

*Specters of Biopolitics:
Eschatology, Katechon and Resistance*

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<A>Security as a Generative Principle of Formation

“What if?” a Unisys publication asked some years ago. “What if security wasn’t a cage? What if instead of keeping things out, it let amazing things in? What if it made you bolder, more ambitious and enabled you to accomplish more than you ever thought possible? What if security unleashed your full potential?” Elsewhere Unisys also stated: “Security can no longer be viewed as a means to a defensive end. It has to become a catalyst for achievement. It must enable you to be more innovative, more competitive and more ambitious.”¹ Security does not figure as a value or commodity here. It is equally clear from political as well as military strategic and security discourse that security has never figured as a mere value or commodity. It occurs throughout political, military, and security discourses, as it does here in these riffs from Unisys, as a generative principle of formation.² In the modern age, especially, security is the constitutive principle of political statehood and selfhood. Through security discourses, the discourse of war is inscribed as the discourse of peace, where modern peace is the continuous attempt to establish secure (political) order internally as much as externally. In the process, security discourses specify the politics of peace in terms of the unfolding of burgeoning discourses of danger and spiraling security problematizations, threatening fields of formation, surfaces of friction, adversarial relations, irreconcilable enmities, and war in the name of life itself.

But if war proceeds from modern security imperatives, from whence does security derive its formative properties as a generative principle of formation? What is the differentia specifica of security politics as a generative principle of formation? Since politics of security have a history and the problematizations of danger against which they authorize war also come in different forms, what then is the differentia

specifica of modern security politics? Pace traditional accounts of security discourse, the conditions on which it is possible to conceive of modern security politics differ from other times, other places, and other spaces.

<A>The Temporal Enframing of Security

Taking place in time, circumscribed by the figuration of time in which their space of problematization, their positivities and empiricities, unfold, politics of security and war are nonetheless always the politics of the limit. “Doomed to time,”³ the very space of possibility for modern security politics of the limit therefore emerges from its temporal enframing, specifically the Copernican turn away from the transcendental finitude of a divinely ordained universe to the factual finitude of modern times. The limit to which modern security politics of the limit therefore addresses itself, and from which it derives its securitizing and war-making warrant, is that of the eschaton of time conceived as factual finitude. Circumscribed within the horizon of factual finitude, the eschaton made immanent, the limit politics of modern security assumes a distinctive quality.

The Unisys advertisements illustrate this beautifully, turning our attention to the modern eschaton as an open horizon of temporal possibility within which the infinite becomings of finite things, happenings, or events—the ontico-ontological difference of the event of the Event being a primary motif of modern security politics as much as it is of Continental thought—are continuously enjoined to take place.⁴ Since everything modern takes place in the factual account of finitudinal time, history, there is no modern time other than that of the changing facticity of finitudinal time. The modern eschaton, accurately depicted here by Unisys, does not signify the biblical threshold of the end of time. To repeat, the temporal limit of modern times signifies, instead, a continuously open horizon of finite possibility, an

infinity of finite possibilities. This prompts me to pose a general thesis about politics of security and war that I wish to take up in relation especially to our modern biopolitics of security and its martial pursuit of life. That thesis is as follows.

<A>Security as Political Eschatology

Every politics of security, by virtue of the very fact it is a politics of the limit, is also constituted by what we might call a political eschatology, is itself a form of political eschatology. As a generative principle of political formation derived from addressing the institution and regulation of a temporal political order from the perspective of the terminal dissolution of that order, a politics of security derives its warrant to secure and to wage war “eschatologically.”

As a political eschatology, the rule of truth spoken by modern politics of security is concerned with the end of things, while the truth of rule that it institutes, and for which it kills, derives from the positive exigencies of government and rule that arise in restricting that end. For it is from the catastrophic threat of the dissolution of the order of things that the politics of security not only derives its very warrant to secure and liberal war its warrant to kill. The catastrophic threat-event of the dissolution of the temporal order of things is continuously also interrogated to supply the governing technologies, by which the political order is regulated in peace to be “fit” for war and is regulated so as to resist the same catastrophic threat-event. The security politics of the limit continuously unfolds the positivities and empiricities, orders of identity and belonging, markers of certainty and norms of conduct, behavioral patterns of conduct, and globally organized logistics of mass killing as well as associated apologias, rhetorics, and ideologies that are indexed to the limit and warranted by it.

Essential to the rule of any truth, marking the limit conditions within which it is possible to conceive and practice a rule of truth, the changing configuration of the Occidental account of the eschaton fed directly into the development of the modern thought of the rule of truth, from Immanuel Kant, G. W. F. Hegel, and Marx to Søren Kierkegaard and Martin Heidegger just as it fed into the truth of rule. Jacob Taubes's extraordinary account of the changing course and character of Occidental eschatology, from biblical through to modern times, also reminds us forcefully that eschatology has a history.⁵ From Taubes we can also appreciate the degree to which, in particular, the changing history of the Christian eschaton was central to the career of the onto-theologico-political problematic of the West.⁶ A continuous source of theological dispute, Occidental eschatology prompted violent challenges to the institution of the religious and political order of things throughout the Christian era.

The eschaton remains a source of civil as well as religious strife today, always a theologico-political field of sacralizing formation, though one that functions differently now because the modern finitudinal immanentization of the eschaton, as an open horizon of possibility rather than the threshold to everlasting life, transforms the nature of the eschaton and the mode of (political) being instituted by it. Modern time, in short, is no less eschatological than Christian time. But it is different, and the difference accounts for the aporetic mode of being of the modern factually finitudinal order of things, and its sacralizing quality, not least that of the cultic security politics of the limit of modern political orders and the war that such politics wages in the holy name of the life of the modern finitudinal eschaton.

An eschaton is nonetheless also a question continuously in question. What is the nature of the eschaton? How is it known? How is it made known? Who is to know it and preside over its mysteries? For what mode of enquiry does it call? How is life to be lived in the light of the eschaton and in that of the future it foretells?

What mode of being, in other words, is enjoined by the eschaton? What, in time, according to some posited order of time, does the eschaton foreshadow? What forms of government and rule does the specter of the eschatological rule that hauntingly comprises eschatological truth—the exigencies of government and rule viewed from the standpoint of the material end of the temporal order of things—make terminally urgent as well as possible? What rule of truth, and what truth of rule, obtains under different eschatological regimes? Who gets what, where, when, and how under the strategic calculus of necessary killing, especially when it is waged in the name of life through the finitudinal biopolitics of security and war? For biopolitics of security is also a regime speaking truth about the nature of times through the truth of the end of times, and the mode of being required to live in, live out, and live up to the eschatological security imperative to resist, at whatever self-sacrificial cost, the end of the temporal order of things.

Keeping the eschaton out of the question demands relentless political and ideological work. But it remains and so persists as a continuous focus also of sedition and contention within any rule of truth. Since the eschaton is not only the locus of fundamental challenges to the conditions on the basis of which a particular rule of truth is conceivable, calling those conditions into question and offering, for example, rival accounts of the eschaton also subvert the very truth of rule of a rule of truth. That is how it “is.” That is the real, eschatologically, and it empowers liberal security discourses and war biopolitically; the analytic of which, positively, in the Foucauldian sense, furnishes its governmental technologies and military strategic operational concepts and doctrines, as well as its political rationalities.

Rule of truth and truth of rule—if the truth teller is telling the truth, then the truth is for everyone, and if what the truth teller says is true, then it follows that the conduct of conduct, from the individual to the collective, should be aligned or align

itself with the truth. Thus, truth and rule directly imply one another here as they have always done throughout the intimate strategic relationship of the ontological and the political. Such is the case, too, for the rule of truth and truth of rule of the eschaton. Excavating the eschaton of a rule of truth and truth of rule calls into question the very mode of being warranted by that eschaton. There is no more seditious act.

There nonetheless seem to be two set responses to the calling into question of an eschaton, on the basis of which it is possible to conceive and enact a temporal order of things. The first response is to side with the forces of order, accepting their warrant to rule in the name of preventing the dissolution of the prevailing temporal order of things. The second is to side with the order of the repressed subjected to the rule of truth and the truth of rule of any such temporal order.

The first response is katechontic. It conceives its task as that of restraining the coming of the end of the temporal order of things. The second response is messianic. It conceives its task as keeping open the call to justice that arises within the temporal order of things and the possibility of another order.⁷ The two appear to be in continuous war with one another, for they seem to offer different interpretations of and dispositions toward the very condition on the basis of which a rule of truth and a truth of rule unfold in their positivities and empiricities as well as in their articles of faith—whether or not that faith is in Christ, or whether it is the modern faith in what Alain Badiou calls fidelity to the event, or in Jacques Derrida’s “the politics to come.”⁸ Within the tradition of Occidental eschatology, they nonetheless represent quite discrete stages in the sacred narrativizing of revealed religion’s transcendentally governed and soteriologically indebted finitudinal politics of security. In the biopolitics of security and war waged in the name of life they are conflated. The katechontic becomes a messianic mission.

Eschatology, by which I mean the configuration of and rule according to the end of a temporal order of things and not merely the Christian account of the eschaton, is central to the archeological structure and genealogical emergence of Western philosophy and politics (rule of truth and truth of rule). In the form of a factual finitude's open horizon of possibility, it is central also to the posing of the political problematic of modern times. As Michel Foucault puts it in The Order of Things, the epistemological problematic of the modern—its very analytic of finitude—is not only posed in terms of reference solely to factual finitude but is thereby tasked with giving concrete epistemological form to factual finitude.⁹ Analyzed epistemologically by Foucault, the point is equally applicable politically. It is applicable also to the military-strategic operational concepts and doctrines and the civil-military apparatuses of security, so deeply sutured into the everyday politics of contemporary liberal regimes.

Modern politics, too, emerged as a project defined by the way it posed the problematic of rule in—and by reference solely to—factual finitude. The task of modern rule also became that of giving concrete political form to finitude. Thus the death of God, politically, remains a violent project, not an accomplishment. Neither is it a done theological or philosophical deal; the doctrinal disputes of the medieval church along with those of the Reformation were as implicated in the dying-off of the Christian God as the facticity (or so-called secularization) of modern rule and truth telling. It thus had its precursors in the scholastic revolutions of the twelfth century, as much as in Machiavelli and above all Hobbes.¹⁰

When Foucault refers to the way in which there was a transformation of political reasoning from the sixteenth century on, he failed to give adequate attention to the way in which there was a corresponding transformation of theological reasoning. Just as the transformation of political reasoning often found its expression

through the tropes of theological discourse, so the transformation of theological reasoning often found its expression through newly addressing questions of conduct and rule. Each was concerned with securing regulation of the conduct of conduct and the establishment of reliable forms of rule in violently changing circumstances. They often also had a lot to say directly to one another. Each remained a point of reference for the other, in the realm of reasoning as well as in the realm of practice. They diverged but did not entirely separate, and they never have. Secularization theses flatten the violent differences that persisted within the medieval church just as much as they exaggerate the extent to which the modern problematization of politics and rule has been secularized. The theologico-political problematic of rule persisted after the dissolution of both empire and church. It persisted into the modern period, though under significantly different formulations.

The Copernican turn from transcendental to factual finitude thus has a history. That history is less of secularization than resacralization, a radical reformation of the sacred as a field of theo-logico-political formation. Foucault's "analytic of finitude"—factual finitude as opposed to the soteriological finitude of the Christian era classically expressed in Augustine's saeculum¹¹ and indexed to the promise of the soteriological security of eternal salvation and everlasting peace—refers therefore to how the eschaton of modern factual finitude is interrogated, as a condition both of possibility and operability, to furnish the modern order of things, political, as well as epistemological and also theological.¹²

One curious thing about the political orders of modern finitude is their recognition that they, too, must be finite since there is no modern time but the finitudinal time within which all finite forms, including those of politically finite regimes, are fated to come and go. The fate of Carthage haunts every Caesar. Scipio's dream is a dream more than one military commander has had. Persistence in and

through the facticity of finitudinal time is the challenge. But the only guarantee offered by the facticity of finitudinal time is that finite forms—however emergent, adaptive, and resilient, according to modern liberal security jargon—are fated ultimately to go. What is especially curious is how much the security politics of modern times are midwife to such comings and goings; it is especially curious and paradoxically, so it seems, although the paradox is so pervasive it has to be counted as a primary characteristic of modern security politics. They do not merely threaten—they positively bring about the end to the temporal orders they claim to secure. There has been no modern state, and there remains no modern political order of any kind, whose security politics have not, in every quotidian way, transformed that state or political order out of all recognition, when, through war, they have not actually brought about its cataclysmic end in the name of restraining that end.

Making its appearance in the form of the emancipation of a more factual realism, modern finitude is nonetheless a hard taskmaster, equally as hard, if differently, than the biblical God, for just as “something like a will or a force was to arise in the modern experience,” it appears no more imperious and relentless than when posed as the requirement to give concrete form to finitude.¹³ Accounts of finitudinal time now recognize no terminus, no final end, and no law that gives the law to the engendering of the finite forms that come and go through the pervasive and intensive procreational relations of force, of which finitudinal time is widely seen to be comprised.

Construed as an open-ended adventure in the intensive procreative engendering of finite form, forms are fated to end and are also fated to be subject to intensive relations of (in)finite procreative force since they are not given in nature but describe continuous processes and patterns of emergence and dissolution operative throughout these the forces of nature. As Walter Benjamin observed of

modern capitalism, there is no day of rest for the factually finite, the securitization of capital remaining its most potent cultic as well as material and positive expression.¹⁴ Needless to say, such a nature is transformed beyond recognition from that of the natural philosophers of the Christian and early modern periods. The nature of the nature of factually finite life, in particular, is no longer even the symphony of the early twentieth century but a cacophony of intensive relations of protean force.¹⁵

Doomed to time, the finitudinal political analytic of modern power relations are nonetheless also diverse and heterogeneous. There is no single response to the challenges set for the political analytic of finitude. As it were, there is no single political modernity. Modern politics of security are therefore also diverse and heterogeneous. If there is more than one security politics and war of the limit, it follows that there is more than one modern idiom of political eschatology. The modern regime of power that now interests me most is that of biopower. Biopolitics also emerged as a response to the problematic of rule posed in and by the properties of finitudinal time and the demand thereby to give concrete political form to modern finitude. The regime of security and war that now interests me most is therefore that also of the biopolitics of security and war.

Biopolitics has not only risen to become arguably the dominant liberal finitudinal mode of rule, but it is in the rise of life as the organizing figure of liberal biopolitics that one can also see the impact of the immanentization of the eschaton most clearly. Here it is possible also to pursue the reverberations of that immanentization throughout the theologico-political field of the formation of contemporary global liberal governance, its cult of life security, and its ecumene of belief in the vitalist mystery of the emergency of emergence posed by the intensive relations of procreative force to which the biopolitics of security and war of modern finitude now newly address themselves. This occurs because the finitudinal life of

biopolitics has undergone continuous and dramatic transformation throughout the modern period. Most dramatically, what it means to be a living thing has been reconstrued through the development of the life sciences of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and the accompanying molecular and digital revolutions. By life sciences, I mean not only the biological sciences but other related sciences of life..¹⁶

The political eschatology I want to broach here is that of the twenty-first-century biopolitics of security, one that continues to revolve, as Foucault first taught, around the finitudinal properties of life as species existence. Such a life is circumscribed by the open horizon of finitudinal time, factially understood through the work of the life sciences (those which also exceed the French life sciences Foucault drew on when he first described the emergence of biopower and biopolitics¹⁷), and regulated from the perspective of the exigencies of keeping that temporal eschaton at work in the political regulation of life, whose mission is to secure life to make life live. As Foucault taught, when one says, “biopolitics,” one means, “biopolitics of security.”¹⁸

Since you cannot secure anything without first specifying what you wish to secure, the biopolitics of security does not simply posit what life is, as if it were already known what it is to be a living thing. Biopolitics, too, must positively specify what the life to be secured consists in, from whence the threats to that life arise, and ultimately what calculus of necessary killing must prevail to preserve life in its vital intensive relations of procreative force against the agents and forces, themselves always in fact arising also within life. This is what makes life the enemy of life in biopolitics, that threatens life in its positive procreativity.

Thereby arises one of my quarrels with biopolitics. To secure life biopolitically now demands an eschatological war for finitudinal time itself, prepared to sacrifice

finitudinal time in the name of the relations of intensive procreative force of which finitudinal time is said to consist. Irrespective of its attachment to the natural rights discourse of early modern politics, liberal politics has become biopolitics simply because its fictive discourse of natural rights, as a throw-back to the pre-Copernican providential world of the scholastics, was insufficient to give political and governmental form to the problematization of rule progressively posed by the Copernican turn to factual finitude.

<A>The Biopolitical Order of an Immanentized Eschaton

I want to focus, therefore, on this point: where there is an eschaton, there is a katechon. Where there is a threat to the end of temporal order, there is the impetus to resist, restrain, or otherwise defer that end. I also wish to pursue that point in relation to the biopolitics of life itself, where the eschaton concerns the open finitudinal horizon of the modern account of life, and the katechon concerns the preservation of that horizon, thereby biopolitically policing what it is to be alive and what it means to have a Life.

I also wish to reflect on how, in the immanentization of the eschaton effected through the now prevailing biopolitical figure of life, the katechontic and the messianic not only become conflated in the imperializing of a biopolitical order of katechontic securitization, but a messianism attends that project and a new order of sovereign mystery also arises within it. Here we have to turn from the insight furnished by Unisys, which started the essay, to that offered by former U.S. secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld with which I want to bring the essay to a provisional end.

Recall Rumsfeld's notorious but nonetheless revealing response to press enquiries about the evidence of links between Saddam Hussein's Iraq and terrorist

organizations: “There are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns—the ones we don’t know we don’t know.”¹⁹ Herein the mystery of the biopolitics of security is exposed. It lies in the ‘unknown unknowns’ of the radically contingent relations of procreative force that biopolitical eschatology says now constitutes political reality. The operational concepts and doctrines of its military strategic and security discourses are inspired by this conception of the protean procreative character of biological nature.

According to the logic of sovereign power, though, the sovereign cannot be of the order over which the sovereign presides. A paradoxical mystery prevails at the center of any sovereign order of power relations. In a biopolitical revision of Foucault’s account of power, factual finitude is now widely interpreted among Western liberal military strategic and security discourses of peace and war as comprising radically contingent intensive relations of procreative force.²⁰ To exercise sovereign command of these radically contingent intensive relations of procreative force, the sovereign order of biopolitics cannot be of the order of these forces. The omnipresent, omnisurveillant, omniscient omnipotence that biopoliticized security discourses of peace and war locally and globally seek to exercise over intensive biopolitical relations of procreative force cannot hold sway over and through them, if it is itself subject to, or subject of, these very biopolitical force relations. It must somehow contrive to appear to stand outside or above them. The little-reported conclusion to Rumsfeld’s riff made the point. Challenged by a reporter to say whether “this” was an “unknown unknown,” Rumsfeld exempted himself from the biopolitical order: “I am not going to say which it is.”

<A>Conclusion

Thus, if Hobbes's state of nature is a political eschatology, it is Carl Schmitt who establishes the political salience of the correlation of the eschaton and katechon and makes an explicit case for it in his theologico-political theorization of sovereignty.²¹ The sovereign for Schmitt, steeped in an Augustinian account of the theologico-political problematic of the Christian church, is the katechon that resists the end of the temporal order of things, and is, in Christian eschatology, also necessary to bring about the overcoming of the Antichrist, the end of finite time, and the rapture of the Second Coming. Hobbes framed his political eschatology in terms of and for a commonwealth during a period of catastrophic civil war. Schmitt framed his in terms of and for a people in the aftermath of the catastrophes of world war and economic disintegration. In a sense, both lived in and wrote for eschatologically heightened times. Our times are different but no less eschatologically intense. The biopoliticization of military strategic and security politics of the limit instituted especially by George W. Bush and Tony Blair remains nonetheless deeply imprinted by an eschatological, katechontic mission messianically because it has not merely been the outcome of mere national administration politics, however much it finds expression there.

We must therefore always ask biopolitically: what happens when the end of the temporal order of things is enframed in terms of and for the now pervasive figure of life, rather than those other modes of political being formulated in response to the requirement to give concrete political form to finitude—commonwealth or people, but also man, state, and war?²²

Prompted by that question, this essay brings forth the eschatological idiom of the contemporary biopolitics of security and war for consideration. Its proposition is that our contemporary biopolitics of security and war, indexed neither to commonwealth, people, man, nor state but to life, substantially exceeds the security

politics of the limit of the national security state, which is also radically transformed by industrialization, massification, urbanization, nuclearization, and globalization of the last 150 years. In charging itself with resisting the end of the modern temporal ordering of life, the contemporary biopolitics of security and war have been driven beyond the national security state and its geostrategic configuration of security and war into an empire of katechontic security. This, among other factors, accounts for the hyperbolicization so characteristic now of the biopolitics of security and war of the twenty-first century.

Equally, the war that biopolitical security institutes as its peace is a distinctive form of war. Taking place in life for life, targeting the autoimmune responses of life, it is an eschatologically driven “time war,” war in time on time, the time of life, to determine the configuration of the open horizon of factual finitude as such; it remorselessly seeks to secure warranted modes of finitudinal being that is enfranchised as alive and a life according to its capacity for suffering (resiliently surviving) the continuous emergency of a finitudinal emergence relentlessly regulated from the eschatological perspective of the biopolitical construal of the end of modern finitudinal times.

<A>Notes

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