

SPRINGER BRIEFS IN EDUCATION  
KEY THINKERS IN EDUCATION

Igor Jasinski

# Giorgio Agamben: Education Without Ends



Springer

# **SpringerBriefs in Education**

## **Key Thinkers in Education**

### **Series editor**

Paul Gibbs, Middlesex University, London, UK

This briefs series publishes compact (50 to 125 pages) refereed monographs under the editorial supervision of the Advisory Editor, Professor Paul Gibbs, Middlesex University, Nicosia, Cyprus. Each volume in the series provides a concise introduction to the life and work of a key thinker in education and allows readers to get acquainted with their major contributions to educational theory and/or practice in a fast and easy way.

More information about this series at <http://www.springer.com/series/10197>

Igor Jasinski

# Giorgio Agamben: Education Without Ends



Springer

Igor Jasinski  
Montclair State University  
Montclair, NJ, USA

ISSN 2211-1921 ISSN 2211-193X (electronic)  
SpringerBriefs in Education  
ISSN 2211-937X ISSN 2211-9388 (electronic)  
SpringerBriefs on Key Thinkers in Education  
ISBN 978-3-030-02332-4 ISBN 978-3-030-02333-1 (eBook)  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-02333-1>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018957632

© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2018

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are reserved by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

This Springer imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG  
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

# Preface

To readers already familiar with his work, Giorgio Agamben (1942–) may be best known for his political writings, such as *Homo Sacer* (1998), and his contributions to debates over the curtailing of privacy rights in the wake of 9/11, or on the status of prisoners of war and refugees. While his more recent work has indeed focused on political issues, seeing him only as a political theorist is misleading given his contributions to the fields of linguistics, literary theory, aesthetics, philosophy, and religious studies. We may instead think of his work as revolving around certain central ideas that unite his diverse interests and lines of inquiry; ideas that are also—as this monograph seeks to demonstrate—fundamentally important for an understanding of the meaning and purposes of education.

That this is indeed the case is far from obvious: Agamben has not written specifically about education, and some of the key concepts in his work—such as *infancy*, *impotentiality*, or *inoperativity*—are not immediately recognizable as educationally significant and may even appear hostile to the very idea of education. The reason for this is that the idea of education contained in Agamben's work is part of a broader vision of the possibility of personal, social, and political forms of life that are defined by a lack of directionality toward specific goals or outcomes. This puts his views at odds not only with the dominant outcome-driven paradigm in education but also with the belief that our lives, more generally, derive their meaning from the realization of personal and professional goals, and that it is the role of education to provide us with the means to accomplish them. It is therefore not surprising that it may seem almost absurd to suggest that places designated for learning, such as schools and universities, should be about anything but the acquisition of knowledge and specific competencies or skills. It also means that recognizing Agamben's work as relevant for education at all may require us to question basic assumptions, not only about the nature of education but about what it means to lead a meaningful life.

While the thoroughly non-instrumental idea of education contained in Agamben's work may seem radical at first, it is certainly not new. In fact, Agamben stands in a long tradition of philosophers and educational theorists who have suggested that life, and, thus, education, should be about more than accomplishing

specific goals (however lofty), going all the way back to Socratic philosophy, the Stoics, and Eastern thinkers like Laozi. It can also be found—to varying degrees—in the work of educational theorists, such as John Dewey, Hannah Arendt, Ivan Illich, and Paolo Freire. In fact, rather than presenting an Agambenian perspective as a radically novel approach to how we think about education, it is one of the purposes of this book to show how Agamben's life and work allow us to potentialize (rather than overcome) the ideas of other thinkers, past and present. Moreover, it would contradict the spirit of Agamben's philosophy, to present his views as transferable or—to use a Freirean term—*bankable* knowledge (Freire 2001) that can be acquired and readily applied. The goal here is, instead, to exemplify Agamben's idea of education as a dynamic, open-ended process, by inviting the reader to engage in an experimentation with ideas. As such, the book should not be thought of as useful, in the sense of providing specific tools or strategies that could be implemented in the classroom or seminar room, but wants to let the reader experience the play with ideas as itself a kind of practice that may inspire new ways of thinking about and doing things in education.

The book is divided into three parts, each of which examines Agamben's contribution to education from a different angle: The first part portrays Agamben's life as the life of a studier, consisting of formative experiences on the threshold between life and work that—taken together—represent an alternative idea of education. The second part presents key concepts in Agamben's work (*infancy, study, community, happiness*) as articulations of the kind of formative experiences discussed in the first part. Rather than a comprehensive theory of education, the educationally relevant ideas in Agamben's work form a conceptual constellation that encourages us to contemplate (*study*, as it were) a possible idea of education. In the third part, finally, I explore ways in which an Agambenian view of education, and his idea of study, in particular, has been used to identify, articulate, and/or model possibilities for studious practices in the spatial, temporal, and curricular infrastructure of the school and the university.

Agamben has noted that what he considers most important about the works of other thinkers, as well as his own books, is what remains unfinished or incomplete in them because it is what is left unsaid that constitutes their “capacity to be developed” (2009a, p. 8). Applied to this book, we could say that it tries to develop what Agamben has *not* said (about education in particular), inviting the reader, in turn, to develop what remains unfinished in this book, realizing that this process itself and not some specific result—such as a conclusive understanding of Agamben's philosophy, or a more perfect conception of education—is both an enactment and the realization, in the present, of an “education without ends.”

## References

Agamben, G. (1998). *Homo sacer*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Freire, P. (2001). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

Agamben, G. (2009a). *The signature of all things: On method*. New York: Zone Books.



# Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Paul Gibbs for entrusting me with writing this monograph for his series, and for his guidance and kind words of encouragement along the way.

I am deeply grateful to my family, Paulina, Diego, and Nikolai, for their love and support, hoping that whatever merits the book may have will somehow justify my extended absences from their lives.

Lastly, my sincerest thanks to my mentor and study partner, Tyson Lewis. Without him, this book would not have been written or even begun, and without his extensive comments on earlier versions of the manuscript, it would not have found its current form. I dedicate this book to him.

Igor Jasinski

# Contents

## Part I Experiences

<b>1 The (Mis)Education of Giorgio Agamben</b> . . . . .	3
1.1 Introduction . . . . .	3
1.2 The Life of Images (Or: Three Lessons Agamben May Have Learned at the Movies) . . . . .	5
1.3 The Desire to Write . . . . .	8
1.4 Studying the Law (Or: Inside the Law) . . . . .	11
1.5 The Possibility of Philosophy/Life . . . . .	12
1.6 Studying Benjamin and Arendt . . . . .	14
1.7 A Nameless Science . . . . .	15
1.8 The Power of Community (Education, Life, and Politics after Auschwitz) . . . . .	17
References . . . . .	19

## Part II Articulations

<b>2 Infancy</b> . . . . .	23
2.1 Introduction . . . . .	23
2.2 Infancy and Potentiality . . . . .	24
2.3 Infancy as a State of Suspension . . . . .	26
2.4 Facets of Infancy . . . . .	27
2.5 Infancy and Education . . . . .	30
References . . . . .	32
<b>3 Study</b> . . . . .	33
3.1 Introduction . . . . .	33
3.2 Infancy, Study, and the Symbolic in Cultural Transmission . . . . .	34
3.3 An Idea of Study (Time, Rhythm, Studious Play, and Ease) . . . . .	35

3.4	The Idea of the Studier . . . . .	39
3.5	The Weak Utopianism of Study . . . . .	40
	References . . . . .	42
<b>4</b>	<b>Community . . . . .</b>	<b>45</b>
4.1	Introduction . . . . .	45
4.2	In-Tentional Versus Intentional Community . . . . .	46
4.3	Teacher-as-not-a-Teacher . . . . .	47
4.4	The Bonds of Love and Friendship . . . . .	49
4.5	The In-Tentional Educational Community as Paradigm . . . . .	52
	References . . . . .	54
<b>5</b>	<b>Happiness . . . . .</b>	<b>55</b>
5.1	Introduction . . . . .	55
5.2	Why Should We Think of a Studious Life as a Happy Life? . . . . .	56
5.3	Educational Happiness as <i>Living Contemplation</i> . . . . .	57
5.4	The Happiness of the (Lone) Studier . . . . .	58
5.5	Communal Happiness in Education . . . . .	60
5.6	Concluding Thoughts . . . . .	61
	References . . . . .	61
 <b>Part III Practices</b>		
<b>6</b>	<b>Space . . . . .</b>	<b>67</b>
6.1	Introduction . . . . .	67
6.2	Khōra . . . . .	68
6.3	The Educational Undercommons . . . . .	70
6.4	The Notch in the School Architecture . . . . .	72
6.5	The Tent as a Model for Studious School Design . . . . .	74
6.6	Screens . . . . .	76
	References . . . . .	78
<b>7</b>	<b>Time . . . . .</b>	<b>79</b>
7.1	Introduction . . . . .	79
7.2	Kairos . . . . .	80
7.3	The Gap Between the Start and the Beginning of the Class . . . . .	81
7.4	Wait Time . . . . .	82
7.5	The Rhythm of School Practices . . . . .	84
	References . . . . .	85
<b>8</b>	<b>Content . . . . .</b>	<b>87</b>
8.1	Introduction . . . . .	87
8.2	Studium . . . . .	88
8.3	Curricular Suspension #1: <i>Shelving</i> . . . . .	89