

**THEMES IN THE THOUGHT OF WALTER BENJAMIN****Dr. Chung Chin-Yi**Research scholar,  
National University of Singapore  
Singapore**Abstract**

Time is thus constellational rather than linear, where past events are teleologically linked with present events through an order which is redemptive and leading to an end which is redemptive and the arrest of all time with the Messiah's return, who will judge the victors in history and bring victory to those who have been oppressed through class struggle throughout history, and this will entail bringing justice to the oppressed classes and judgement for the Antichrist as ruling powers from which even the dead will not be safe. Benjamin thus describes history as the procession and succession of a series of victors- these victors are the rulers in history, the political elites who have benefited from the spoils of capitalism and who have gained power from these spoils from oppressing the lower classes or working classes. History has always been shown to empathize with these victors in history, or the rulers or political elites who have derived their power from the oppression of the lower classes or proletariat. As Benjamin puts it, this empathy with the victors in history is also an occasion of horror because the spoils of victory owe themselves to the anonymous toil of contemporaries as much as their great minds and talents who have created them. Thus Benjamin holds that there is no document of civilization which is not free from barbarism, it is the violence of class oppression which has allowed the victors in history to maintain their power and advantage. The task of the historical materialist is thus to brush history up against the grain and also depict the losers in history who will be eventually redeemed by the coming of the Messiah who will bring justice for them and give them a voice.

**Keywords:** Benjamin, History, Messianic Time, Class struggle, Redemption

*Only the Messiah himself consummates all history, in the sense that he alone redeems, completes, creates its relation to the Messianic. (Benjamin, 1978: 312)*

The above quote posits the Messiah as the culmination of history, all the injustices of worldly life will be righted and all the oppressed classes will be redeemed by the Messiah as the Messiah completes history and will represent the culmination of Messianic time which history is moving inexorably towards.

*For this reason nothing historical can relate itself on its own account to anything Messianic. (Benjamin 1978: 312)*

In this quote Benjamin posits that history cannot stand apart on its own account to the Messianic because time itself is Messianic and the culmination of all history, as such there is no existence of history apart from Messianic time and the culmination of the redemption of history and all the oppressed classes and losers in history with the coming of the Messiah

*Therefore the Kingdom of God is not the telos of the historical dynamic, it cannot be set as a goal. From the standpoint of history it is not the goal, but the end. (Benjamin 1978: 312)*

Benjamin thus distinguishes the realization of the holy Kingdom of God as a goal and as an end. According to Benjamin, with the culmination of history with the coming of the Messiah, the realization of the Kingdom of God is not a telos or goal towards which history strives but the ultimate end and realization of history in which all will pass away and replaced by the holy Kingdom of God as the culmination and end of all worldly history

*Therefore the order of the profane cannot be built on the idea of the Divine Kingdom, and therefore theocracy has no political, but only a religious meaning. (Benjamin 1978: 312)*

Benjamin thus distinguishes the religious meaning of theocracy from the political, the political is transient and worldly and will pass away, as will the order of the profane which is prohibited from being built on the idea of the Divine Kingdom being opposed to it, but the profane along with the political as manifestations of the fallen empirical world will pass away into the realization of the transcendental ideal Kingdom of God which will find its realization at the end of history.

*The order of the profane should be erected on the idea of happiness. The relation of this order to the Messianic is one of the essential teachings of the philosophy of history. It is the precondition of a mystical conception of history, containing a problem that can be represented figuratively. If one arrow points to the goal toward which the profane dynamic acts, and another marks the direction of Messianic intensity, then certainly the quest of free humanity for happiness runs counter to the Messianic direction but just as a force can, through acting, increase another that is acting in the opposite direction, so the order of the profane assists, through being profane, the coming of the Messianic Kingdom. (Benjamin 1978:312)*

Here Benjamin distinguishes the Messianic and the profane as two polar opposites, but argues that though the profane acts through self-realization and self-indulgence and the satiation of selfish desires which acts contrary to the other giving logic of the Messianic Kingdom, it runs counter to the Messianic Kingdom but also can be a precondition of the Messianic in its exhaustion. Hence we see the similarities with Augustine and Siddharta. While Buddha encourages renunciation as the path to enlightenment, Siddharta says that it is necessary to experience the fullness of life and to err and sin in order to reach equilibrium and find the way. There are different paths to enlightenment- Govinda follows teachers but doesn't reach a true state of nirvana, while Siddharta who does not renounce the world finds enlightenment through experience. The final conclusion of the novel Siddharta is a mix of Buddhism, Taoism and Christianity- finding salvation through the renunciation of sin and experiencing desire in order to renounce it. The novel is about the complexity of spiritual enlightenment, which comes through experience of the complexities of life rather than renunciation of the world. It is necessary for Siddharta and Augustine to experience sin and debauchery before they renounce the sensual and material life for more spiritual and enlightened experiences. Hence the profane order is necessarily experienced before it is exchanged for spiritual enlightenment or the order of the Messianic.

*The profane, therefore, although not itself a category of this Kingdom, is a category of its quietest approach, For in happiness all that is earthly seeks its downfall, and only in good fortune is its downfall destined to find it, Whereas admittedly, the immediate Messianic intensity of the heart of the inner man passes through misfortune as suffering. (Benjamin 1978: 312-13)*

We see this recovery from the profane to the Messianic in the life of Augustine. Augustine experiences a life of suffering from satiating himself too much in the profane order to find God at the end of saturating himself in sin by turning away from sin to the Kingdom of God. Augustine then emerges from a life of darkness to a life of light in forsaking his life of sin for knowing God. While this meant a life of chastity, Augustine found it brought him closer to God to be chaste than while pursuing sins of the flesh. Augustine found that a secular life divorced from God had only left him spiritually adrift, impoverished and barren as he did not know the saving and redeeming grace of Christ. Augustine eventually emerged to become one of the most influential theologians of the Catholic church, and indeed many are amazed that even he could be redeemed when he had lived in such wanton sin and darkness prior to his redemption.

Augustine then moves from a life of deceit and lies to truth. His journey is one in which he exchanges the lie of worldly glory for the truth of God. While to be a child of God is to be esteemed lowly by the world's standards, Augustine discovers in his pursuit of Christ riches that are infinitely greater than the wealth and prestige he had gained by becoming a professor of rhetoric and indulging in wine and women.

From a heartless thief and perpetrator of lies through his practice and teaching of rhetoric Augustine moves towards the truth of Christ as savior and redeemer. Augustine then charts a journey from darkness to light, forsaking his worldly ways for the truth and light of knowing and serving God.

*To the spiritual restitution in integrum, which introduces immortality corresponds a worldly restitution that leads to the eternity of its downfall, and the rhythm of this eternally transient world existence, transient in its totality, in its spatial but also in its temporal totality, the rhythm of Messianic nature is happiness. For nature is Messianic by reason of its eternal and total passing away. (Benjamin 1978: 313)*

Augustine the represents this passing away of the profane order to embrace the Messianic, as is Nature, Nature is the passing away and destruction of the profane order to be replaced with the Kingdom of God or the Messianic order. This realization of the Messianic order through the destruction of the profane order is what leads to true happiness and true fulfilment in place of temporary fulfilment of the profane order in pleasure seeking where all classes will be liberated from class oppression with the coming of the Messiah to replace the profane self-serving order with the Messianic Other-serving order in which God's Kingdom will be truly classless and there will no longer be any poverty or class oppression.

*To strive after such passing, even for those stages of man that are nature, is the task of world politics, whose method must be called nihilism. (Benjamin 1978:313)*

It is this passing away of the profane order that is a stage of nature and this is the task of world politics, whose method must be called nihilism because it is the destruction of all belief in the profane order or the belief that self-fulfillment leads to happiness. The destruction of the profane order which satiates self in search of happiness is to be destroyed to lead to its replacement with the Messianic order in which the consideration of the Other before the self in the kingdom of God will be replace it and replace all capitalist self-fulfillment with a Marxist utopia in which there is no class oppression or property but a kingdom of equality and love which is the fulfillment of the Messianic order and the passing away of the capitalist profane order.

In his essay fate and character, Benjamin sees the need to separate these concepts as inherently related causally, character being the cause of fate and being thus deterministically linked- Benjamin challenges the idea that fate can be reduced to character as a single cause on the grounds that this is an idea that is reductive and that does not capture the complexity of character of the idea that fate is constant, monodimensional or unchanging throughout the course of one's life. Rather Benjamin sees them as inseparable interactions, what Benjamin seeks to highlight is the complexity and interactive nature of fate and character which changes throughout one's life, perhaps Benjamin wishes to suggest that fate is dynamic rather than static and contingent on the choices one makes at different stages in life rather than a single function of a character that remains constant throughout life as we are conscious that fortunes can change, as can a person's choices or moral character as a rigid causal relation between fate and character would suggest. Benjamin also objects to the causal relation between fate and character on the ground that it condemns and convicts as guilty before character occurs, that is, the law condemns and makes a person guilty before his crime, rather than being a consequence of his actions, indeed the law condemns before a person is guilty and thus determines rather than convicts a person of guilt.

*The idea underlying this is the following: if, on the one hand, the character of a person, the way in which he reacts, were known in all its details, and if on the other, all the events in the areas entered by the character were known, both what would happen to him and what he would accomplished could be exactly predicted. That is his fate would be known. (Benjamin 1978:304)*

Benjamin thus objects to the idea that we can predict a person's fortunes based on his character on the basis that this is reductive and that one's character cannot be essentialized and determined by a single trait which thus determines the outcomes of his fortunes. This also overlooks the idea of divine mystery. We are aware that even in the bible based on the book of Job that a good person is not spared from ill fortune and may go through periods of ill fortune to strengthen and refine his character rather than merely as punishment or retribution to any sin committed. Likewise, it is acknowledged in Ecclesiastes that even good deeds may be made in vain as the wicked prosper while the good suffer on the lack of opportunism they take to profit themselves in worldly ways. Hence Benjamin's contest that fate and character are deterministically linked can have biblical backing that this is an overly reductive reading of the divine mystery of God's ways and also an overlooking of divine mercy and redemption which blesses even when one is unworthy of blessing.

*It emerges that the traditional conception of the nature and the relationship of character and fate not only remains problematic insofar as it is incapable of making the possibility of a prediction of fate rationally comprehensible, but that it is false, because the distinction it rests on is theoretically untenable. For it is impossible to form an uncontradictory concept of the exterior of an active human being the core of whom is taken to be the character. No definition of the external world can disregard the limits set by the concept of the active man. Between the active man and the external world all is interaction, their spheres of action interpenetrative, no matter how different their conceptions may be, their concepts are inseparable. (Benjamin 1978:305)*

Benjamin thus holds that the separation of fate and character is not theoretically possible as these concepts are interactively and dynamically related throughout a person's life and in a dynamic rather than static relation that is reducible to a single character trait. Benjamin does not believe determining the core of one's character by reducing one's character to a single trait is theoretically sound, and moreover that one's fate and one's character exist in a dynamic and inseparable relation throughout one's life and though Benjamin does not explicitly state this, I

infer fate changes based on the choices one makes which change throughout a person's life. For instance there are people who are at certain stages of their lives very fervent in religion and morally devout but who veer or decline in faith and make irrational or immoral choices at later stages in life, an example being David who was a man of God and very devout in all his choices till he met Bathsheba whom he could not resist sexually and succumbs to sin. Hence even going by a very Godly and devout man David, we see he was also prone to bad moral choices and could not be simply summed up as a good and God loving man because he was also capable of making immoral or bad choices which thereafter lead to retribution. Hence what Benjamin argues about fate and character being dynamically interlinked rather than separably and causally related again, has support in the Bible.

*If a concept of fate is to be attained, therefore, it must be clearly distinguished from that of character, which in turn cannot be achieved until the latter has been more exactly defined. On the basis of this definition the two concepts will become wholly divergent where there is character there will with certainty not be fate and in the area of fate character will not be found.*(Benjamin 1978: 306)

Hence Benjamin wishes to distinguish character from fate on the grounds as we have argued earlier that this is overly reductive because these exist in dynamic correlation and interaction rather than singularly determined. Benjamin wishes to separate the two to dispel the myth that bad fortune is a response from God to a religious offence. As we have seen with our earlier discussion of Job and the prosperity of evil people, it can be seen that ill fortune can be a ground for the testing and development of one's character rather than simple retribution for sin. It is also true that swindlers and dishonest business people profit more in worldly ways than those who are purely ethical or honest in their business practices. Hence Benjamin wishes to argue for complex interaction between fate and character rather than the reducibility of it to a single trait or function of character.

*There is no question of the 'moral world order' being restored, instead the moral hero, still dumb not yet of age as such he is called a hero wishes to raise himself by shaking that tormented world. The paradox of the birth of genius in moral speechlessness moral infantility is the sublimity of tragedy. It is probably the basis of all sublimity, in which genius, rather than God appears. Fate shows itself, therefore, in the view of life, as condemned, as having, at bottom, been condemned and then become guilty. Goethe summarizes both phases in the words 'The poor man you let become guilty'. Law condemns, not to punishment but to guilt. Fate is the guilt context of the living ,* (Benjamin 1978: 307-308)

Benjamin thus does not wish to concede that the Law is a consequence of one's guilt but instead to argue that the law determines and produces guilt. Thus one is condemned before one becomes guilty of the law, it is the law that produces and determines guilt rather than vice versa. Thus we should feel sorry for the poor man you let become guilty as it is a series of conditions through which a man becomes guilty, in my discussion on Brighton Rock, I have argued about how poverty has produced a hardened criminal in Pinkie. Thus law condemns and finds guilty rather than is a consequence of one's guilt rather than innocence.

Time in Walter Benjamin's Thesis on the Philosophy of History is conceived as teleological, constellational rather than linear, but leading towards the return of the Messiah and redemption from all who have been in power or victors in history for the oppressed classes. Benjamin conceives of history as being controlled like a puppet in a chess game by a dwarf which is actually a symbol for historical materialism, in which the so called losers in history or the oppressed classes will be finally redeemed from their position of loss by the return of the

Messiah who will defeat the Antichrist and all who have been historically oppressed in class struggle.

*Reflection shows us that our image of happiness is thoroughly coloured by the time to which the course of our own existence has assigned us. The kind of happiness that could arouse envy in us exists only in the air we have breathed, among people we could have talked to, women who could have given themselves to us. In other words, our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of redemption. The same applies to our view of the past, which is the concern of history. The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply. Historical materialists are aware of that.* (Benjamin 1968:254)

Benjamin thus views history as a telos that leads eventually to the end of redemption, in which though we are now bound up in selfish and self-interested ways which leads to materialistic capitalism and interest in protecting one's property, there will be a time when we will be freed from envy and work towards a truly classless and selfless society with the coming of the Messiah who will free the oppressed classes from the rulers and property owners and those who have exploited them in history. Thus Benjamin conceives of time as Messianic and leading inevitably toward class liberation and redemption with the return of the Messiah who will free the oppressed classes from exploitation and subjugation.

*To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke) It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at the moment of danger, Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: That of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. In every era the attempt must be made to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it. The Messiah comes not only as a redeemer, he comes as the subduer of the Antichrist. Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.* (Benjamin 1968: 255)

Benjamin thus views history as class struggle leading to redemption from the so called victors in history: the so called ruling classes and elites by the return of the Messiah who will not only liberate us from class struggle but also the Antichrist. Benjamin's time is thus Messianic, teleological and redemptive: the end of history will see the return of the Messiah who will judge those who have aided the maintenance of the power of the capitalistic elites and ruling classes who have exploited and subdued the working classes and proletariat who will be redeemed by the coming of the Messiah who view these elites and ruling classes as the enemy, and these ruling classes and elite will not be safe from the judgement of the Messiah even if they are already dead as it is an eschatological judgement of mankind from the position he has adopted in history : as a member of the oppressive ruling class and elite or as a member of the working classes who remain oppressed and controlled by this capitalistic ruling class.

*The class struggle, which is always present to a historian influenced by Marx, is a fight for the crude and material things without which no refined and spiritual things could exist. Nevertheless, it is not in the form of spoils which fall to the victor that the latter make their presence felt in the class struggle. They manifest themselves in this struggle as courage, humour, cunning, and fortitude. They have retroactive force and will constantly call in question every*

*victory, past and present of the rulers. As flowers turn toward the sun, by dint of a secret heliotropism the past strives to turn towards the sun which is rising in the sky of history. A historical materialist must be aware of this most inconspicuous of all transformations.* (Benjamin 1968: 255)

Benjamin here opposes the crude materialism of capitalism to the spiritual desire of Marxism to transcend commodity fetishism and hunger for the crudity of material desire. The oppressed classes persevere not for the reward of these material things but towards a truly classless society in which there is no more class oppression and subordination based on the ownership of property and the material. They persevere with courage, humor cunning and fortitude. They will challenge the material authority of the ruling elites who have oppressed them through possession of greater material wealth than them. Benjamin describes this turn away from materialism as a sun which is rising in history. This heliotropism must be made apparent to the historical materialist because it signifies his eventual victory as the sun rising in history and the scourge of the ruling classes who oppress the working classes through possession of greater material wealth.

*To historians who wish to relive an era, Fustel de Coulanges recommends that they blot out everything they know about the later course of history. There is no better way of characterizing the method with which historical materialism has been broken. It is a process of empathy whose origin is the indolence of the heart, acedia, which despairs of grasping and holding the genuine historical image as it flares up briefly. Among medieval theologians it was regarded as the root cause of sadness. Flaubert, who was familiar with it, wrote: 'Peu de gens devineront combine il a fallu etre triste ressusciter Carrhage.' The nature of this sadness stands out more clearly if one asks with whom the adherents of historicism actually empathize. The answer is inevitable: with the victor. And all the rulers are heirs of those conquered before them. Hence empathy with the victor invariably benefits the rulers. Historical materialists know what this means. Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the past rulers step over those who are lying prostrate. According to traditional practice, the spoils are carried along with this procession. They are called cultural treasures, and a historical materialist views them with caution. For without exception the cultural treasures have an origin he cannot contemplate without horror. They owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great minds and talents who have created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries. There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free from barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another. A historical materialist therefore dissociates himself from it as far as possible. He regards it as his task to brush history up against the grain.* (Benjamin 1968: 256-257)

History is thus selective for Benjamin in that historians only empathize with the victors of history in terms of political rulers and elites of capitalism. History only celebrates the victors of history- those elites and rulers who have oppressed the working class. Benjamin thus describes history as the procession and succession of a series of victors- these victors are the rulers in history, the political elites who have benefited from the spoils of capitalism and who have gained power from these spoils from oppressing the lower classes or working classes. History has always been shown to empathize with these victors in history, or the rulers or political elites who have derived their power from the oppression of the lower classes or proletariat. As Benjamin puts it, this empathy with the victors in history is also an occasion of horror because the spoils of victory owe themselves to the anonymous toil of contemporaries as much as their great minds

and talents who have created them. Thus Benjamin holds that there is no document of civilization which is not free from barbarism, it is the violence of class oppression which has allowed the victors in history to maintain their power and advantage. The task of the historical materialist is thus to brush history up against the grain and also depict the losers in history who will be eventually redeemed by the coming of the Messiah who will bring justice for them and give them a voice.

*A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows us an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise, it has caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.* (Benjamin 1968: 257-258)

The angel of history thus sees the past as a ruin which has been compiling through the generations leading to piles of debris. These are the generations of class exploitation by the ruling powers of elites which have led to generation upon generation of ruin, catastrophe, class struggle and wreckage that ensues from the destruction of class exploitation. But Benjamin also maintains that a storm blowing from Paradise named progress is blowing through history which will eventually reach its teleological end in the return of the Messiah who will subdue the Antichrist and the victors in history such as the ruling classes and capitalistic elites and liberate the losers in history from class struggle and eventually redeem them from exploitation and oppression.

*Historicism contents itself with establishing a casual connection between various moments in history. But no fact that is a cause for that very reason historical. It became historical posthumously as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years, A historian who takes this as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the 'time of the now' which is shot through with chips of Messianic time.* (Benjamin, 1968: 263)

Time is thus constellational rather than linear, where past events are teleologically linked with present events through an order which is redemptive and leading to an end which is redemptive and the arrest of all time with the Messiah's return, who will judge the victors in history and bring victory to those who have been oppressed through class struggle throughout history, and this will entail bringing justice to the oppressed classes and judgement for the Antichrist as ruling powers from which even the dead will not be safe.

In *Benjamin's Abilities*, Weber draws a parallel between Benjamin's philosophy and Derridean deconstruction in noting the affinity between "translatability" and "iterability". Essentially, Derrida argues that the structure of the mark is its repeatability, its ability to differ from itself a priori, and Weber transposes this concept of the ability of the concept to be repeated to Benjamin's work in noting that the Absolute has to be translated to be instantiated. Weber notes that the concept is defined by its "ability" to be translated and iterated, the concept is a certain power or potential to be repeated with a difference as the material, as Aristotle noted with his dynamis / energeia distinction or the difference between potentiality and actuality as a power to be translated and repeated with a difference, or iterability.



In this illuminating re-reading of Benjamin, Weber applies Derrida's meta-concept of iterability, or the ability of a concept to be repeated, to bear on Benjamin's texts. Accordingly, Weber traces the conditions of possibility for Benjamin's Absolute to its translatability, as Benjamin has read the Absolute in "The task of the translator" and "The Work of Art in Mechanical Reproduction" as that which has to be translated and reproduced, or repeated. Weber draws an analogy between this repeatability of the Absolute with the actualization of the virtual in Deleuze. The hallmark of a concept, as it appears to Weber for Benjamin, Deleuze and Derrida, is thus its translatability and repeatability, or iterability. This again applies to Weber's reading of epic theatre in Benjamin as a citability. What Weber successfully performs in his readings of Benjamin, Deleuze and Derrida is a tracing of the conditions of possibility that has informed all their readings of the Absolute to iterability or repeatability. Weber thus successfully traces the meta-concept that has sustained their readings of the Absolute in a thoroughly engaging and convincing manner.

According to Weber's Derridean rereading of Benjamin, the structure that informs their interpretation of the concept is a certain structural necessity for citability and repeatability or iterability is the a priori condition of a concept- its necessity to actualize itself. This is Deleuze's translation from virtual to actual and Benjamins' translation of the transcendental Absolute in his work, which many have interpreted as a Kantian a priori form, into empirical conditions as the transcendental is nothing outside the empirical, the virtual is nothing outside the actual, it is the nothing that separates transcendental and empirical which enables its paradoxical differentiation. On Weber's interpretation, this a priori difference as a nothing which separates the transcendental and empirical, or iterability, is precisely what enables the actualization of the concept. The hallmark of a concept is its ability to be repeated and actualized.

Weber describes, in deconstructive fashion, this actualization of the concept as a death of the concept and a relation to its afterlife, in other words, the concept has to go through a certain annihilation or death as an idea and survive itself afterwards in the material world in order to be actualized. In Derridean readings the structure of this repetition as death and survival is the production of the trace. The very act of hearing-oneself-speak presumes a need for signs, and thus solitary mental life needs indicative signs to communicate to oneself. Thus absence and the empirical have invaded solitary mental life, which cannot be reduced to pure expressive signs or ideality. At the heart of life is death. Death and non-presence is the condition of possibility for life. Death constitutes life, it is the impossible possibility that enables life.

The hallmark for the Absolute that Weber thus draws as an affinity between Benjamin's philosophy of the Absolute and Derrida's deconstruction is thus the structure of the concept as repeatability, iterability, the ability to be repeated, and a priori difference. The concept survives its death to the ideal world to live on in the material world as that which has been translated as concepts are irrevocably mediated, the transcendental is nothing outside the empirical, form has to actualize itself as content. Weber thus argues for the pertinence of deconstruction to an interpretation of Benjamin as both believe in the translatability of the Absolute as repetition with a difference, and a priori difference.

*The destructive character knows only one watchword: make room, only one activity: clearing away. His need for fresh air and open space is stronger than any hatred. (Benjamin 1978: 301)*

In the above passage Benjamin describes the destructive character who fuels progress. The destructive character demolishes and destroys tradition and history to make room for new paths and progresses.

*The destructive character is young and cheerful. For destroying rejuvenates in clearing away traces of our own age, it cheers because everything is cleared away means to the destroyer a complete reduction, indeed eradication of his own condition. But what contributes most of all to this Apollonian image of the destroyer is the realization of how immensely the world is simplified when tested for its worthiness of destruction. This is the great bond embracing and unifying all that exists. It is a sight that affords the destructive character a spectacle of deepest harmony. (Benjamin 1978: 301)*

The destructive character does not respect tradition and seeks to destroy traces of our age and the old. The destructive character reduces and eradicates his own condition in order to make way for the new, simplifying things by designating them worthy of destruction. Everything needs to be destroyed for the destructive character – this is his unifying vision.

*No vision inspires the destructive character. He has few needs, and the least of them is to know what will replace what he has destroyed. First of all, for a moment at least, empty space, the place where the thing stood or the victim lived. (Benjamin 1978: 301)*

The destructive character thus destroys for the sake of destroying without any sense of vision of what he will replace his destruction with, it is senseless and futile destruction which is gratuitous rather than a real need to replace things that drives him, without any sympathy for his victims that will be in his way.

*The destructive character does his work the only work he avoids is being creative. Just as the creator seeks solitude, the destroyer must be constantly surrounded by people, witnesses to his efficacy. (Benjamin 1978: 302)*

Benjamin thus opposes the destructive character to the creative, seeing that he surrounds himself by people and destroys for the sake of destroying without being reflective, creative or contemplative, he drowns himself in the masses and herd mentality and sees only the need to destroy rather than create.

*The destructive character has no interest in being understood. Attempts in this direction he regards as superficial, Being misunderstood cannot harm him. On the contrary he provokes it, just as oracles, those destructive institutions of the state, provoked it. The most petit bourgeois of all phenomena, gossip, comes about only because people do not wish to be misunderstood, The destructive character tolerates misunderstanding, he does not promote gossip. (Benjamin 1978: 302)*

The destructive character thus does not want to be understood and he completely disregards the opinions of others and wishes deliberately to be misunderstood, to this end, he tolerates gossip because he does not wish people to understand his character to or to comprehend his destructiveness.

*The destructive character stands in the front line of the traditionalists. Some pass things down to posterity, by making them untouchable and thus conserving them, others pass on situations, by making them practicable and thus liquidating them. The latter are called the destructive. (Benjamin 1978: 302)*

The destructive character thus has no interest in history or preserving things for posterity, he is interest only in practicality and utility without sentiment or conservation, thus clearing and destroying history.

*The destructive character has the consciousness of historical man, whose deepest emotion is an insuperable mistrust of the course of things and a readiness at all times to recognize that everything can go wrong. Therefore the destructive character is reliability itself. (Benjamin 1978: 302)*

The destructive character thus mistrusts the course of history and is a pessimist believing everything can and must go wrong, only seeing the negative in every situation and thus bearing no wish to preserve the present and only destroy the past to make way for the future. Hence the destructive character is reliability because he trusts nothing and no one.

*The destructive character sees nothing permanent. For this reason he sees ways everywhere. Where others encounter walls or mountains, there too he sees a way, But because he sees a way everywhere, he has to clear things from it everywhere. Not always by brute force sometimes by the most refined, Because he sees ways everywhere, he always positions himself at the crossroads. No moment can know what the next will bring. What exists he reduces to rubble, not for the sake of rubble, but for the sake of leading through it. (Benjamin 1978: 302-303)*

The destructive character thus believes in impermanence and transience, he sees ways everywhere to make room for the new, every obstacle is turned into a passage for the new. Because he always sees paths through the old he is always at the crossroads of making way for the new. He reduces everything to rubble to bring on new phases and trends.

*What does language communicate? It communicates the mental being corresponding to it. It is fundamental that this mental being communicates itself as language and not through language. Languages therefore have no speaker. If this means someone who communicates through these languages. Mental being communicates itself in, not through a language, which means it is not outwardly identical with linguistic being. Mental is identical with linguistic being only insofar as it is capable of communication. What is communicable in a mental entity is its linguistic entity. Language therefore communicates the particular linguistic being of things, but for their mental being only insofar as this is directly included in their linguistic being, insofar as it is capable of being communicated. (Benjamin 1978: 317-18)*

Benjamin thus considers the communication of language as the naming of the mental being that corresponds to it but it does not correspond to any outward linguistic being. Mental being is named in rather than through language. This means that the lingual naming of an object refers us to its mental being or concept rather than the referential naming of an outward object. Thus language is revelation of the essential concept of mental being of an object to us and refers us inward to this object rather than outward to the object. It therefore refers us to the revelation of the linguistic being of the object as its concept brought about through its naming rather than an external object.

*Naming, in the realm of language has as its sole purpose and its incomparably high being meaning that it is the innermost nature of language itself. Naming is that by which nothing beyond is communicated and in which language itself communicates itself absolutely. In naming the mental entity that communicates itself is language. Where mental being in its communication only there is the name and only the name is there. Name as the heritage of human language therefore vouches for the fact that language as such is the mental being of man, alone among all mental entities, communicable without residue. On this is founded the difference between human language and the language of things. But because the mental being of man is language he cannot communicate by it but only in it. The quintessence of this intensive totality of language as the mental being of man is naming. Man is the namer, by this we recognize that through him pure language speaks. All nature, insofar as it communicates itself communicates itself in language and so finally in man. Hence he is the lord of nature and can give names to things. Only through the linguistic being of things can he gain knowledge of them from within himself- in name. God's creation is completed when things receive their names from man. (Benjamin 1978: 318-19)*

Benjamin thus describes language as a metaphysical entity which has divine origins from the bible. Naming completes the act of creation in which God has assigned man the authority to name things and thus bring out their linguistic being through language. Thus man communicates not through language but in it- names refer to a divine metaphysical concept rather than an external physical object. Revelation is thus completed through the process of naming. Man gains access to the divine nature of objects through naming them, thus completing the divine process of creation by naming and thus gaining authority over objects by creating the conceptual linguistic blocks of language which language is made up of. Language thus refers to itself in a chain of concepts rather than serve as a referent to an external object. In this way language is divine and a series of divine metaphysical entities through the concept rather than the referents to an object.

*Language communicates the linguistic being of things. The clearest manifestation of this being, however is language itself. The answer to the question ‘What does language communicate?’ is therefore ‘ All language communicates itself. The language of this lamp, for example does not communicate this lamp (for the mental being of the lamp, insofar as it is communicable, is by no means the lamp itself) but the language lamp the lamp of communication, the lamp in expression. For in language the situation is this: the linguistic being of all things is their language. (Benjamin 1978: 316)*

Language does not thus refer us to a thing in itself or an external referent, an object the lamp but communicates the linguistic being of the lamp which is its mental concept. The act of naming refers us internally to this linguistic being and mental concept rather than an external referent or object. This is what Benjamin means when he states that we communicate in rather than through language. Language refers to itself in an infinite series of referents or mental concepts and Derrida has spoken of this as the fact that there is nothing outside the text, language refers to itself in an infinite series of supplements and concepts rather than to an external referent or object.

*For the metaphysics of language the equation of mental with linguistic being, which knows only gradual difference, produces a graduation of all mental being in degrees. This graduation, which takes place within mental being itself can no longer be embraced by any higher category so leads to the graduation of all being both mental and linguistic , by degrees of existence or being such as was already familiar to scholasticism with regard to mental being, However the equation of mental with linguistic being is of great metaphysical moment to linguistic theory because it leads to the concept that has again and again as if of its own accord elevated itself to the center of linguistic philosophy and constituted its most intimate connection with the philosophy of religion. This is the concept of revelation. (Benjamin, 1978: 320)*

Language is thus internally referential but has concerns with a greater metaphysical purpose. This is the concept of revelation. The act of naming brings the divine nature of an object to light because the ultimate act of naming was first conferred by God and the act of naming completes the divine revelation of the linguistic being of an object. The purpose of language is thus revelation- to unconceal their divine nature and purpose within a name.

*Within all linguistic formation a conflict is waged between what is expressed and expressible and what is inexpressible and unexpressed. On considering this conflict one sees, in the perspective of the inexpressible, at the same time the last mental entity. Now it is clear that in the equation of mental and linguistic being the notion of an inverse proportionality between the two is disputed. For the latter thesis runs: the deeper ie the more existent and real to the mind the more it is inexpressible and unexpressed whereas it is consistent with the equation proposed above to make*

*the relation between mind and language thoroughly unambiguous, so that the expression that is linguistically most existent (ie the most fixed) is linguistically the most rounded and definitive; in a word the most expressed is at the same time the purely mental. Exactly this however is meant by the concept of revelation, of it takes inviolability of the word as the only and sufficient condition and characteristic of the divinity of mental being that expressed in it. The highest mental region of religion is (in the concept of revelation) at the same time the only one that does not know the inexpressible. For it is addressed in name and expresses itself in revelation. In this however notice is given that only the highest mental being, as it appears in religion, rests solely on man and the language in him, whereas all art, not excluding poetry, does not rest on the ultimate essence of language mind but on language mind confined to things, even if in consummate beauty. "Language the mother of reason and revelation, its alpha and omega" (Benjamin 1978: 320-21)*

The highest region of language, religion thus expressed itself in revelation and beings to light that which is inexpressible and unexpressed, all the more confirming that language has metaphysical and divine objects and thus not refer to an external referent which is necessarily empirical for the realm of religion refers us to the arena of the transcendental and unseen where language takes the purpose of revelation and communicating the inexpressible and unexpressed as well as unseen and that which lies beyond the senses and beyond the world of the empirical. The highest faculty of language is thus revelation and communicating to men the linguistic being of that which is inexpressible and unexpressed through revelation because language itself is of a divine origin.

*Language itself is not perfectly expressed in things themselves. This proposition has a double meaning in its metaphorical and literal senses: the language of things are imperfect, and they are dumb. Things are dined the pure formal principle of language – sound. They can only communicate to one another through a more or less material community. This community is immediate and infinite, like every linguistic communication is magical (for there is also a magic of matter.) The incomparable feature of human language is thus its magical community with things is immaterial and purely mental, and the symbol of this is sound. The Bible expresses this symbolic fact when it says God breathes his breath into man: this is at once life and mind and language. (Benjamin 1978:321)*

Hence language does not confine itself to empirical objects because it serves the purpose of revelation and was first breathed by God into man to express the immaterial, the inexpressible and the unexpressed. Language is thus immaterial and refers to the mental linguistic being of things- their mental concepts rather than to an external object or referent. Language is thus immaterial and purely mental and serves the function of revelation- to disclose to man the divine nature of objects and their divine meaning. God breathed language into man that he might experience revelation and an insight into the divine linguistic being of things which God himself named in order for men to experience through the word and the Bible which is for man revelation of higher truths through language whose purpose is revelation and disclosure of higher truths and God's ways.

*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 its 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 contests 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.

### Works cited:

Augustine, Saint. *The Confessions*. New City Press. New York. 1997.

Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. Harcourt Brace Jonavich, New York. 1968.

Benjamin, Walter. *Selected writings: volume One, 1913-1926*. Belknap press, Harvard, London, 1996.

Benjamin, Walter. *Reflections*. Harcourt Press. New York. 1978.

Herman Hesse. *Siddharta*. New directions Publishing, New York. 1951

Weber, Samuel. *Benjamin's Abilities*. Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press. 2008.