antonio Negri*, edited by Murphy and Mustapha (2005 and 2007). For a useful, albeit preliminary, engagement with Negri’s reading of the book of Job, see the essay by Stolze in the second volume, although he does not engage with the matters of measure and *kairós* in any substantial fashion. An unpublished article by Barber and Smith draws in part upon Negri’s analysis of Job in order to explore his reclamation of the idea of poverty from its theological background (Barber and Smith unpublished).

cosmogony. It is a complex opposition that has both positive and negative registers for each term, with Negri searching for a way beyond the negative senses of measure and immeasure – as oppressive order and unending evil – to find more positive senses. As for *kairós*, it falls into a rather conventional sense of the opportune time and thereby, via the New Testament, the time of crisis, the end times with their trials and hopes. Or in Negri's words, *kairós* is a time of rupture, an 'exemplary temporal point' (Negri and Defourmantelle 2004, 104-6). Immediately we face a problem, for Negri does not overtly connect (im)measure and *kairós*. Nevertheless, they are, as will become clear, involved in an intimate embrace. In what follows, I begin with *kairós*, exploring what Negri both does and does not say about the term, before offering a rereading of *kairós* that will bring it into the arms of (im)measure.

For Negri's most compelling statement concerning *kairós* we need to turn for a moment to another study, the extraordinary *Kairós, Alma Venus, Multitudo* (2003, 139-261), as well as his comments in the conversation with Anne Defourmantelle (2004). Here two comments capture Negri's effort to reshape time as *kairós*: it is the 'moment when the arrow of Being is shot' and it is 'the immeasurability of production between the eternal and the *to-come* (Negri 2003, 180; see also Negri and Defourmantelle 2004, 104; Hardt and Negri 2004, 357). The first picks up the sense of the 'exemplary temporal point'. *Kairós* is an opening up in time that is eminently creative; it is the edge of time when Being is created. Two brief comments in Negri's conversations with Anne Defourmantelle reveal the obvious theological connection: we are always at the point of creativity; it is the moment each day when, 'one creates God': everything one does is a creation of God, since 'to create new Being is to create something that, unlike us, will never die' (Negri and Defourmantelle 2004, 146-7). Further, this process of creativity is marked by naming, especially the common name. In *Kairós, Alma Venus, Multitudo* Negri observes without comment, 'Whatever thing I name exists' (Negri 2003, 147). In case we missed the gloss on Genesis 1, when God names the items of creation, and Genesis 2, when Adam names the animals, Negri makes it explicit in his discussion with Defourmantelle: 'Naming is at once the Bible and what makes epistemology possible' (2004, 119).

The second comment I quoted above – between the eternal and the *to-come* – constitutes Negri's challenge to the measurable piling up of time as past, present and future, in which our present is a moving point between the fixed detritus of the past (to be collated, measured and studied by historiography, to be celebrated in triumph or mourned as disaster) and the future (as a repeat performance of the past). Instead he proposes that the 'before' should be understood as the sign of eternity – time rests in the eternal – and that the 'after' must be recast as the 'to-come'. Once again, it is not difficult to pick up a theological undertone: *kairós* operates not merely *sub specie aeternitatis*, for it is part of eternity; from that context *kairós*, as a perpetual moment of creativity, looks

towards an eschatological 'to-come'. In its passage, *kairós* gathers more and more features: it is immeasurably productive, the home of living labour, restlessly in motion, multiple, common, the source of joy, corporeal and material, and thereby resists domination and oppression.

Despite all this compelling energy, Negri still rests with a very temporal *kairós*, opposing it to chronological time and then attempting to reshape it in terms of revolutionary creativity and desire. Indeed, his book on Job shows how regular Negri's approach to *kairós* really is. For Negri, Job provides an energetic counter to the idea that time is empty, static and measured. This sense of time came into its own only with Neo-Platonic thought, when time became abstract, a form of being, transcendent and dominating – precisely when Christianity became the dominant ideological force of empire. What does Negri find in Job? Here time is concrete, lived, painful, common, immanent and even filled with theophany; it is a stark contrast with abstract and dominating time. In particular, the time of Job is characterised by rhythm, movement and event (what Negri calls time-movement). In short, it is ontological time. Is this notion of time really in Job? It is when you take pain and death – and here Negri is able to deal with death in a way that few materialists are able to do – as the basis for understanding time as the common reality of our existence and as the source of the desire and power to eliminate such suffering. More specifically, Negri argues that in Job time is both a being towards death (he quotes Job 7: 4, 6-8 and 9: 25-6) and a fullness and state of happiness (now it is 29: 2-6). As content and part of existence, this time in Job is the point of contact between lived, concrete time and the linear movement of divine epiphany – here earth and heaven touch. This is of course *kairós*, which now becomes the point of contact between Job's lived time of pain and divine epiphany, the creative labour of suffering opening out to liberation. This ontology of time is nothing less than the 'immeasurable opening of *kairós*'.

These arguments are variations on a persistent motif, *kairós* as the time of crisis and as a period of what can only be described as opportune, revolutionary time. With some modifications, we find comparable arguments in Walter Benjamin (blast and flash), Giorgio Agamben (time that remains), Alain Badiou (event and laicised grace), Ernst Bloch (*Novum* and *Ultimum*), apocalypse and rupture (Fredric Jameson). However, on this score the New Testament bears heavy responsibility (Kittel, Friedrich, and Bromiley 1985, 389-90; Barr 1969). In that collection of texts *kairós* may mean the period when fruit becomes ripe, a season (spring, autumn and so on), the time of birth or death, the present, a designated period that is more often signalled by the plural, *kairoí*. But the term also identifies a specific moment, often in the dative 'at the right time', which may be opportune or favourable, or it may be dire and risky. However, increasingly the word takes the definite article, 'the time' (*ho kairós*), and in this form its sense is the time of crisis or the last times. So it becomes one of the New Testament's major eschatological

terms, specifying the longed-for, albeit troubled, time of final conflict, the end of history, the reign of the Evil One and Christ's return to vindicate the faithful. These senses dominate, for good or ill, our sense of *kairós*, holding up and restricting *kairós* as a term devoted to time and gathering the semantic field around that point.

However, in order to undermine the surreptitious dominance of the New Testament on our perceptions of *kairós*, I would like to move back to classical Greece. And there a few surprises await us. To begin with, *kairós* is not only a term of time but also of *place*. The temporal sense is largely the same as the one I have explored above – the right, critical and proper time or season. For a largely agricultural economy, *kairós* indicates the right season for planting or reaping, with a particular emphasis on the time the fruit is ripe, so much so that *kairós* also bore the sense of fruitfulness and advantage. But in its spatial sense, *kairós* designates what is in or at the right place, especially in terms of the body. *Kairós* and especially its adjective, *kairios*, designate a vital part of the body. For example in Homer's *Iliad*, the adjective is used to mark the right place on the body for an arrow to find its mark. And in the works of Pindar, Aeschylus and Euripides the word means a target, especially on the body in battle: it the point where a weapon can inflict the most damage (see especially Onians 1973, 343-7; Rickert 2007, 72).

What are we to make of this extended sense of *kairós*, one that goes well beyond time? To begin with, both temporal and spatial senses of the term find their basis in the meaning of measure, proportion or fitness. As time, *kairós* is then a distinct measure or the appropriateness of time – the exact, critical and opportune time. As place, it becomes measured space, as well as the way space is proportioned, preferably 'correctly' when one refers to the body where everything is in its right place. It takes little imagination to see that a kairological, that is, properly proportioned body would be a male body, athletic, warlike and virile. There is a distinct sense that *kairós* actually refers to what is in its right place and time, duly measured, appropriate and opportune. Indeed, although *kairós* takes on a range of meanings – convenience, decorum, due measure, fitness, fruit, occasion, profit, proportion, propriety, symmetry, tact, wise moderation, as well as opportunity, balance, harmony, right and/or proper time, opening, timeliness – the semantic cluster coalesces around the idea of what is duly measured and proportional, in short, the right time and right place. As Hesiod puts it in *Works and Days*: 'Observe due measure, and proportion (*kairós*) is best in all things' (Hesiod 1973, 81; translation follows Rickert 2007, 72).<sup>3</sup>

Not quite the sense of *kairós* to which we have become accustomed – due measure and proportion. Yet, given this fuller meaning of *kairós*, a question lurks in the shadows of this classical *kairós*: what is its opposite? Not *kronos*, and thereby chronological time – the standard line in most philosophies of time (including Negri's) that seek to oppose

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<sup>3</sup> On *kairós* see further Rickert (2007), Carter (1988); Untersteiner (1954), Kinneavy (1983), and Sipiora and Baumlin (2002).

*kairós* and *kronos*, for *kronos* became a byword for an old fool or dotard, especially in the comedies of Aristophanes. As a proper name, Kronos is, as is well known, the father of Zeus; but he also designates that period before our era, the distant past which may be either a golden age or the dark ages, depending on one's perspective.

Instead of *kronos*, the opposite of *kairós* is determined by a series of prepositions: *apó kairoû*, away or far from *kairós*; *parà kairón*, to the side of or contrary to *kairós*; *pró kairoû*, before *kairós* or prematurely; *kairoû péra*, beyond measure, out of proportion and unfit. These senses all bear the weight of what is outside the zone of *kairós*, untimely and out of place. And all of them may be gathered under the term *ákairos*. If *kairós* designates the well-timed, opportune and well-placed, then *ákairos* means the ill-timed, inopportune and displaced. I cannot emphasise enough how important this opposite of *kairós* is: over against measure we have beyond measure; timely versus untimely; in the right place versus the wrong place. One who is *ákairos* is in the wrong place at the wrong time. This opposition will become vitally important soon enough when I return to Negri.

Before I do, a couple of further points demand attention. Too often commentators neglect the unavoidable economic dimensions of *kairós*, especially with its agricultural flavour. In this case, as the quote above from that agricultural text par excellence, Hesiod's *Works and Days*, indicates, *kairós* means the right season of the year for planting, cultivating and harvesting crops and fruit. But it also indicates the right place, due to soil, landform and amount of moisture, for planting a particular crop or orchard. But now the economic sense explodes well beyond these agricultural references. I would suggest it beats a path to a collection of terms in Greek that have simultaneous moral, class and economic dimensions. *Kairós* and *ákairos* join words like *agathos* and *kakos*, good and bad, as well as a host of related terms, in which moral and class status, as well as physical appearance are closely interwoven – good vs. bad, wealthy vs. poor, noble vs. ignoble, brave vs. cowardly, well-born vs. ill-born, blessed vs. cursed, lucky vs. unlucky, upright vs. lowly, elite vs. masses, pillars of society vs. dregs, beautiful vs. ugly (Ste. Croix 2006, 338-9; see also Ste. Croix 1972, 371-6).<sup>4</sup> It soon becomes apparent how the spatial sense of *kairós*, with a focus on the human body as one that is appropriately proportioned with every item in its 'proper' place, also has a class sense. The (male) body out of proportion, one that is 'ugly' and out of proportion, is also the body of the poor, exploited majority of Greek society – what, following Negri, we might call the monstrous (Negri and Casarino 2008, 193-218). From here *kairós* may also, in connection with this cluster of other terms, apply to social measure and order. A kairological social order has everything in its proper place – aristocratic elites, exploited peasants, driven slaves,

<sup>4</sup> Ste. Croix provides a host of related terms: *hoi tas ousias echontes, plousioi, pacheis, eudaimones, gnōrimoi, eugeneis, dunatoi, dunatōtatoi, kaloi kagathoi, chrēstoi, esthloi, aristoi, beltistoi, dexiōtatoi, charientes, epieikeis* – all for the 'good' propertied classes; for the 'bad' unpropertied classes we have *hoi penētes, aporoi, ptōchoi, hoi polloi, to plēthos, ho ochlos, ho dēmos, hoi dēmotikoi, mochthēroi, ponēroi, deiloi, to kakiston*.

women, and so on. It goes without saying that such a proportioned and fit society, one characterised by *eugenia*, ensures the ruling elite remain precisely where they are. Disorder and immeasure, what is contrary to *kairós* and thereby *ákairos*, designate an unfit society, one in turmoil and on the rocks, when time is out of joint and events take place outside their proper time and season.

*Kairós* has turned out to be far more multifaceted than we might have expected. Not content to be restricted to a temporal register, it has now spilled out to include agricultural and bodily spaces, the sense of measure and then blurted out its sinister class allegiances. In this light, any alignment with or appropriation of *kairós* is a risky move to make. For the invocation of *kairós* runs the danger of siding unwittingly with the well-proportioned over against ill-fashioned bodies, ruling elites rather than downtrodden peasants and slaves; in short, with the interweaving of moral, economic and biological factors, *kairós* sides the good, beautiful, well-born, wealthy and educated aristocrats. In this wider context, my own political options are clear: rather than the carefully ordered world of *kairós* with its moral and class associations, I would rather join the bad boys and girls, ugly bodies, poor peasants, cowardly slaves, ill-born labourers, cursed, unlucky and lowly masses, in short, the dregs of society. And this means that I side with what is contrary to and beyond *kairós*, with *ákairos*, with what is untimely and out of place. Does not every revolution have its moment of akairological anarchy, out of which new, more socialist possibilities emerge?

Now that we thrown in our lot with *ákairos*, what are the implications for Negri's use of *kairós*? Should we dispense with it as weighed down too heavily with a theological heritage of opportune or exemplary time, at the edge of creation? Or should we rough it up – shirt torn, pants filthy, black market cigarette scrounged from a passer-by – and cross to the wrong side of the tracks, taking *kairós* into the zones of *ákairos*? I prefer the latter, but in order to do so I need to set the scene by returning to the heavy influence of the New Testament on the subsequent philosophical and Marxist use of the term *kairós*. As we saw earlier, the New Testament limits *kairós* to a temporal register, offering two overlapping senses: as the right time and a risky, even unexpected time of crisis. However, what has happened is that the biblical notion of *kairós* emphasises the temporal at the expense of the spatial sense, buried the moral and class associations, and domesticated *ákairos* in the name of *kairós*. How so? It has enhanced the unexpected nature of the final days, while at the same time defanging the revolutionary elements of *ákairos* and calling on *kairós* seems to speak in its name. By contrast, what I propose to do is move in the other direction, allowing *ákairos* to set the agenda and transform *kairós*. So I draw upon the opposition between measure and immeasure (*misura* and *dismisura*) that is central to his exegesis of the book of Job. But I am intrigued: measure-immeasure immediately connects with my earlier discussion of the base sense of *kairós-ákairos*; yet Negri makes

nothing of the link (I can only assume he is not aware of it). So let us see what happens when we bring the two together.

### Measure and Immeasure

However, before I make the connection, I need ask what Negri does with measure and immeasure. This opposition may be regarded as a substantial realignment of some old philosophical distinctions, especially those between eternity and contingency, universal and particular and, on a theological or mythical register, of chaos and order – a basic motif of myths of creation and one that both is central to the book of Job and has significant political ramifications. And in the commentary on the book of Job, measure-immeasure also becomes the means of reorganising an impressive string of topics: value, labour, pain, ontology, time, power, evil, theodicy, creation and cosmogony. I would like to focus on three items in relation to measure and immeasure: their changing values in Negri's interpretation; their intersection with the themes of chaos and creative order; and their overlap (unbeknownst to Negri) with *kairós*. Let us explore each point in some more detail.

To begin with, Negri (through Job) dismisses all forms of measure and comes out as a champion of immeasure. However, this is only the beginning; although Negri wants to dispense with a negative, retributive measure in favour of a creative immeasure, that chaotic moment is only a transition to a new, positive form of measure. That is to say, by the time Negri draws near to the end of his commentary on Job the valuation of measure and immeasure shifts: at first measure is negative and immeasure positive, but when we encounter a negative immeasure, a new, creative measure begins to appear.

As for measure, it affects the crucial categories of value, labour, time, ethics, justice, good and evil. And it does so through the filter of retribution, which turns up in the mouths of Job's erstwhile legal friends, Eliphaz and Zophar. The logic of retribution goes something as follows: if I perform an evil act I will be punished for it; so also with a good act. Balance is the key: evil at one moment will find an equal measure (now as retribution) at another moment; so also will good eventually produce a balance of good in the moment of reward. Ergo, if Job is suffering he must have done something evil to deserve it, even if he doesn't know what that evil act is. In other words, one can measure evil and good in neat quantities.<sup>5</sup> So also with justice it becomes a simple formula that matches the correct measure of reward or punishment with the act in question. Or ethics, which becomes a calculation of the balance of good and evil as well as role of justice

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<sup>5</sup> Although Elihu, the fourth interlocutor, is not part of the original circle of three, his argument for transcendent providence and Job's pride is for Negri the last possible moment of rationalisation (Negri 2009, 107-8).



within that calculation so that we can gain that vital advice as to how we should live our lives. In our own day we can add labour and time: our economic system relies on the ability to calculate how much labour is spent on a job, how overtime is to be calculated, what the right wage is for the labour-time given over, with heavy emphasis at the moment on the measurement of immaterial labour, and so on (see further Brouillette 2009). It is all so simple – even the eternal conundrum of theodicy ceases to be a problem at all, for it is merely a question of calculated and quantifiable measure. The operation of retributive measure seems so common sense, working its way into the smallest mundane acts: the cost of a loaf of bread, whether I should reciprocate that invitation from people I can't stand, the grades a child receives at school – the *lex talionis* of everyday life.

Job's response is simply to dismiss any form of measure in these situations. So we find the third friend, Bildad, who tries to compensate for the loss of measure. Bildad advocates an over-charged and extra-transcendent God (Negri calls it the 'mystical deception' and over-determination) who comes in as an enticement to and guarantee for worthiness. All one can do before such a God is surrender and offer devotion and adoration. Or, as Negri points out, it is a craven apologia for dictatorial power. Job's perpetual refusal to acknowledge either a system of retribution or an over-charged deity who commands devotion simply does not compute for his friends: 'When Job decisively rejects the transcendent motif as well, his lawyers – who are on the brink of becoming his ideological enemies – accuse him of titanic *hybris*' (Negri 2009, 38).

One term from my original list of items which are strung together under the theme of measure-immeasure is left: value. Superficially, Negri is after another theory of value, especially since he is scathing about the Marxist labour theory of value. One can no longer measure labour power (x hours in the working day), surplus value (x+ hours and greater efficiency within those hours, i.e. absolute and relative surplus value), or indeed exchange and use values. They are all so much scrap iron – a position Negri would continue to hold in his well-known collaboration with Michael Hardt in the trilogy, *Empire*, *Multitude* and *Commonwealth*. Already in his commentary on Job, one of Negri's tasks is to find a completely new theory of value and Job is enlisted to help him do it. Quite straightforward, it would seem: a recovery of value without measure. The catch is that this is not the only sense of value operating in Negri's text. Alongside the economic one there is also an ethical one: the labour theory of value slips into an ethical code of value and back again.

On this ethical calculus, what is the value of labour? It is evil, argues Negri. And it is evil precisely because labour is subject to immeasurable exploitation. Now we need to pay very close attention, for the argument has some sharp turns and we need to choose our path with care. Negri wishes to recover value, to rescue it from its subservience to measure, control or limit. He proposes to do so via the theological narrative of 'of an immensely powerful, creative ontology that emerges from chaos' (Negri 2009, 73). This

slow process involves Job gaining power in his stand against God, which involves, as it were, a return to the chaos that precedes creation and a re-creation of the world from the ground up. A tall order, perhaps, but Negri sees it in Job and wants it for his own time.

However, in the process of making this argument, the opposition between measure and immeasure begins to shift. It happens first with immeasure. One's initial impression is that Negri attaches a positive value to immeasure and a negative one to measure, a value we can trace in the affirmation of the immeasurable multitude of his later work with Hardt, in the criticism of quantification and exchange over against the endless creativity of social, common knowledge and its irreducibility to exchange relations (Hardt and Negri 2000, 2004, 2009). Chaos, in other words, is good and order not so much. But when Negri mentions in his book on Job that exploitation itself is immeasurable, this all too convenient opposition starts to break down. Add to this the immeasurable nature of evil (Negri 2009, 8-9), which in itself questions the realms of reason and measure, and we have a different ball game entirely.

The more conventional track from this point is to attribute this immeasurable exploitation and evil to the unsettling realm of chaos and then seek out order in response as some way of controlling such evil. Social sanctions, the law, police and army all play this role, attempting to keep a lid on the riotous riff-raff on the streets. But Negri is not interested in that path – he has suffered too much at the hands of the forces of order. Instead, he fixes on the immeasurable nature of pain and suffering – the central topic of Job – and argues that the only way to overcome the immensity of evil is through the immeasurability of pain. Only when we have descended into the depths of immeasurable, undeserved and guiltless pain are we able to get anywhere at all. From the midst of this undeserved suffering power first emerges, a power that is creative. In short, one immeasurable responds to and is greater than another; endless suffering and pain overcomes immeasurable evil and exploitation.

Even more, pain leads to the creative power of labour. So the opposition shifts again: the immeasurableness of evil now finds itself face to face with the immeasurable creative power of labour. The stakes are high, for on the one side we find God. In a move reminiscent of Ernst Bloch, God becomes the name for all that is oppressive. So, even though the book is set up as a struggle between God and man, it is a very unequal struggle. God, it would seem, is far too powerful, or as Negri puts it, immeasurable, imbalanced, disproportionate (Negri 2009, 28-9). Since God's plays the role of both judge and an adversary who laughs sarcastically at an increasing rebellious Job, God actually takes the side of oppression: '*God is the seal of the clearest, fiercest, deepest of social injustices* (chapter 24 screams forth human anger and desperation in this regard – from within the darkness, the misery and the most terrible unhappiness)' (Negri 2009, 43). In other words, in contrast to the measured God of the Scholastic theologians for whom God was an ordered being with fixed characteristics (Negri and Defourmantelle 2004, 80), this God of Job is the site of immeasurable evil. A quick survey of Christian or indeed

Jewish or Islamic history (the three religions that claim Job as a sacred text) leads to quick agreement with such an observation: persecutions, Inquisitions, Crusades, jihads, genocides, wars on terror, and dispossessions in the name of God only begin the list.

In response to the firepower of evil, Negri piles up as many desirable terms as he can on the side of immeasurable pain: power, creation, love, labour, democracy (pain is democratic over against fear which is dictatorial), community, time (as a concrete, lived and common reality which can lead to a time for liberation), and even value. In a sentence: the value of labour may be found in democratic pain and suffering which produces the power of creative labour. This lived experience is quite literally *ontology*. So it not merely immeasure that has value over against measure, but rather two types of immeasure, the one evil, oppressive and divine and the other chaotic, creative, powerful, and ... good. Soon enough I will stitch this sense of immeasure in with what I have called *akairós*, but note what has happened: measure has been revalued. Not restricted to the dreadful patterns of payback, in which reward and punishment are appropriate to the initial act, measure has been dismantled and reshaped for a new task. This powerful and creative ontology that emerges from chaos is comparable to the chaotic immeasure that precedes creation so that the world may be re-created from the beginning. In other words, through the two types of immeasure, one evil and oppressive and the other creative and powerful, a new measure emerges, the creation of a very different and just order.

Let me summarise the moves as follows: negative measure -> negative immeasure -> positive immeasure -> positive measure. If we thought that a retributive system of carefully measured patterns of labour, time and value were bad enough, then we were in for a shock; immeasurable labour and exploitation are far worse. Yet, in the midst of this untold pain and suffering, a new creative power emerged, one that would lead to a thoroughly new measure, a new order that has nothing to do with the old.

That is all very well, but is not the far more interesting moment that of immeasure? I must confess to being drawn to immeasurability rather than some search for a new measure, particularly because Negri's terminology overlaps significantly with that old mythological (and biblical) pattern of chaos and created order. The bare narrative sequence of the story of creation is deceptively simple and perhaps too well known: out of chaos comes the careful ordering of creation in which every thing finds its place. We might fill out this bare structure with all manner of detail – chaos may be the destructive force of older, cranky gods, as in the Mesopotamian creation myth, *Enuma Elish*, or it may be the formless and void state of the 'deep', the *tehom*, in the account of Genesis 1, or it may be the pure absence of apparent form and clear demarcation, the proverbial primeval swamp. In response to such chaos, creation involves victory over chaos (variously a monster, the sea, a serpent, an older opponent from an earlier generation of the gods), the demarcation of heaven and earth, planets in their paths, seasons at the right time, and the careful ordering of created life, usually in some form of hierarchy that

places humans at the top or, as is more often the case, subordinates human beings to the gods. Or we might turn to the Flood narrative of Genesis 6-9 for another version of the same story: the initial creation (measure) has turned out to be flawed, characterised by extraordinary evil and exploitation. In order to begin again, God makes use of a beneficial chaos (the flood) to wipe out the old and begin again with a new, created order. Or, in Negri's own take on this narrative, when 'measure fades into the disorder of the universe and evil is reflected in chaos, in the immeasurable' (2009, 49, in relation to Job 28:23-7), we need 'the collective creation of a new world' that 'is able to reconstitute a world of values' (2009, 14).

Negri is not shy about these cosmological connections, evoking the creative power of labour, the bringing into being of which human beings are capable, and above all – for my purposes at least – 'a great chaos, a great immeasurableness' (2009, 52) that makes it clear enough that the connection is not all that forced. As I argued earlier, this immeasurable chaos may be one of endless exploitation or it may be the highly productive one of depthless pain and suffering.

One feature of this cosmological chaos is worth emphasising, for too often it slips by without notice, camouflaged behind the screen of natural chaos: it is also, if not primarily, a political chaos. Once again Negri unwittingly brings the connection to the fore (Negri and Casarino 2008, 193-218), although now in his opposition between eugenics and the monster, the one a favoured theme from the Greeks onwards (meaning to be well-born, good and beautiful – note the connections with *kairós*) and the other a marker of what resists. In the creation myths, the monster is of course the one that must be overcome through the creation of order. These stories of creation are usually depicted as cosmogonic (creation of the natural world), theogonic (creation of the gods), and anthropogenic (human beings come into the picture). Nice and neat, but far too limited, for they are also what should be called poligonic (see further Boer 2005-6). They deal with the origins of, and thereby provide ideological justification for, the current political and social order. For instance, the Mesopotamian myth *Enuma Elish* is keen to point out that the Babylonian king is a direct descendent of Marduk, the warrior and creator god, and the myth spends a good deal of time with the ordering of society, the construction of Babylon and the establishment of the state. Similarly, the creation story in the Bible does not end with the seven days of Genesis 1 or indeed the alternative story of Genesis 2 with its more earthy narrative of the garden. It runs all the way through the stories of the patriarchs and matriarchs (Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah and Rachel, and then the twelve sons and one daughter, Dinah), the migration to Egypt, Moses and the Exodus, wilderness wandering and formation of a state in waiting, and then ends with the conquest of the Promised Land. In other words, it is primarily a political myth of creation. So if created order means political order, then the chaos against which that order continually struggles is as much political as it is natural. Primeval abyss and catastrophic flood are inseparable from disobedience regarding the tree of good and

evil in the garden, from murmuring and insurrection in the wilderness, from the perpetual challenges to the divinely-given power of Moses, and so on.

Now at last I can come back to the matter of *kairós*, which begins to look rather different from my initial foray into Negri's treatment of that theme. Two lines intersect at this point: the extraordinary way measure slots into *kairós*, immeasure into *ákairos*; and the way in which chaos and order have an inescapably political dimension. As for the first line, recall that the base sense of *kairós* is indeed measure, and that the temporal and spatial senses of the term are modifications on this basic sense. *Kairós* is both the properly proportioned body (physical, political and social) and the right or opportune time. It takes little imagination to see that the myths of creation – especially in their poligononic dimension – express this double sense of *kairós*: they provide narratives as to how everything finds its spatial (from the heavenly bodies through the creation of human beings to seat of power in the city) and its temporal (days, months, seasons and their proper relations) order.

What then is contrary to *kairós*, is outside it or far away from it, or indeed beyond *kairós*? Immeasure, obviously, or as I have called it earlier, *ákairos* – the ill-timed, unseasonable, and out of place. Negri of course wants to find a retooled measure and indeed *kairós*, but he tarries long with immeasure, with the monstrous, and thereby with *ákairos*. In fact, I would suggest that Negri himself unwittingly recognises the possibilities of *ákairos* through his invocation of the monstrous (Negri and Casarino 2008, 193-218), as also in his efforts to recover the ideal of poverty from its revolutionary theological heritage for a common political agenda (see Barber and Smith unpublished). Here too the very political nature of chaos comes into play, for if chaos marks the constitutive resistance to oppressive power, then we need to dwell in the midst of that chaos. Among others in the innovative *operaismo* movement in Italy, Negri should be the one to identify most closely with such resistance; as he has argued repeatedly, state and economic power are not givens to which people resist; no, that resistance is primary and to it oppressive political and economic power must constantly respond and adapt. So it is with the narratives of chaos, which has already been joined by our comrades, immeasure and *ákairos* – the fathomless, ill-timed and displaced. We see it again and again in those creation myths where chaos – disobedience, murmuring, insurrection, challenges to divinely appointed leaders, and simple refusal – is the constitutive force that must be countered in ever new ways. But we also see it in our own day with the running riots in Paris in 2006 or Greece in 2008-9, even in the hooligans who burn cars and smash shop fronts, the brazen disregard for police by gangs of youths, the massed protests in Seattle, Genoa and countless other moments of anti-capitalist protest. All of these are dubbed as chaotic and monstrous, threats to social order and the state, the work of thugs and criminals. They are, I would suggest, manifestations of *ákairos*.

It is time to review my argument concerning *kairós* and (im)measure. We began by exploring what turned out to be a rather conventional and biblical understanding of *kairós* – as the right season and opportune moment – only to raise questions about its moral and class allegiances in classical Greek thought. After siding with *ákairos* we turned to investigate the organising role of (im)imeasure in Negri's commentary on Job. But as we did so, the close interweaving with *kairós* and *ákairos* began to emerge, so much so that we sought the political connections between immeasure and *ákairos*. It has been a creative engagement with Negri's commentary on Job, an effort to take a productive argument a few steps further – all by means of a book of the Bible. Here the various lines came together, especially in the immense possibilities of immeasure, which is not only cognate with *ákairos* but also intersects with the theme of chaos as a distinctly political motif. In short, I have sided quite clearly with those who are untimely, not in the right place, chaotic and beyond measure.

## Conclusion

I close with a slightly different question, one that emerges from the preceding engagement: why on earth is Negri, the avowed atheist and frequent critic of the brutality sanctioned by religion, reading the Bible? One reason is that it provides him with a way to think through the brutal defeat of the Left in Italy in the 1970s – the police roundup, court cases, prison terms and exile. Another is that for this atheist Job enables Negri to make some sense of Judaism and Christianity, if not his brief time with Catholic Action in the 1950s where theology and politics came into contact with one another and where the central problem of the common – community, giving a hand, love of others – first arose (Negri and Casarino 2008, 41, 44). As he points out, he has nothing against religion, admits to an omnipresence of a pagan 'religiosity of doing' in his work, finds the ascetic tradition immensely appealing, calls for a thorough rethinking of communism comparable to the way the church fathers reshaped Christianity in the first few centuries, admits somewhat tongue-in-cheek to having offered the smallest of prayers to his mother when in prison awaiting word on his petition for parole, and goes so far as to say that the only definition of God he is prepared to admit is one of 'overabundance, excess, and joy' – these are the 'only forms through which God can be defined' (Negri and Defourmantelle 2004, 101, 106-7, 134; Negri and Casarino 2008, 179, 181). These are some of the reasons why Job draws him in, for Job is in fact a figure of the new militant, like Francis of Assisi (Hardt and Negri 2000, 413), one who brings transcendence to account through a sheer act of desire.

Yet a far deeper reason informs Negri's reading of the Bible; or rather, this reason enables him to read the Bible and indeed deal with theology without succumbing to secularised theology or being trapped by the absolute truth claims of theology. The key is

that Negri enacts the relativising of theology which negates its claims to both absolute truth and to the origins of much (if not all) contemporary thought. In a crucial footnote to the essay ‘Reliqua Desiderantur’ in *Subversive Spinoza* (2004, 54, n. 4), Negri deals with the arguments for the continuity of theological concerns in Spinoza’s secularisation of political concepts. It may be the unfolding of a theological nucleus, the internal logic of secularisation within theology, or the argument that Spinozian democracy was a result of a specific form of religious alliance and civic association. In reply, Negri initially questions whether one can guarantee continuity across the treacherous bridge of secularisation; he suspects not. But then he takes a much stronger position, arguing that Spinoza, like Marx and Machiavelli, brings about a profound rupture with any process of secularisation or laicisation, offering a materialist and atheist break with any theological continuity. Elsewhere he identifies this break in terms of the refusal to rely on transcendence that bedevils Western political thought, for which transcendence is manifested in hierarchy and legitimacy. He calls this refusal of obnoxious transcendence as an ‘operational materialism’ and ‘wholehearted atheism’ (Negri 2004, 24; Negri and Defourmantelle 2004, 158).

However, I suggest that Negri is pushing towards is what may be called a relativisation of theology. By questioning the continuity of theology in secularisation and especially by arguing for the profound rupture of a materialist approach, he effectively negates the claims made on behalf of theology to be the *fons et origo* of all (political) thought. And by arguing for the brand new beginnings of Spinoza, Machiavelli<sup>6</sup> and Marx, he puts theology in its place as one possible mode of thinking politics, or indeed culture, economics, society, and so on. Or rather, this is how I read what he is doing, even if he pushes the argument for a profound rupture a little too hard at times. This process of relativising theology shows up time and again in his detailed engagements with Spinoza, the comrade of Job (Negri 2009, 16-17; 2004, 51). Thus, in both *The Savage Anomaly* (itself a brilliant materialist reading of the Dutch and Spinozian anomalies) and *Subversive Spinoza*, Negri constantly interprets Spinoza’s engagements with theology – the proofs of God’s existence, prophecy, miracles, pietas, love, salvation and the Bible – in terms of other substantive issues – Power and power,<sup>7</sup> imagination, liberation, freedom, democracy, collectivity, the body, hermeneutics and so on. In other words, Negri enacts the relativisation of theology by reading Spinoza in a materialist register, or as he puts it, Spinoza’s ostensibly theological concerns, such as theism and pantheism, are ‘dissolved’ in his materialism (Negri 2004, 94). But that also means that theology does not need to be cast out into the outer darkness, there to gnash its teeth in the company of other superstitions; it becomes part of a much wider intellectual and political programme, as

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<sup>6</sup> For Machiavelli religious allegiance is subservient to the political pact (Negri 2004, 54, n. 15).

<sup>7</sup> Following Michael Hardt’s decision in translating *The Savage Anomaly*, the Latin *potestas* becomes Power and *potentia* power – the key issue in Negri’s reading of Spinoza.

Negri finds with Spinoza's *Ethics*. Spinoza does so with his radical synthesis of reason and religion, materialism and religiosity (*pietas*), but only when he has made his own exodus from the strictures of religion (for Spinoza it was his Jewish heritage) and created his own new philosophical universe (Negri 1991, 10-15). Thus, theology and materialism become two possible codes, often at loggerheads, two ways to approach the same problems. So too with Negri's commentary on the book of Job.

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