

## David Jack on the politics of the pandemic

One of the most important living political theorists, Giorgio Agamben is best known for diagnosing the condition of ‘bare life’: biological existence shorn of social and cultural trappings. While it has been central to studies of refugees and asylum seekers, this concept has assumed a new significance during the pandemic.

In a new book, *Where Are We Now?: The epidemic as politics*, Agamben gives a disturbing prognosis for a culture so ‘willing to renounce our ethical and political principles for the sake of health at any cost’. In the early days of the pandemic in Italy, his criticisms of the government’s crisis management gained some sympathy, before public opinion turned swiftly against him. However, with rolling lockdowns and increasing epidemiological uncertainty, Agamben’s willingness to speak up for the preservation of the foundations of civic life offers a tonic to the atmosphere of alarmism and the new medically endorsed state of exception.



Giorgio Agamben

### Extracts from David Jack’s article, ‘Bare Life and Health Terror’

‘The punitive and at times threatening rhetoric ... used in press conferences reflects the bad conscience of governments that know exactly what they have – or haven’t – done.’

‘A society in which life has devolved into the protection of purely biological or “bare life” is no longer a society at all.’

### About David Jack

David Jack is a freelance writer and editor, who holds a PhD in Comparative Literature from Monash University. A specialist in the work of contemporary French writer Michel Houellebecq, David has taught literature at Monash University and Federation University, and European cinema at the Monash Prato centre in Italy. His interests are contemporary European literature, philosophy, and politics.



David Jack

### Interviews

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