

The fearful experience of exile—of being banished, spiritually or physically, voluntarily or by force, from one’s home, society and culture—invariably occasions reflection on the precarious conditions of existence. Exile renders life *precarious* in the strictest sense, for the term, derived from the Latin word for “prayer” or “entreaty” (*prex*) denotes a state that is frighteningly uncertain, fully dependent on the charitable will of others, and therefore beyond the subject’s control. A person’s situation is precarious when one must pray to another for sustenance, lest he or she go hungry, when one must beg for safekeeping, lest he or she suffer or perish. Precariousness points to a grave lack or loss that can be satisfied only through another’s intervention; it leaves someone existentially vulnerable, reliant on benefits or gifts that may or may not arrive. Torn from the usual contexts of support and care, the exile is set adrift, eager to land in safe harbor, where concerns over one’s livelihood, possessions, and health may be addressed. As long as these concerns remain unanswered, as long as the exile’s prayers continue to fall on deaf ears, the risk of insecurity prevails.

This risk is a cause of fear precisely because it strikes at the very core of subjectivity; for the precariousness of exile reveals that the subject maintains but a tenuous relationship to the property that constitutes its identity, be it one’s possessions, one’s body, or one’s very own life. The exile discovers a split or even an abyss that divides one’s subjectivity from one’s existential

being, the preservation of which is now shown to exceed the subject's rational will. An exile's being is precarious because its survival is out of his or her hands.