The Machine in Esposito and Agamben

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Abstract

The subtitle of Roberto Esposito's work, *Two* refers to a 'machine', a machine with two poles. Machines of a similar type play a crucial if discreet and barely thematised role in Giorgio Agamben's work. Understanding the functioning of these machines allows us to acquire a firmer grasp of Esposito and Agamben's conceptions of our contemporary moment, and above all what must be done in order to escape it. The disparate modes of operation which characterise these machines may constitute the most fundamental bone of contention that separates these two thinkers, underlying as it does their conception of political and economic theology, the history which operates according to a theological logic, and the conception of community that each of them urge upon us as a potential future, in the desuetude of these machines.

Introduction: Machine, Dialectic, History

What is a machine, for Roberto Esposito and Giorgio Agamben?

Agamben has devoted the preponderance of his life's work to identifying a certain set of machines (from the anthropological machine of *The Open* to the governmental machine of *The Kingdom and the Glory*) that govern the history of the West — its thought, speech, history, and politics — like a fate, and yet he rarely speaks about the machine *as such*. He speaks of the *dispositivo,* the device or apparatus, the *dispositif* in French, but does he intend by this precisely the same thing?[1] We shall leave the question hanging.

If Agamben does not tell us directly about the mechanics of machines, Esposito certainly does, and he does so most extensively in a book devoted to political theology and the nature of thought, entitled *Two* (2013). In this book, Esposito traces an explicit genealogy of the notion of the machine, in tandem with the *dispositivo.* This text shares a startling number of themes with Agamben's *Kingdom and the Glory* (2007), in which the system of machines that his thought sets itself to identify assumes a form very similar to that of Esposito's. Therefore, by placing this work alongside Esposito's *Two* — which takes the subtitle, *The Machine of Political Theology and the Place of Thought* — we may find the illumination we are seeking for Agamben's notion, even if only by contrast.

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[1] In a rendering of the text that was to become *What is an Apparatus?* at the European Graduate School in 2005, Agamben makes a novel suggestion for an English translation of this term: 'dispositor' or 'dispository', a designation from astrology which concerns the way in which a constellation, a configuration of multiple stars forming a totality, affects the identity and behaviour of those human beings who fall under its sign (Agamben, 'What is a Dispositive?').

One thing we can say in general about the machine in the history of philosophy is that it tends to be opposed to dialectical thought — and indeed to any thought worthy of the name: dialectical thought would be distinguished from the mechanical most of all because it understands itself to be 'organic' or 'living', or at least on the side of 'life'. The machine is dead, automatic, gyrating in an eternal rotation that produces only the Identical; whereas dialectical thought is alive, and produces the Same in a form that differs each time, with every iteration becoming more rational and more perfect — or at the very least becoming something new. Thus, in post-Heideggerian traditions, amongst others, machinality and thought are taken to be inimical to one another, with the calculation or 'reckoning' of 'logistics' falling short of everything that dialectics will have taught us, even those who distance themselves from it.

Let us restrict our focus to the dialectic. Is dialectical thought a refusal of the Two? It is most frequently said to overcome the abstract negation of oppositions that allows an entity to consider its identity to be fully formed only when the other of that identity has been altogether excluded from it. Dialectical thought on that account would amount to the production of a previously excluded third (the *tertium non datur* of classical logic) that would encompass both of the two opposites as mere moments of a concept which grasps more perfectly what an entity is.

On the other hand, it has become more prevalent of late to speak of the dialectic in such a way as to render its *similarities* to the machine more readily apparent: on this reading, the dialectical moment of sublation (*Aufhebung*), encapsulated in the speculative proposition, would allow Reason to run between the two poles (subject and predicate) at an infinite speed, putting now one and now the other in the place of the subject of the sentence, such that they become blurred, 'reflected into' one another, and so thought as one.

In any case, what distinguishes dialectic is a novel form of negation. Dialectic *determinately* negates, and this means that it learns from its mistakes and does not repeat them identically. It is this repetition in particular which distinguishes it from the machine. The machine does not live, and it does not learn, it cannot acquire new habits. When it repeats an action, it does not accumulate an historical memory from which it can learn and thus engender a new or improved action, a difference, and save in the form of a deterioration which goes counter to the smooth running of the machine and hence may not be said to be properly machinic at all, the repetitions of its gestures do not produce difference, or at least progression. While the infinity embodied by this progression is a 'true infinite', the infinity of the machine's eternal gyration is a 'bad infinite', a repetition without accumulation and hence without difference. Machines give us merely chronological time, the time of clocks, whilst dialectic gives us history. Machines abstractly negate the past, consigning it to oblivion; whilst dialectic determinately negates, and thus remembers.

And yet, in Agamben, we have such a thing as history, we have historical memory and fate, and yet its unfurling is governed by a fatal *machine* that perhaps bears some distant relation to the gyres of fate in Plato's Myth of Er from the *Republic*. There have long been *machinic* accounts of history, but to what extent does this mean that Agamben's vision is to be distinguished from Hegel's? On Agamben's account, the procedure whereby the two poles of the historical-fatal machine are brought together is not one which produces the best of both worlds but rather involves a collapse into indifference. Far from being understood as an attempt to sublate the two opposites, the function of the machine that governs historical destiny is to keep the two poles apart, and it is only with the exhaustion of the fuel supply that keeps it running that the machine runs down and the two parts begin to coalesce. In dialectical sublation the moments of a concept become articulated in a precise constellation of distinct points, whereas in Agamben's stuttering engines the poles of an opposition are blurred into indistinction and everything is run together. History for Agamben — and thus the machine itself — runs in the opposite direction to the Hegelian dialectic.

Here therefore we find a rather more Heideggerian conception of history, in which one can speak of the end, consummation, and exhaustion of an entire tradition (in the sense of a historical transmission or inheritance), a machine that is said to have governed an entire 'culture' and which can now offer us nothing more than an eternal return of disasters on various scales, just as the football matches between the two factions of the Great War are said to be repeated every time a big game is played out on our screens as an international spectacle. Agamben suggests that once it has reached this point of exhaustion, emptiness, idleness, inoperativity, the machine's two poles completely intertwined and giving rise to all manner of sinister events, one should put the machines that have governed Western history permanently out of action. Only a restarting of the classical machine could allow the two poles to be separated once more, and this Agamben explicitly rules out: what matters is to distinguish between two forms of indifference or indistinction, one that characterises the end of history when the engines are running on empty, capable only of 'idling'; and another which characterises the day after the end of days, when the engines have been altogether stopped (and then, but this is yet another story, put to a playful 'new use', as when the Neapolitan uses an old bicycle to make ice-cream, in Alfred Sohn-Rethel's account).

We must think the inoperativity of the machine not as a failure to produce or ever to have been endowed with a task or specific work (an *ergon*), but as a potential that has been liberated from the *telos* of an actuality. From the point of view of the machine there is only lack in this indistinction — and from the perspective of dialectic, the machinic vision of history was always doomed to end this way; but from the point of view of a future that might be to come, a perspective we are compelled to adopt if we want to have any future at all, this negativity shows itself to conceal an untrammelled possibility.

At this point, it becomes clear that the Agambenian machine is not quite so distant from Hegelian dialectic as it might seem, for this terminal inoperativity is in part conceived on the basis of the Bataillean (and Blanchotian) notion of *désœuvrement* — an idleness or laziness on the part of the dialectical procedure, wearied by the working week, and out of action for the Sabbath. On this day of rest, it dawns on us that there is no reason to think that productivity is better than respite, no justification for considering Sunday as subordinate to the other days. Indeed, one might posit that a dialectic without sublation, without a fated final product is precisely akin to the machine that Agamben posits as pulling the strings of Western history.[2]

And yet this sabbatical from work is a risky time: the slackening of tension that occurs often leads to illness, as one's defences drop and one's machinic routine is interrupted. One even witnesses a propensity simply to prolong those routines in playtime, as when Chaplin's fidgety gestures with the spanners persist despite the assembly line's having ceased to move. Indeed, the progressive winding down of the machine can lead to disaster, if we fail to understand both its functioning and the way in which we might put a permanent stop to these none-too-innocent gyrations. Thus, without resorting once again to dialectical sublation, or explicitly resisting it and restarting the machine so as to stretch apart the two poles once again, let alone allowing the machine to continue running on empty after it has exhausted its store of possibilities, in sport and comedy, we need to find a new way of inhabiting its ruin, whilst all the time devoting ourselves to ensuring that the infernal machine never starts up again.

What conception of history does the machine give us? The least we can say is that the machine is not human, and almost certainly not alive: one does not choose such a term if one wishes to say that the human being is responsible for his actions and indirectly or directly thereby for the march of history (hence the tragic notion of Fate that still persists in the Greek philosophy we have just evoked) — or, more precisely, one does not intend the human being as a conscious living being, spontaneously bestowing meaning upon his world and his actions. We must recall that Agamben also describes the *human being* as a machine. If we are a 'species' in any sense, it is our specific trait to constitute an 'anthropogenic machine' that produces representations of our own distinctness from the animal as another kind of life. What is at work in this machine is precisely not *Geist* as in Hegel's Philosophy of World-History; it is not even Thought, as it is at the level of the *Science of Logic*. But it often seems that negative definitions such as these are all that may be found in Agamben's text.

So let us turn to Esposito. What is the motor of history for him? How does it work, and where does it carry us? Is it a decline as opposed to an ascent, an 'inverted Hegelianism' as it seems to be for Agamben? One thing we can

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[2] A full consideration of the relation between Hegel and Agamben, a question to which little serious work seems to have been devoted, would require a long reading of *The Time that Remains*, one of Agamben's richest texts, and among the most compendious in its references.

hypothesise in advance of our investigation is that history for Esposito does not amount to a *collapse* of two poles, but is more like the *subordination* of one to the other, which maintains both in existence but in a new constellation. This in itself would account for Esposito's suggested way out of the impasse in which history has landed us: a road that takes us beyond the 'person' and towards an *im*personal thought, that in turn leads us to reconceive *communal* life. It also draws Esposito closer to classical Hegelianism than Agamben will allow himself to be.

By exploring the differences that separate Esposito's conception of the machine from Agamben's, we shall draw near to an understanding of the most fundamental reasons for their divergence on the topic of political life.

Esposito: History as Politico-Theological Machine

What, then, is the machine, for Esposito, and how, if at all, is it to explain the movement of history?

In *Two*, it seems that the logic of history is described by means of the notion of 'political theology'. Esposito speaks of political theology — and thus of the motor of history — in terms of a 'machine', 'the political-theological machine of the West' (*Two*, 3). The subtitle of the book itself places alongside one another '[t]he *Machine* [*la macchina*] of Political Theology and the Place of *Thought'*. At stake, therefore, is the relation between history or political theology understood as a machine, and thought, but the relation will ultimately imply the latter's removal from the *person* to the *im*personal. We must understand both why history is a machine, and one that is to be described in politico-theological terms, along with the manner in which this history is to relate to the supposed necessity for thought to think — and to think itself — beyond the limits of the Person.

Let us begin with the machine that is here taken to motivate history as political theology.

The word 'Two' in the title of Esposito's work describes the *functioning* of the politico-theological machine. Perhaps we might say that it refers to a particular way in which power is imposed upon both the human race and individual human beings, often *by* those very individuals themselves — in sovereign fashion. The machine applies itself to — or perhaps it even embodies — the entity which is to be governed, and it does so in a way that involves both duality ('Two') and unity ('One'). An entity is split, or related to something which opposes it, and, subsequently, one of these two parts is subordinated to the other and thus incorporated within it: 'exclusionary assimilation is the fundamental, defining action of the political-theological machine. It operates precisely by separating what it purports to join and by unifying what it divides, by submitting one part to the domination of the other' (*Two*, 3).

When it comes to the identity of the human (or what Esposito will call the human 'person'), for the most part the metaphysical tradition, under the sway of

such a binary machine, distinguishes between our reason and our animality (*logos* and *zōē*), soul and body (cf. *Two,* 7). The part of the human species that stands closest to animality (and ultimately to the inanimate *thing*) is then subordinated to the rational part, or what we call 'thought'. The subordinated animal aspect is thus excluded from the identity of the human person, but since the very identity of this entity *depends* upon that exclusion, we may say that the excluded part is *included* in the entity and included precisely by way of its exclusion. Identity unifies or individuates itself by excluding a certain part of itself, whilst nevertheless retaining it *as* excluded.

In affirming as much, Esposito admits that he is straying towards a Hegelian dialectical conception of identity, in which the negation of that which one is not is essential to the positivity of what one is (cf. *Two,* 3).[3] Hegel's notion

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[3] Christopher Lauer has provided us with a brief consideration of Esposito's relation to Hegelian dialectic (in Rajan and Calcagno 2021, 232ff), but by drawing him as close as possible to Jean-Luc Nancy, and in particular to his *Experience of Freedom* in a way that might be justified in a short piece from *Terms of the Political,* he tries to present Esposito as demonstrating 'a commitment to thinking undialectically that can be read back into his major works' (233). One wonders how well this stands up in the case of *Two.*

Lauer perhaps rather too easily shrugs off Esposito's own frequent recourse to the language of dialectics by stating that, '[t]hough Esposito often refers to immunity and community as being in "dialectical" relation to one another, he intends this only in the loose sense that they are mutually implicating' (234), and this in spite of the fact that 'neither Esposito nor Nancy frames his approach as a repudiation of Hegel or dialectics in general' (235). This tension between a dialectical relation to other thinkers and a non-dialectical break is pursued throughout the essay, without being altogether resolved; more strictly speaking, the proclivity towards the dialectical is seen as one of two tendencies within Esposito's work, which he might have resisted more determinedly, and could have done so had he followed Nancy more closely (cf. 242, 244).

María del Rosario Acosta López demonstrates that, in spite of what may be Esposito's own most explicit relation to 'dialectics', on another reading of the latter, Hegel can be shown to be pursuing a thought of community in such a way as to aid Esposito's own quest: 'Hegel occupies an important place in the deconstructive genealogy that gives rise to an alternative thinking of community as *communitas'* (Acosta in Bird and Short 2015, 15). For his is a 'thought that can linger long enough in the void of *munus* without falling back again into the temptation of filling it with content, of turning it into a myth once again' (19): and '[t]he task in hand is to interrupt the myth of community without renouncing the thinking of a being-in-common, i.e. to remain in the difficult realm of accepting both the need of community and its impossibility. The question is whether Hegel himself might be able to say something about this possibility' (23). And the answer to this question may be found in Hegel's conception of the way in which Christian love surpassed the Judaic community that stood under the sign of the divine Law, resulting in 'an alternative notion of community that may pose a resistance to the dialectics [on Esposito's account] between *immunisation* and the communitarian and totalitarian *myth'* (20): 'love *interrupts* the sovereignty of Law' in the very gesture of fulfilling it — a *pleroma* that is at the same time a disabling or rendering 'inoperative' (26–7). By referring to the origin of Hegel's *aufheben* in Luther's translation of Paul's *'katargeo'* (by way of a reference to Agamben's *Time that Remains*), Acosta shows that Hegel's very notion of dialectic must be rethought, and we might add that this will indirectly imply that the dialectical gesture of

of determinate negation explains how an entity can be excluded, overcome or cancelled without being altogether obliterated, as happens in the straightforward annihilation of *abstract* negation; the product of the dialectical process depends for its identity upon the particular negation of the particular thing that it negates.

But something like this notion is also to be found in in a *deconstructive* theory of identity, and, more importantly, in Agamben, who has made the notion of an inclusive exclusion his own. Esposito's language seems to make no attempt to conceal this proximity; indeed, it might even be understood to have been deliberately brought to the fore so as to underscore the differences that will nevertheless be shown to separate them.

On this conception, in subtly different ways in each case, an individual entity remains dependent upon the otherness that it would rather oppositionally separate itself from, in the name of a purity of identity, an absolute presence (or substance, *ousia*) of one's own propriety, spared all alteration, the temporal differing of one's self from one's self. Identity is not substantial or self-subsistent, but rather relational. Indeed, it is just this move from an immunitary self-enclosure to a communal exposure that we are perhaps most familiar with from Esposito's biopolitical works.[4]

When human beings become ensnared in the politico-theological machine, their substantial identity, or the 'One', becomes divided against itself. And indeed, we might be tempted to understand all forms of identity as always already so ensnared, as a rather ahistorical reading of deconstruction would assume. What nevertheless sets Esposito apart from deconstruction is his desire to provide an *historical* account of this process, or at least an account of history *as* such a process of division and subordination, exclusion and re-inclusion.

The Relation between Personhood and Political Theology

What is the relation between the politico-theological machine that governs history and the machine that constitutes personhood? This question is crucial to Esposito's project, since it is a reconfiguration of the latter machine that will ultimately allow us to escape from the impasse into which history has forced us.

Simply put, only those who subordinate the animal part of themselves to their rational faculty may be accorded the status of *personhood*, and only those in possession of this status may be allowed to take part in political life, subject to the

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Hegel and the (purportedly) non-dialectical gesture of Esposito, *pace* Lauer (as well as many others), might not be so strictly opposed to one another as has been imagined.

[4] Cf. Frost, *supra*. And although the language of immunity and community is not central, either to the works on political theology or the works on personhood, in the latter Esposito speaks quite directly of 'the *immunitary* machine of the person' (*Third Person,* 16, emphasis added).

law and responsible before it, as citizens.[5] Michel Foucault has suggested that one's identity — one's very personhood — is something that in the end needs to be determined only by the police, who enforce the law that is instituted by the powers that be. It seems that in order to be governed, it must first be established who we are. Thus sovereign power must invoke a procedure which establishes identity.

Personhood is thus a *dispositivo* — a device — crucial to the machine of political theology itself: 'There is a limit that the hermeneutics of political theology cannot overstep, however, unless it intersects with another paradigm that constitutes its semantic operator and linchpin*,* so to speak. In order to make the political-theological machine run — separating what unifies and unifying what divides [*separando ciò che unifica e unificando ciò che divide* — perhaps more idiomatically: separating what is unified and unifying what is divided] — it needs one more *dispositif:* the category of "person"' (*Two,* 5/7).[6]

The person is in truth not so distinct from the politico-theological as it might first appear. In the Western tradition, the person embodies an undecidable or at least undecided coincidence between theology and politics in the specific form of Christianity and Roman Law: 'the notion of person constitutes the original place of intersection between the Christian religion and ancient Roman law — to the point that historians are still divided on the question of which of the two paradigms appeared first' (*Two,* 6, cf. *Third Person,* 8ff).

By means of the division within the individual that allows personhood, thresholds may be instituted within the human species as a whole, between those who are rational and responsible, and those who are irrational and irresponsible — the political citizen and those who should be excluded from the *polis* and confined to the home *(oikos),* which can include those subjected to the violence of house arrest, and those who are excluded from the *polis* altogether, banished even from the hearth, growing in all cases more akin to the beast or the animal within, and thus often lain open to legal killing. Like a Socrates or a *homo sacer,* a slave, or, more insidiously, today, it seems, anyone whom it is possible to identify as irrational or immoral, which can simply be anyone who disagrees with a certain hegemonic discourse, with what is granted the status of unchallengeable 'Truth' in a particular context — or perhaps anyone who is deemed unhealthy or unclean in some way that has been decreed by those in power. This is a gesture we have witnessed in recent days in the supposedly democratic West in ways that it would be naïve to say we might not have predicted but which have nonetheless been startling in their speed and aggression.

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[5] A clear summary of Esposito's work on personhood, including much of what is more fully developed in *Third Person,* may be found in *Persons and Things,* from 2014, seven years after the more substantial treatise.

[6] I give two page numbers in a reference only where the original, cited second, is explicitly invoked.

For Esposito, personhood, at least in the form of a *telos* to be produced, is essential to the running of the politico-theological machine insofar as the person is that entity which has subordinated its animality to the sovereign governance of its own rational thought (which might include, or be subordinated to the prevailing rationality in the form of the hegemonic power-knowledge complex). Sovereign domination within is the condition that makes possible our subjection to sovereign domination from without, in the form of the law that governs men.

Personal and Impersonal Thought

The goal of the splitting and subordination of the human being and human species is thus to produce a legally responsible 'person'. This is at the same time to institute a malign depersonalisation of entire groups of biologically specified human beings, their legal identities rendered inseparable from their biological character. Personhood allows a law-giving sovereign power to institute divisions within the social body, distinguishing political lives from non-political lives, the citizen from the non-citizen. This distinction reaches one of its most extreme points, according to Esposito, in the twentieth century, with the 'racial anthropologies' deployed by National Socialism (*Third Person,* 7). The reduction of the Jews to the status of sub-human 'non-persons' makes it clear that, here as elsewhere, 'the status of personhood became an agent of depersonalisation' (*Two,* 7).

In a book devoted exclusively to the notion of personality, entitled *Third Person: Politics of Life and Philosophy of the Impersonal,* Esposito links the gesture of depersonalisation to the distinction between vegetative and rational life, the non-individuated, impersonal, unconscious life of the innards, and the conscious, outward, relational life of the person (*Third Person,* 6–7). This distinction was what allowed Nazism to develop its anthropological categorisations: 'In the 1930's, the depersonalisation project[7] initiated in the previous century from a different perspective reached a point of no return: the notion of person was immediately crushed into [*sic* — *schiacciata sul,* perhaps 'pressed hard up against', 'compressed together with', 'compacted with', or 'flattened hard against' as when a bullet becomes something like a diagram of itself after striking a brick wall] its mere [*nudo,* bare, naked] biological referent and, rather than being philosophically deconstructed, it appeared to be literally devastated [*sic]*' (*Third Person,* 7/11).

As with Agamben's philosophy of history, we find here a historical process which leads to a certain indifference, in which a more careful philosophical articulation and reworking of this indifference is called for if we are to avoid the disaster it threatens. Similarly, the solution to this problem of indifference is not to restore the classical opposition, 'between the subject and the biological

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[7] Which we might gloss as follows: 'the elimination from human life of any transcendence with respect to its immediate biological given' (*Third Person,* 8).

substrate underlying it' (*Third Person,* 8): this is what, according to Esposito, a certain personalism attempted during the first half of the twentieth century.

Esposito's response to the collapse of the two poles, the rational and the biological, is rather to have recourse to a certain thought of the impersonal, which is not intended to *oppose* but rather to 'call into question' the prevailing meaning of the 'personal', such that it no longer excludes a *sub*-personal element. This would amount to 'preventing [*sic — impedendo*, rather 'hindering', 'hampering', or 'impeding'] [...] the functioning of its exclusionary *dispositif* [*sic* — the translator has chosen the French term simply to translate the Italian *dispositivo*]. The impersonal [...] separates the semantics of the person from its natural effect of separation' (*Third Person*, 14/19).

It is at precisely this point, when the similarities between the two thinkers are becoming most readily apparent, that we begin to sense a divergence between them. Indeed it is here that Esposito makes one of his most explicit references to Agamben's thought, as if to demonstrate that, even though their ways part, they nevertheless depart from the same topic: Esposito speaks of his thought of the impersonal as 'our signpost for the reuniting of form and force, mode and substance, *bios* and *zōē* — which has always been promised but never truly experienced until now' (*Third Person,* 19). The two poles of the biopolitical machine are to be 'reunited', a new indifference thought, but for Esposito this coincidence takes the form of an impersonal and communal thought that refuses to separate the personal from the impersonal, and above all resists the subordination of the latter to the former, thus rejecting the machine of personhood altogether.

That this constitutes a departure on Esposito's part is given a preliminary confirmation in the fact that the notion of the person plays only a minor role in Agamben's thought, at least in this form. It appears most prominently in the *Kingdom and the Glory* in the form of the three *personae* of the Holy Trinity. Esposito is more concerned with the human and political form of personality, whilst nevertheless demonstrating that the (political) notion of the person as we understand it today originates equally and at the same time in *theology,* in early Christian thought, with the three Persons of the Trinity and the two natures in one person that constitute Jesus Christ, and in the *political,* in Roman Law (*Two,* 6–7).

Machination and the Rethinking of Political Theology

But why speak either of personalisation or political theology in terms of a *machine,* and what does Esposito's conception of machinality tell us about the way in which political theology ought to be conceived?

Genealogically, Esposito identifies the notion of machine directly with Foucault's notion of a *dispositif,* whilst noting that this way of thinking can be traced back at least as far as Heidegger's concept of *Machenschaft,* machination or machinality, which he employed in the 1930's to name the essence of

technology, before settling upon *Gestell* (*Two*, 2, 16ff), and, following Heidegger, Esposito describes the operation of the machine as its 'machination'. The machine machinates. Heidegger broaches this term at the outset of his turn towards a thinking of the essence of technology understood as a response to the Western tradition's failure to think being, a forgetful lapse that allowed beings to be treated as mere resources for techno-scientific control and exploitation. The efficient administration of these resources is the new task for a thought that had become something like a calculating and planning machine: *logos* become 'logistics'.

According to Esposito's reading of Foucault, the *dispositif* should be understood as a machine that is external to life, but one which ensnares the living creature in its mesh. The machinic apparatus insinuates itself at the animal's very core and severs its life from its rationality, splitting it in two. Finally, the apparatus reconnects the loop of that entity's self-relation, but this time in the form of a subjugation, a subjection rather than a mere subjectivation — subjecting it both to the external apparatus upon which the animal is now dependent and to itself.

One of the crucial features of the machine is its totality. What does it mean to speak of totality? Simply that the machine can conceal itself in the guise of its opposite and thus appropriate the latter. This is the meaning of 'machination'. Esposito identifies an early version of the logic of machination in Nietzsche's conception of the will to power, which in its weaker and more cunning forms, conquers by means of a strategy of deception that involves concealing its own identity behind the mask of its counterpart, as in the privileged example of Jewish hatred presenting itself in the inverted form of Christian love and thus colonising the entire field. Most importantly for our purposes, the opposite of the machine is *life*. The machine is a dead automaton, whilst life is a free process of differentiation, renewal, and proliferation. Machines are said to operate within fixed boundaries or between 'poles', whilst life exists between, prior to, or outside of all fixity and polarity.[8]

This notion of machination allows us to make sense of the particular type of political theology that Esposito proposes, for political theology is also a

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[8] To some extent the association of binarity and opposition with death — the kind of deadness which is almost always associated with the machine — and their non-oppositional plural origin within life is common to all 'life-philosophy', French and German, and could once again be said to originate even earlier, in Hegel's response to Kant. Later on, Esposito will appeal to Henri Bergson, who is among the most direct when it comes to this opposition between the quantifiable discrete and the unquantifiable continuum, as one of the representatives of a history of impersonal thought which carries us beyond the two-stroke engine that is political theology.

(Let us note in passing that we borrow this term from Agamben, who speaks explicitly of a 'two stroke engine' *(una macchina a due tempi),* which is to say, a machine with two poles (*Kingdom and the Glory,* 126/142, translation modified). In the context of car engines, a two stroke engine would involve a mechanism that makes two opposite motions in the time it takes the principal axle of the mechanism to complete one rotation. Duality in unity, then.)

machine, bounded by the two poles of politics and theology. It concerns a conceptuality of the political, with its supposedly theological origins, and most crucially the idea of an individual *personal* sovereign suspended above the political order and coordinating it vertically — which in turn is reflected in any supposedly sanctified, 'immune', absolutely pure and separate instance, such as the legally responsible person.

Political theology is understood by Walter Benjamin as a secularisation which falls short, since it simply transfers the structure of divine sovereignty, more or less unaltered, to earthly human sovereignty (along with anything that involves a similar machine). But Esposito suggests that the very term 'secularisation' is among the least suitable for understanding the true connection between the political and the theological because secularisation — akin in this respect to 'disenchantment' and 'profanation' — presupposes the existence of an eternal transcendent realm standing in opposition to a *saeculum,* in the very first instance uncontaminated by it, as if it were some kind of pure origin. In this way, secularisation as a process undermines its own purported identity: 'the secularisation paradigm does not allow a critical perspective on political theology to be opened up', and indeed, while it is one of the accounts of modern history most readily proffered since at least the nineteenth century, it is 'the least suitable one to shed light on the connection between theology and politics — because the tool is inevitably part of the connection' (*Two*, 23, cf. 1–2). This is to say that politico-theological language persists here since the very idea of secularisation presupposes the opposition between God and Caesar that it is intended to overcome (*Two*, 1–2).

The structural foundation of this genetic persistence is the machine and the way in which it pervades even its opposite, which in turn means that there is no outside of the machine, spatially or temporally. Having taken up residence in both halves of an oppositional division (which exhausts the whole of reality — nature and artifice, life and the machine), the machine becomes covertly coextensive with this reality, the *dispositif* extending its power everywhere.

This quality of machination makes it all the more difficult to see how one might ever depose such a machine, since there is no place outside of it from which one might initiate a resistance, no conceptuality or vocabulary which it will not already have colonised. The machine starts to go without question, ensuring its invincibility.

Esposito frequently describes the relation between the machine and its opposite as an 'antinomy' or an 'antinomic intertwinement' (cf. *Two*, 25), and by reference to the fission carried out by the mirror image — the switching of left and right instituted by the mirror as it creates our reflection in a space that stands opposite our physical body. Our reflection does not live, but seems to, in the shiny cultural artefact that conceals itself by means of the very reflection that it creates. Life is a mask taken on by the machine.

Esposito's Divided Corpus: Political Theology (Machine) and Biopolitics (Life)

This tells us something important about the subject-matter of Esposito's thought as a whole that perhaps remains to be appreciated as fully as it might: we should not think that *life* in biopolitics excludes the existence of a *non*-living machine, as a certain vitalistic conception might suggest.[9] We should not assume that biopolitics is antithetical to political theology and its machine, or part of an entirely separate discourse. Either element may be said to predominate in today's political scene: the politico-theological machine, or life as the topic of biopolitics.

This relation is mirrored in the great divide that seems to run through Esposito's corpus: on the one hand we have the trilogy on *life:* biopolitics, immunity and community; while on the other may be found those texts devoted to the *machines* of political theology and the person.[10] At first glance, these two

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[9] The separation of person and animal, by the apparatus of personhood, allows Esposito to describe personhood itself as a 'technical artefact' that does not coincide with the living being (*Two*, 99). Hence, the opposition between the 'Two' may be understood along the lines of the distinction between nature and culture, or life and the machine, perhaps. The personality of the human being never coincides absolutely with the living being, for it involves machinically dividing that animal from itself and subordinating that part of it which is incompatible with personhood; more precisely, a person is just a living being that has subordinated part of itself.

Some of the inspiration behind this passage derives from the fact that at times, particularly in more rapid and condensed texts such as *What is an Apparatus?* Agamben himself hazards certain formulations which risk suggesting an opposition between the apparatus and a life that would be altogether distinct from it. This might allow us to nuance Antonio Calcagno's suggestion that in Esposito's own work there is always a gap between thought or language and the reality which it attempts to think and name (Calcagno 2015, 40, 48). This will not straightforwardly be the case if that relation may be understood to be analogous to the dialectical intertwining of machine and life. Calcagno's approach seems to import a negative theological framework into Esposito's work that we have yet to find within it, and we would expect not to if we are right to stress the proximity between Esposito and Hegel, for a certain Hegelian heritage (deriving from the passages of the *Phenomenology* devoted to 'Sense Certainty') would rule out the ineffable. Everything else in Calcagno's argument seems to us to follow from that presupposition.

[10] The separation may be taken to be marked by the way in which even Greg Bird, one of Esposito's finest commentators, in a significant text on the topic of community, allows his focus to be restricted to the 'biopolitical trilogy' and a few others, with no analysis of *Two* (Bird 2016, 153). Later on he states, '[t]he relationship between rights and the proper is most thoroughly articulated in his notion of the impersonal [...]. His argument is too complex to cover in detail here' (186). Bird's only allusion to *Two,* to the best of our knowledge, is just that (cf. 224n18). A similar gesture may be found in Peter Langford's book on Esposito, which saves the allusion to *Two* for the very final pages of the book, when it is already too late to expand upon it (2015, 208–9).

My initial intention, before composing this text and seriously exploring the issue in question, was to ask the following question: if in the context of political theology we can speak of what seem to be homologous gestures to those exhibited by the biopolitical works but *without* using the language and logic of immunisation and without deploying biological or biopolitical terminology, then what does that tell us about this biopolitical language? Does it

halves seem not to coincide, or to do so only tangentially and to share little of the same terminology. But we may understand them in fact to be complementary mirror images, the one half prevailing in the other, in which it conceals itself. One ought not to think of life without the machine, nor vice versa. Perhaps one cannot.

In the third chapter of *Two*, entitled 'The Place of Thought', Esposito traces a 'minor' history of thinkers — for the greater part of history condemned and repressed — extending from Averroes to Giordano Bruno, Spinoza, Schelling, Nietzsche, Bergson, and culminating in the work of Gilles Deleuze, from whom we take the idea of a 'minor' history.[11] These are the philosophers of the impersonal.

At least one figure from this tradition supplies Esposito with his notion of the machine as indistinguishable from life: for Deleuze, the machine has precisely the same *antinomic* relation to life that Esposito has been describing: life is ensnared by the machine, but the machine is also a part of life, part of how we must understand life, at least according to the 'machinic' paradigm which Deleuze and Guattari adopt to replace the arborescent image of thought that largely defines 'metaphysics'. This allows us to avoid the dichotomy between mechanism and finalism, and thus to refuse a radical ontological distinction between nature and culture, living and non-living, animal and man, in the very name of the machine. The machine does indeed divide up the real in all its diversity into a binary form, or a series of binary oppositions, but the machine itself is nevertheless multiple. There are many machines, not just one, and not just two (cf. *Two*, 192ff). For instance, in Esposito, personhood is to political theology as a machine within a machine, a smaller but still crucial cog that allows the broader mechanism to run.

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really occupy the most central place in Esposito's description of our contemporary political situation? Now, in hindsight, the matter seems a little more prosaic.

With the publication of *Two* in English (2013) along with *Categories of the Impolitical* (2015; first published in 1988) which perhaps constitute the end and the beginning of Esposito's original philosophical production, his description as a thinker to be defined primarily by biopolitics comes to seem misleading.

[11] With such a rich history to draw on, we would be reluctant to agree with Joshua Schuster's suggestion that the concept of the impersonal remains rather allusive in Esposito, and even dependent upon — or at least most satisfactorily explicated by reference to — a certain literary tradition, with Maurice Blanchot as one of its 'primary sources' (Schuster in Rajan and Calcagno 2021, 176ff). It is not clear in the end whether Schuster's notion of prosopopeia, or as he puts it bluntly, 'personification', can do justice to the dialectic (if we allow ourselves that word) between the personal and the impersonal (188f).

We might supplement Schuster's text with the cautious but more broad account of the impersonal provided by Calcagno (Calcagno 2015, 44ff).

Esposito's Technical Terms and the Revolutions of the Machine

If the two halves of Esposito's work are both caught up in the wheels of a single machine, then any attempt to make sense of it seems most likely to succeed if it goes by way of a consideration of this machine's *modus operandi*. Given that political theology itself functions as a machine on Esposito's account, this makes it extraordinarily difficult to overcome the political theological paradigm and to open up a future beyond it. So how should we approach the problem of its overcoming? This amounts to asking what we are to do with respect to the machines that govern our culture.

For Esposito one of the principal tasks involved in this overcoming is that of finding a new vocabulary with which to speak of political theology and the person that occupies its centre. It is as if by re-describing political theology and personhood, we might finally be able to acquire the distance necessary to analyse and disable the machines that they constitute, to deploy 'sabotage' (*Two,* 198); or failing that we might be able to transform the way in which these machines operate from within. Such would not be a superficial affair if we accept something that Agamben says elsewhere about apparatuses, and that is that, of all of them, language itself is the most grand and the most ancient (*What is an Apparatus?* 14). What Esposito's philosophical project might amount to in that case is the search for new words with which to name the movement that the various machines describe or must be made to describe at the end of history — if that is where we stand today. Thus, it is time to shed some light on what might be called Esposito's 'technical terminology' and the question of translation, for this is not a merely incidental point but a crucial part of one of the most basic gestures of his thought as a whole.

The present author was convinced by a conversation with Connal Parsley, translator of one of the very few renditions of Esposito into English that is unambiguously successful, that we need to interpret certain relatively innocuous phrases in his discourse as *technical terms* and so to take them more seriously than we might otherwise have been tempted. This requirement, as well as the difficulty of meeting it, together with the seriousness of that failure, emerges in the frustratingly comic efforts that find their way into a number of the other translations to which Esposito's work has been subjected. Prime among these examples is the most significant movement of all, which, if we are to believe the predominant English renditions involves one phase of a machine 'reversing into' another, as if these entities were somehow bad drivers! — But after all, why not? In Italian, *le macchine* are not just machines, they are also cars.[12]

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[12] In the text we are focussing upon here, *'rovesciarsi nel suo opposto'* becomes '[to] reverse itself into its opposite' (*Two,* 47/51). Joshing aside, and in all fairness, this type of phrase is genuinely difficult to transport into an English idiom; one would have to explicate far beyond the literal, to produce something like 'it turns itself inside out in such a way as to be transformed into its very opposite', or even 'to enter into a new relation with its opposite'.

These renderings are all the more damaging in light of the significance that these terms bear, for they constitute the 'transitional phrases' (as Parsley put it), which describe the motions made by machines when they are being transformed or overcome, as for instance when we are exhorted to 'allow' the machine of the person 'to revolve upon its hinges *[farlo ruotare sui suoi cardini]* until its exclusionary power is diffused *[disattivarne,* deactivated, disabled*]'* (*Two,* 15/16, translation modified[13]). It was the less than heroic failure to capture some of these technical terms in an idiom that does indeed seem to be recalcitrant to them that led to the tangled thickets of the English translation of *Bios.* Not that Esposito can simply allow the machine of the *Italian* language to function as it might most naturally have done, if we agree to take language as a machine that also needs to be worked upon. One might even say that this deployment of natural language in a technical form is itself the 'turning inside out' that is required of language if it is to surmount the tendencies that have hitherto held sway within it.

We have already seen that one central notion in the realm of the machinic is that of revolution (*ruotare*), the movement of the wheel (*la ruota*). This seems to incorporate both the gesture that machines make in the normal course of events — the repeated and automatic rotation of their engine, *revolving* over and over — and the manner in which these machines might be overcome without appealing to anything that would transcend them: *revolution.*

Central to this rotation is the *hinge,* or perhaps better the axis or axle (the somewhat unfamiliar 'lynchpin' that we have already met with in an earlier translation). This constitutes another of Esposito's technical terms in disguise. The hinge is the hidden centre *around which* an artefact or a machine rotates, as around an axle (cf. *Two,* 33ff). We are today called upon to *unhinge* the machine (*Two,* 176). This means that we must first *expose* and then *damage* the machine's hidden core, the screw or spindle at its heart, if we are to change one sense of 'revolution' into the other. We investigate the machine's workings all the better to sabotage them. In the case of the political-theological machine of history that

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For the same phrase, which Esposito invokes over three decades earlier, Parsley himself gives 'overturning into its opposite' *(Categories of the Political,* 37/57, as at 10/17, although there the Italian differs by a single word, *'rovesciarsi nel* proprio *opposto')*, where at least the 'turning' of 'overturning' is given an appropriate preposition, even if 'overturning' cannot strictly take 'into' in that way.

Later on, Esposito speaks of *'rovesciarsi come un guanto',* which is translated, quite rightly, as 'turning himself [or itself] inside-out like a glove' (126/198), which gives us as good an image as any for understanding the motion that we are here attempting to gain some purchase on, except that one would ideally need to capture the way in which the inverted or 'invaginated' object was somehow lain out flat upon a broader surface, thereby becoming a diagram of itself.

[13] The only problem with the published translation here, apart from 'diffused' (which may be a misprint for 'defused'), is a mild distortion of the idiom: *ruotare sui suoi cardini* is translated as '*rotate* on its hinges'. With apologies to the translators, we feel more and more obliged to defend these idioms in their death throes, or — more mildly put — their embattled state, even in the struggle against American English.

concerns us here, this hinge is the person, the machine of personhood.

It is in this context that one should understand Esposito's description of the 'hollowing out' of the machine — in Deleuze's deliberately theological term, 'conversion' — as a gesture which exposes the machine's core. For 'hollowing out', we might read 'ex-coriation' (if we might be allowed to hear the word 'core', in defiance of an etymology that in fact refers to flesh — or rather turning it altogether inside out).

What is involved in this exposure of the inner workings of the hinge? We attack an entity in which we are entirely enveloped by turning it *inside out*, invaginating it (this 'invagination' is what becomes, in certain translations, 'reversing into': a gesture that is at once involution and evolution). This means exposing to the outside what was formerly locked away on the inside, allowing the machine to run. In the case of the politico-theological machine, this will involve resituating the personal on a broader *im*personal terrain, relocating the transcendent sovereign onto a 'plane of immanence'.

All of these transitional phrases which describe the terminal motion of the machine are centred upon the idea of getting to the core of something, prising open its self-enclosure, and laying out the newly exposed core on a flat plane — itself perhaps comprised of yet further sets of machines — within which the original machine constitutes but one coordinate or region.

Once this relocation has taken place, it becomes possible to 'repurpose' the original machines. Only after this exposure are we in a position to disable this core, and either reorient the hinge, or disable it altogether. For all our rubbishing of the notion of 'reversing into', Esposito does indeed speak of putting the machine in 'reverse gear' (*Two*, 196), but this means not to go backwards and collide with something else but to change the direction in which the machine is running. Naturally, to those familiar with the biopolitical works, it was only to be expected that this would involve a transition from a *negative* to an *affirmative* mode of thought.

Thus, a complete account of what we are to do with the machines we have inherited is to determine a new way of thinking and speaking that will allow us to conceive and describe the way in which a hinge might be modified, by first dismantling it so as to expose its core, and then putting it back together in such a way as to reverse its habitual motion.

We need to broach the very heart of the machine and then turn the whole thing inside-out, transforming a destructive and individualistic immunitarian negativity into a creative and communal positivity, initiating the passage from personal to impersonal, immunity to community, from political theology to a new thinking of community; or more precisely we are called upon to demonstrate that the relation between the two is not one of mutually exclusive opposition at all, and that community is a *part* of immunity, provided the latter is understood in a hitherto unaccustomed way. This is precisely what takes place when one

dismantles the immunitarian device and lays out its components upon the broader diagram of the communal.

Once again, Esposito carries out the dismantling of the machine by way of an appeal to the machine of language: he has long pointed out the common derivation of *immunitas* and *communitas* from *munus* — so insistently that the echo of this word will now resound whenever we intone either of its etymological offspring. This resonance ensures that when we speak of one, we shall never be able to forget the other and leave it behind; rather the sense of the initial term will be transposed from negative to positive so as to allow immunity and its like to twine themselves around the heart of community.

This gesture within the realm of etymology exposes the hidden core of immunity in *munus* and, having dismantled it, reveals the way in which the machine of immunisation may be 'plugged in' to a more numerous cluster of machines, at the precise point of com-munity, that very notion to which it once wished to remain opposed, but with which it now shares a machinic plane of immanence. To expose the core, and indeed to render it not so much a substance as a relation, is to transform our very (political) ontology from within: it is to change the way in which the machine functions, from — the most dire extreme — a machine of death to a machinic or perhaps 'instituting and instituted' life.[14]

What is most singular about Esposito's approach is revealed in the fact that this communal life is an *impersonal* one.

Opening the Personal onto the Impersonal: The Potential Material Intellect

The exposed core of the machine of political theology 'turns out' to be the person. Esposito's strategy for transforming the way in which we hear and understand the word and concept of the person is to situate them on a more expansive plane of impersonality, allowing 'person' to resound in the 'im-person-al' just as *'munus'* did in 'im-mun-ity' and 'com-mun-ity'. This will in turn stop the machine of political theology dead in its tracks: 'by sabotaging the *dispositif* of the person, this shift will end up derailing the machine of political theology' (*Two,* 10). A philosophy of the impersonal implies a new way of thinking about oppositions, and in truth a new 'placement' of thought itself such that it becomes capable of so thinking: 'Given that the inherence of thought in the individual space of the subject is the epicentre of the political-theological *dispositif* of the person, it is not surprising that a philosophy of the impersonal entails a dislocation of the "place" of thought' (*Two,* 9).

The preponderance of metaphysical, legal and political traditions have situated thought in a very particular 'place', and that is precisely within the individual human being or person. The 'person' is an individuated subject and it is considered to be the spontaneous origin of thought. Law and politics, at least,

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[14] For this is how Esposito has come to speak of the matter in his most recent work (cf. *Instituting Thought* and *Institution*).

depended upon this locating, since the individual ownership of thought was taken to be the precondition for *subjecting* an individual to the power of law, to a legal order that imputed responsibility to individuals for thoughts, words and deeds that would henceforth be deemed their own.

The philosophy of the *im*personal, on the other hand, will attempt to *dis*locate thought from individual subjectivity, and by doing so demonstrate another way in which the individual might think of its relation to itself, distinct from that of propriety or ownership. This is because the proprietorial, subjugating part of itself — thought or reason — *is not its own*. Thought, far from being proper to the individual subject, is *common*. Thought is thus reconceived as an activity or a resource — more precisely a 'collective power' (*Two*, 12) — *potentially* shared out among all human beings. Ratiocination is an activity that does not originate from individuals, let alone certain individuals who might thereby form an elite, but rather constitutes an ongoing activity in which everyone can participate, or of which they can become the occasion.

At stake in this philosophy of the impersonal will therefore be a new definition of the political body, on the basis of what Averroes, following and reworking Aristotle, called the 'potential intellect'. This political body will be shown by Esposito, at least in connection with Spinoza, to be distinct from a *'people'* (a fusional collective subject, ultimately modelled on the body of an individual and not surpassing its logic) as it is from a *group* of individuals united by a transcendent sovereign (individuals separated by a Hobbesian immunitary logic of preserving life by relinquishing one's individual power to do so to the Leviathan). In other words, to think the political body we must refuse the very terms of the individual, either at the level of isolated singular bodies or the projection of this individual onto the level of the body politic itself as a super-individual. Both of these alternatives fail to think beyond the individual to the genuinely collective, beyond *substance* and towards *relation*. Only thus will it be possible to think immunity and community together.

Esposito remains here as he has been since the early 1990's extremely close to Jean-Luc Nancy, who attempts to think the individual not as ontologically an island but as a form of 'being-with', 'compearing', and in a relation of *partage* or 'sharing-out', in a mutual exposure of our ability to communicate with one another. In short, inherently related to others and defined by a reciprocal indebtedness which is bestowed upon us as a task and which Esposito calls *'munus'*.

Debt: Reconnecting Political Theology and Economic Theology or Biopolitics

Let us approach this belonging-together of a collectivity in the medium of impersonal thought by another route. In the book we are currently reading, Esposito arrives at this topic by way of the notions of debt and indebtedness.

The persistence of the politico-theological machine in its opposite seems to apply also to the transition that some have seen — including Agamben perhaps —

in the transition from *political* theology to *economic* theology. Broadly speaking this transition is understood by Esposito along the lines of the Foucauldian transition from *sovereign* regimes of power to *governmental* ones, from political theology to biopolitics (or in Foucault's more murky distinction, from biopolitics to bio*power*). But once again, the logic of the machine dictates that this cannot be understood as a simple chronological procession with absolutely clean breaks between epochs; the politico-theological sovereign *persists* in economic theology; it is just that this sovereignty has been transferred from nation-states to transnational financial institutions, to the global *economy*. Sovereignty does not disappear, it just changes place. Thus political theology and its concomitant sovereignty pervade even their own supersession. This is presumably the reason why Esposito plays down the opposition between political and economic theology (cf. *Two*, 130), which Agamben might well be said to assert more forcefully (cf. *Kingdom and the Glory*, 1ff), thus remaining slightly truer to Foucault's attempt to present something reasonably proximate to a *chronological* ordering of the two forms of power, albeit with the proviso that Agamben shifts the break much further back in time: from around the time of Kant to William of Ockham in the 13th and 14th centuries (ibid., 107f), if not earlier still, in the very first centuries after Christ's birth (ibid. xi, 110, 111, & 229).

As becomes clear from the final pages of Esposito's *Two* — entitled, 'Passage: Sovereign Debt (Economic Theology II)' — the intertwining of political and economic theology, alongside the widespread financial debt that has been installed at the level of states and individuals and which is wielded by global financial institutions as a form of sovereign power, defines the contemporary situation. It is this notion of debt that may be said to bind together Esposito's work on political theology with his more famous texts on biopolitics. It also gives us an intimation as to how we might negotiate a concrete solution to our predicament and thus flesh out the bare bones of the machine and its transformation.

This link explains why it is only here, at the very end of the book, that a certain amount of biopolitical terminology starts to crop up in Esposito's vocabulary, multiplying itself more profusely than at any other point in the text. But it is not a matter of finally translating the language of the political-theological machine and its personal core into the language of biopolitics, but rather a case of describing the particular configuration that political theology and economic theology have assumed today, which has bestowed upon political theology a *biopolitical form*. As Esposito puts it, today, law strikes at life directly, without mediation, and thus exerts what he describes as an 'exclusionary' power upon it (*Two*, 205). What has seized hold of life, in such a way as to control the possibilities of entire national populations, is *debt:* power is now primarily economic. In other words, the transnational institutions of global finance have assumed the role of sovereign law-givers, controllers of national policy, and debt

— national and individual — is the means by which power is wielded over entire nation states and over the lives of citizens, who are given over to 'debt slavery'.

Although the example made of Greece may most immediately spring to our mind, Esposito's most striking instance of the relation between economic theology and biopolitics involves the healthcare system of the United States of America. The prime cause of bankruptcy in North America was, at the time of writing, the result of unpaid loans taken out to cover the costs of basic medical treatment, which is to say, the measures necessary for bare survival (*Two*, 207). The power of life and death is thus wielded by a new sovereign, which has assumed an economic form. As Esposito puts it, biological life is the new point of overlap between economics and politics, economic theology and political theology.

Might we conjecture that with this tilting towards economic theology, it is as if *debt* had replaced the *dispositif* of the *person* as the motor of the (originally) politico-theological machine? Debt would then be what splits and subjugates its subjects, summoning human beings to stand before the Law.

Accelerating Debt to *Munus:* From Political Theology to Biopolitics

In any case, this discourse on debt leads Esposito to his ultimate solution to the problem of the machine, and indeed to the problem of ('negative') immunitary biopolitics: we should convert the meaning of the political-theological (or economic-theological) 'condition' by taking our mark precisely from this global system of debt.

In terminology reminiscent of the once again popular (though already waning) notion of 'accelerationism', Esposito suggests that since the machine of indebtedness cannot — he claims — be stopped, we should rather speed it up, bringing it to the point of absolute universality, which would ultimately reduce it to absurdity, for in the end we shall all be debtors. If every individual and collective is in debt, then there are no longer strictly speaking any real creditors, and at this point it becomes possible, if not necessary, to transform the meaning of 'debt' such that it is rendered identical to the *munus*, the reciprocal indebtedness that binds together a *communitas:* 'In situations like our current one, in which everyone is indebted, the notion of credit itself begins to lose force. Certainly, this passage, which flips the violence of debt over into the solidarity of a shared *munus* (a burden or task but also a kind of gift) is not automatic. It can only result from a conflict with the politico-theological order'. This is to transform an economic debt into an 'ontological' one (*Two,* 15/16–17).[15] Indeed, the concluding lines of the book speak of transforming our *polis* into a community of debt in such a way that 'the immunitary grip in which the world is suffocating would be broken' (*Two*, 209), thus explicitly invoking biopolitical terminology in a politico-theological context.

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[15] 'Flips...over into', *ribalta...nella:* another technical term, flippantly translated.

Esposito urges us to conceive the future of the common *munus,* the communal obligation that has historically been distorted to form a kind of generalised immunity, practically in terms of the more common notion of 'debt'. What is required is a rethinking of sovereign debt in the form of a *common* debt, a *munus* that can bind us together as individual nations as well as individual countrymen, rather than isolating us.

This passage from immunity to community has a form that we will already have uncovered in our investigation of political theology: an invagination, an overturning that reveals a hidden core, extroverting what was introverted — a turning outward which opens up the enclosed.

Thus we must first have interrogated the machines of political theology and personhood, in their contemporary historical determination, in order fully to understand how a negative biopolitics might be converted into a positive one, the hostile immunisation opposed to community into a hospitable immunisation that refuses exclusion. Thus we hope to have shown that it is the machine that allows us better to understand the contemporary moment, and the exploration of Esposito's 'technical terms' has given us some insight into the way in which the functioning of the machine is to be modified so as to alter the sense of the two terms that it holds apart, such that they shall no longer stand in an oppositional relation. Only thus can we understand how our biopolitical regime may be understood beyond sovereign thanatopolitics.

This point brings us to consider Esposito's relation to his countryman, Giorgio Agamben, for it is precisely this shift from one form of biopolitics to the other that he believed the latter to be unable to account for. Thus we need to ask after the extent to which our consideration of the machine in Esposito has illuminated the character and role of the machines that populate Agamben's work. What makes them run and what makes them run down, and what are we to do with them then? What, in other words, are we to make of *inoperativity*?[16] It will be no coincidence if we opt to focus our inquiry into the mechanism which drives Agamben's thought, or the object of that thought, on *The Kingdom and the Glory: Towards a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government,* whose themes and bibliography bear an almost uncanny resemblance to Esposito's *Two,* a book which nevertheless contains just three references to Agamben's work, all in footnotes, one entirely incidental and all of them minimal if not minimising (cf. *Two,* 211n2 et al.). What is the meaning of this repression, if it is not simply tact and academic convention? And what does this similarity and this silence teach us about machines in Agamben's philosophy?

The Governmental Machine in *The Kingdom and the Glory*

In *The Kingdom and the Glory,* Agamben speaks of a 'governmental machine', which, as Agamben's machines always do, has two poles, which it both separates

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[16] I must take the liberty of referring to the last but one issue of the present Journal for a very rich consideration of this question.

and articulates. 'Articulation' in Agamben almost always takes the sense — a limiting one in the English, which is much more ambiguous — of 'joining together'.[17] It is 'a double machine [*una macchina doppia*], which is the place of a continuous separation and articulation' (*Kingdom and the Glory,* 99/114). The two poles of this machine are Kingdom and Government, which may be identified with transcendent sovereignty (in modern terms, the legislature) and the immanent government of men and things (the executive[18]), the latter being constituted by administration and management: economy, or rather, as it is said in the Greek of the most ancient fathers of the Church, *oikonomia* as that notion was developed to make sense of the notions of the trinity and the history of the *saeculum,* its salvific or redemptive history, from the second to the fifth century after Christ. This machine supplies the paradigms for the two primary forms of power that are deployed today, or as Agamben sometimes suggests, the two forms of power that characterise '[p]olitical philosophy and the modern theory of sovereignty', political theology, on the one hand, and 'modern biopolitics up to the current triumph of economy and government', or 'economic theology, on the other. The latter seems today to predominate, with the executive (government) usurping the legislative (sovereign) or having collapsed into it, to form a technocracy or 'government by experts' (*Kingdom and the Glory,* 1).

For Agamben, the ultimate structure of the machine is to be found not so much in the relation between the two poles, which have in any case today collapsed, but between the second — and now predominant — pole and that central void *into which* the opposites have collapsed, which is to say between 'economy' or government, and *glory.* The latter today takes the form of public opinion and consensus, which is broadly driven by a media that is largely subservient to governmental demands (cf. *Kingdom and the Glory,* 254f).[19] The centre of the governmental machine, the joint of kingdom and government, is empty, and — especially when the absence of god or the sovereign becomes glaring — it is glory that comes to cover over this emptiness, or the desuetude of the king who 'does nothing'. Agamben understands this emptiness as (responsible

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[17] Cf. an interview which Agamben gives before a Greek audience in which he affirms very clearly, 'the machine is always a dual one' (Agamben 2011).

[18] Cf. Agamben 2011 for a very clear statement on this.

[19] 'If this is true, the problem of the political function of the media in contemporary society that is so widely debated today acquires a new meaning and a new urgency' (*Kingdom and the Glory,* 255). In a world in which a certain 'consensus' is so readily and disingenuously appealed to it is worth stressing its connection with glory: 'if one understands the essential link that ties it [consensus] to acclamation, consensus can be defined without difficulty, paraphrasing Schmitt's theses on public opinion, as the "modern form of acclamation" [...]. In any case, consensual democracy, which Debord called "the society of the spectacle" and which is so dear to the theorists of communicative action, is a glorious democracy, in which the *oikonomia* is fully resolved into glory and the doxological function, freeing itself of liturgy and ceremonials, absolutises itself to an unheard of extent and penetrates every area of social life' (*Kingdom and the Glory,* 259). For an excellent and somewhat different account of acclaim, cf. Tarizzo 2019.

for) the governmental machine's inoperativity, which in theological terms is that of god or the divine sovereign on the Sabbath, or during those strange moments before and after creation, or at least before and after the history of redemption. In political or secular terms, this should be understood as the *essential* inoperativity of the human being, which reveals itself at the end of history — his want of a task or project that would be specific to his kind. Glory is the way in which the machine captures this inoperativity and deploys it (which is to say, it puts worklessness to work) for politico-theological purposes, so as to exert power over life even in the apparent absence of a sovereign figure. It is this power and these purposes which Agamben ultimately wishes us to resist, and he urges us to do so by envisioning this emptiness as a lack of fuel which has caused the machine to run down and allowed for glory, public opinion, and media simply to prolong the domination of the half-dead sovereign. Practically speaking, our aim should be to put the machine (and thus the rule of law) out of action for good. Or perhaps this messianic moment of sabbatical inactivity is and has always already been with us, in faraway corners of our lives and culture, did we but know it. The extent to which this is the case constitutes one of the most crucial questions in the interpretation of Agamben's philosophy.

Agamben's genealogical investigation of sovereign power and the way in which it assumes the form of *oikonomia* or governmentality (cf. *Kingdom and the Glory,* 65) is, as so often in his predominantly *archaeological* work, impelled by a certain contemporary historical situation, in which a binarity that was once thought to exist no longer obviously holds sway, and whose existence we can recollect only by envisioning the present moment as one in which this duality has collapsed into a point of indiscernibility. Thus, Agamben reads the governmental machine as an incarnation of the economic machine that has been in operation, most visibly in the realm of Christian theology, for at least two millennia and therefore as 'a bipolar machine ultimately producing a zone of indifference' (*Kingdom and the Glory,* 122, cf. 136). To understand our situation today and to negotiate a way out of it, it becomes necessary to look further back in history in order to see just what it is that has become indistinguishable, and to trace the history of the emergence and subsequent vanishing of these two poles. This emergence is the work of a bi-polar machine that is at risk of being forgotten, now that one of its poles and its empty centre have been eclipsed, and to see our way beyond it we must once again call it to mind.[20] Such is the task of Agamben's

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[20] A producer of differences that risks complete oblivion in the collapse of the differences produced: Heidegger taught that these differences could be reduced to the ontological difference of beings and being, and that it was being itself which was being forgotten, or more precisely, this forgetfulness of long standing was itself in danger of being forgotten. Agamben speaks rather of a machine, which Heidegger would for the most part rather not, considering the turning-points of history to be more in the nature of mysterious epochal withdrawings that define historical epochs and history itself as an *epochē*. Once again, it will be a fruitful task for the future to consider the alteration Agamben makes to this conception, and the role of other figures, perhaps Walter Benjamin first of all, within it.

archaeology in the *Kingdom and the Glory.* This oblivion has allowed government and glory (a consensus of public opinion with respect to mediatic exposure) effectively to usurp the empty throne of the sovereign and thus tacitly to extend its reign, to install it where it apparently is not.

Glory and Inoperativity: At the End of Economy

In the arena of theology, glory is offered as the solution to the problem of the ends of economy, the final moment in the history of salvation that runs from creation to redemption, the time before creation and the time after the day of judgement, the sabbatical during which God has nothing (yet or left) to do. He simply remains idle, out of action or inoperative (cf. *Kingdom and the Glory,* 160–61). He exercises his (contingent) ability 'not to' (cf. *Open,* 67).

Glory is said to cloak this god with its splendour, a sovereign who lounges upon his throne and does nothing, exerting no effect upon his creation or subjects, right up to the point of not bothering to exist at all, we might say. The apparent absence of sovereignty is symbolised by the empty throne, whose representation — from the Papal Basilica of Saint Paul in Rome — adorns the front cover of Agamben's book: 'Government glorifies the Kingdom, and the Kingdom glorifies Government. But the centre of the machine is empty, and glory is nothing but the splendour that emanates from this emptiness, the inexhaustible *kabhod* ['glory' in Hebrew] that at once reveals and veils the central vacuity of the machine' (*Kingdom and the Glory,* 211).[21]

Glory hides divine inoperativity; or at least, by placing a screen over it, it both conceals it and reveals its place, perhaps in the end concealing not the place but rather its emptiness. Glory thus shelters 'the unthinkable emptiness that is the inoperativity of power' (*Kingdom and the Glory,* 242), and Agamben suggests that this inoperativity, this empty threshold of Kingdom and Government, is so essential for the governmental machine that it must be captured by the machine and utilised as fuel for the machine's engine. This capture takes place in the form of glory.

Elsewhere in Agamben's *œuvre* the emptiness at the heart of a machine — the machine's having fallen idle — is described in terms of a machine or car (*macchina*) that has run out of petrol: the question then becomes how that very same machine is to carry on functioning in its own desuetude, to be 'running on empty'. Thus the account of the governmental machine may be read as an explication of the logic of inclusion by means of exclusion that formed the heart of *Homo Sacer.* It attempts to explain how sovereign power continues to operate

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[21] The exception to the idea of an end of all government (the end of economy in which God is inoperative, and then simply glorified) is hell, which is the only part of the Christian cosmos that continues to be governed even after the last judgement, and thus Agamben is able to describe the vision of contemporary governmental power, the eternal government of men and things, permanent management and administration, as an 'infernal' idea (*Kingdom and the Glory,* 163).

even within its own apparent absence, in the functioning of biopolitics, political theology in economic theology, the king once his power has been handed on to his government and politics assumes the form of the mere management of affairs. This explanation would involve laying out that gesture of inclusive exclusion proposed by *Homo Sacer,* in a chronological sequence; or more precisely it would describe the history of the West itself as abiding by this logic.[22]

Glory is the way in which one can heal or at least plaster over the fracture between the two parts of the governmental machine, the fissure that separates an inoperative sovereign and the effective government of the world. It is also (we might say, in a different direction, on an axis rotated ninety degrees) the point of indistinction between politics and theology, and helps us to explain why the notions imported from the latter continue to pervade the former even when sovereign power itself seems to have ceded its place to another more governmental and economic form of power. It is glory, which today takes the form of revering celebrity and gawping at spectacles (and indeed, in many aspects of culture and society, a seeking out of 'heroes' or even 'super-heroes' to glorify), that ultimately destines the two poles of the governmental machine to collapse into one another: it is the corrupt but seemingly interminable repetition of a glory that once honoured God in his majesty. Sovereignty becomes a pure absence concealed by a pervasive glorification, and glory becomes indistinguishable from government in the form of a demagogic complicity between media and governance. The machine has then run its course, and it is this situation that Agamben's philosophy reckons with.

The Mystery of Glory and the Uselessness of Man

The enigma of glory is put by Agamben in the following terms: why does power need glory, which is to say why does something that should by rights be operative, active, and effective in achieving its ends, need to be 'solemnly immobilised' in glory? (*Kingdom and the Glory,* 195) In other words, why is power not always acting, doing what it *can*? Why does it become inactive or inoperative? Why is it compelled to pause for a holiday or sabbatical and receive the acclaim of ceremonial ritual, useless and ineffective from a utilitarian point of view?

It may aid us in our search for an answer if we specify that, today, the inoperativity that glory conceals is, in 'godless' secular modernity, not just the inoperativity of god (understood effectively as non-existence) but the inoperativity of *human* life, which Agamben posits as standing at the centre of political practice, as we have seen it to occupy the void centre of the governmental machine (cf. *Kingdom and the Glory,* 246).

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[22] While nothing is simple in the arena of political theology when it comes to the relation between the theological and the secular, we might read this theological account as a historicisation or mythical chronologisation of the *structural* character of potential, power, or possibility. Or at least we *could,* if that structure did not *itself* open up (and eventually bring to a close) a certain history.

The way in which the governmental machine operates also applies to what Agamben will describe as the 'anthropological machine'. This latter pivots upon the way in which neither man himself nor his politics has a task proper to them (and nor does his history — or the history of a particular nation — have a *telos*). Perhaps we might say that this is the way in which the governmental machine is understood in Modern times, or perhaps it is rather the (demystified?) way in which Agamben himself is attempting to rethink the functioning of the machine: 'the governmental apparatus functions because it has captured in its empty centre the inoperativity of the human essence' (*Kingdom and the Glory*, 246).

Throughout his *œuvre*, Agamben affirms human life to be inoperative and without purpose, without a specific task or function (*ergon* in Aristotle). Man is the 'sabbatical animal' (*Kingdom and the Glory*, 246). And yet, in a way that has yet to be satisfactorily clarified, Agamben describes this *'argïa'* or 'worklessness', this *'sans œuvre'* and *'désœuvrement',* as what makes the 'incomparable operativity' of the human species possible. It is the source of the specific possibilities of thought and action that are unique to human beings, and in this context the most important of these potentials is the political practice of man, the way in which the political body is today supposed to function — how power is meant to operate or indeed be overcome:

> properly human praxis is sabbatism that, by rendering the specific functions of the living inoperative, opens them to possibility. Contemplation and inoperativity are, in this sense, the metaphysical operators of anthropogenesis, which, by liberating the living man from his biological or social destiny, assign him to that indefinable dimension that we are accustomed to call 'politics'. [...] The political is neither a *bios* nor a *zōē,* but the dimension that the inoperativity of contemplation, by deactivating linguistic and corporeal, material and immaterial praxes, ceaselessly opens and assigns to the living. For this reason, from the perspective of theological *oikonomia* the genealogy of which we have here traced, nothing is more urgent than to incorporate inoperativity within its own apparatuses. *Zōē aiōnios,* eternal life, is the name of this inoperative centre of the human, of this political 'substance' of the Occident that the machine of the economy and of glory ceaselessly attempts to capture within itself. (*Kingdom and the Glory*, 251)

To what extent Agamben's work is attempting to resist this capture, or even to prise this third (or fourth) form of life apart from any machine is another of the truly profound questions that confront the interpreter of his work.[23]

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[23] Agamben concludes the main part of *The Kingdom and the Glory* with these words: 'Establishing whether, as we have tried to show liminally [*sic* — Latin in the original*, in limine,* on the threshold, we have opened the door to such an account, without being able yet fully to

The emptiness at the heart of the governmental machine is precisely the sabbatical absence of works and tasks that characterises the human being. To shift thus from the theological to the secular is to 'profane' the empty throne. What we have in place of this divine absence is 'eternal life' (*zōē aiōnios*) (*Kingdom and the Glory,* 247), the life of the sabbatical animal referred to above — mythically, we might speak of this as a return to paradise in which the distinction of human and animal becomes irrelevant and a new form of common life is entered upon.

This Edenic inoperativity is not something that we are simply presented with; it is a state that must be achieved by means of a process of 'deactivation' in which all human and divine works are *rendered* inoperative, and indeed this very gesture of deactivation is described by Agamben as itself a 'properly human and political praxis' (*Kingdom and the Glory,* xiii). This disabling of current uses opens up the possibility of a 'new use' (cf. *Kingdom and the Glory,* 250–51). Deactivation suspends the hitherto prevalent actualisation, which has prevailed for so long that it has come to seem impregnable: to dare to question it will allow us to return to a perhaps unsuspected reservoir of potential.

At the stage characterised by the machine's idling, its hollow heart causes a collapse and yet it carries on regardless, continuing to rotate and engender seemingly eternal recurrences of ancient phenomena, just as the law still operates during the sovereign exception and with an even greater reach, as the machine colonises that which is not machinic. What is needed is for the machine to be put permanently out of action and for human thought and deed to escape its clutches more effectively than an exclusion which is merely a concealed inclusion.

Destiny and Collapse: Differentiating Agamben from Esposito

When it comes to differentiating Agamben's notion of the machine from Esposito's, one crucial point to note is that Agamben is happy to speak the language of destiny: 'The economic-governmental vocation of contemporary democracies is not something that has happened accidentally, but is a constitutive part of the theological legacy of which they are the depositaries [*depositarie* — inheritors]' (*Kingdom and the Glory,* 143/160). It is necessary and unstoppable: 'the motor of the machine as it turns [...] cannot be stopped [*il motore della macchina ... nel suo inarrestabile giro*]' — it must inevitably work its way out (*Kingdom and the Glory,* 246/269). Agamben puts the matter quite directly: 'from the beginning, the machine as a whole was destined [*dall'inizio la macchina nel suo complesso era destinata*]...' (*Kingdom and the Glory,* 143/160). So we were fated to end up in this situation, in which an emptiness at the heart of the

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commit ourselves and enter], glory covers and captures in the guise of "eternal life" that particular praxis of man as living being that we have defined as inoperativity, and whether it is possible, as was announced at the end of *Homo Sacer I,* to think politics — beyond the economy and beyond glory — beginning from the inoperative disarticulation of both *bios* and *zōē*, is the task for a future investigation' (*Kingdom and the Glory,* 259/283).

machine was revealed and a collapse between the two poles, or at least between government and the glory which covers the sovereign in its having become indistinguishable from government — its uselessness — takes place.

How does Agamben suggest that we respond to this situation? There are two aspects to his recommendation: not only not to *resist* the gradual winding down of the machines of fate by putting a wedge between old binary opposites, but perhaps even to encourage their decline. And yet it is then that the real task begins, for one must precisely not rest content with a relativistic indifference in which anything may be said, thought, and done, but rather one must learn to think of this indifference in a new way, such that it is not understood simply as the product of a transcendent sovereign law, wielding power and separating the *bios* of human life from its *zōē*, or, one might say, to accord with Esposito, its personal life from the impersonal. In this way, new possibilities of human life will be unearthed by the archaeological excavation of the roots of the machine, which will reveal what has been progressively obliterated by the history that the machine has engineered.

Rethinking the Inoperative: Potential

It is the centre of the machine, the third moment, standing in between the two poles, that Agamben wishes to rethink: it once stored the fuel that kept the two poles apart but then became exhausted and allowed the two poles to fall together, concealing the fact that sovereign power was operational even in governmental-economic power. But once the machine has been rendered permanently inoperative, this void will be revealed to us in a new light: it is not a failure, negativity or lack, but a well of inactual *possibility*. It is as if one were to reorient the entire working week around the Sabbath, rather than thinking of this Sunday as a moment's respite in which one rests in order to 'recharge' for the sake of the coming week of work.

In Agamben's most explicitly biopolitical works, which indeed address a terrain narrower than the more extensive machines addressed in *Kingdom and the Glory* (cf. Primera 2019, 71f), Agamben is concerned with the fatal machine that eventually allows *bios* and *zōē* to collapse into one another according to the developing logic of sovereign power (and its expansion). The point is to rethink the life that results from the sovereign imposition of power which lays it bare; in its stead we must think positively of the *potential* that ordinary zoological life harbours and which was constrained to the utmost by the might of sovereign power that strips this life of its particular characteristics and thus of its possibilities. This will be neither a *zōē* distinct from *bios,* a life prior to its being formed (a distinction that is itself the product of a sovereign way of thinking[24]), nor the bare life that sovereign power produces at the height of its exhaustion and

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[24] Cf. the review by the present author that appears later in the present volume for more on this idea.

simultaneous triumph by eliding that very distinction, but a new kind of inseparability that Agamben writes by hyphenating the expression 'form-of-life' (*forma-della-vita*).[25]

In the context of the machines of the *Kingdom and the Glory*, Agamben asks whether it is possible 'to think inoperativity outside the apparatus *[dispositivo]* of glory' (*Kingdom and the Glory*, 247/270). This is what he means when he speaks of the possibility of thinking politics *beyond* glory, a human community after the machine, a possibility which remains in question at least in the state of suspense in which the *Kingdom and the Glory* leaves us, with a solution promised in the concluding Part of the Homo Sacer series (*Kingdom and the Glory*, 258). In particular, a reading of the *Use of Bodies* alongside *The Highest Poverty* would be indispensable in attempting to determine how this reversal from a 'negative' reading of inoperativity to a 'positive' one might take place, the quotation marks attempting to do justice to Agamben's wariness when it comes to reading the final volumes as the *pars construens* of the whole project, which will have been up until then *destruens* (*Use of Bodies*, xiii).

The emergence of hyphens in the expression 'form of life' (to give 'form-of-life') supplies the technical term which plays the role of the expressions that we have examined in Esposito's work and which describe a reversal in the machine's functioning. For Agamben, it seems that the machine does not shift into reverse in any sense, but is simply stopped ('parked') once and for all. And yet, nevertheless a core is revealed, around which the machine is seen to have revolved and upon which it fed, but this core is devoid, and it is comprised of a certain form of life which we have yet even to specify as god, animal, or man, but which in any case is inoperative and all the more potent for that very reason.[26]

Without being able to stray too far into the concluding Volume of Homo Sacer, what we can say on the basis of *The Kingdom and the Glory* alone, alongside certain earlier texts, in response to the question of what this politics and this inoperative life might be, would amount to a rudimentary outline of what

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[25] As Agamben remarks elsewhere, giving the example of Heidegger's *'in-der-Welt-sein'* (2005), even marks such as the hyphen can function as technical terms in philosophy, and technical terms constitute the 'poetic' moment of thought, the moment at which something new is named by language. In this case it is Agamben's own 'solution' to the problem of biopolitics. But then the task confronting us is truly to understand what 'form-of-life' itself means, and here we face once again an interpretative question that still stands in need of a detailed answer: is form-of-life generic and not specific in the way the various *bioi* were, or is it just as specific and differentiated but without the separation from biological life that *bios* enjoyed? Certainly it seems that this life will have been transformed precisely *by* this inseparability. But we are not even sure of the extent to which it will be proper to describe this life as 'human'. What then shall we say of it, positively and negatively, kataphatically and apophatically, destructively and constructively?

[26] Although this encounter warrants a detailed consideration, one wonders if this reversal of 'impotence' into 'potency' escapes Paolo Virno, who devotes a recent book to what appears to be a tactful but trenchant critique of Agamben's position (Virno 2021).

could be called, borrowing a term from Esposito that may find no rightful place in Agamben's thought, the latter's 'affirmative biopolitics'.[27] Such is the ultimate *practical* importance of a discourse on the Italian philosophers' respective conceptions of the 'machine'.

At the very least we can say that this is the moment at which the inoperativity of the machine is turned to new 'uses' (common uses, free uses, as Agamben often says, as opposed to a right of *individual* ownership which would be consecrated by *law)*. These new uses would constitute a new form of possibility as such. The Penelopean undoing of works (the *actuality* of certain possibilities) amounts to 'swimming upstream' from an actualisation to a preceding potential (which does not in all respects resemble the act to which it gave birth, a potential which is far broader than what it became, and which Gilles Deleuze dubs the 'virtual' for these reasons). Is this why certain 'infamous' forms of life, strange, quirky instances of *actual* life are so important to Agamben? — Because they hint at an alternative actualisation, or perhaps facilitate this return to virtuality, and thus indicate to us the *range* of possibilities that the hegemonic actualisation tends to conceal? At the same time, these would be moments of a messianic future revealing themselves in the Now rather than standing at some indeterminate point in the future yet to come.

In *The Time that Remains,* and elsewhere, Agamben speaks of the disabling of machines, or at least the deactivation of actualisations, in the form of the 'as [if] not', the *hōs mē* of Paul's Letter to the Romans*.* The particular *bios* or form of life that characterises an individual or group is considered in the messianic light as if it could just as well not have and could have been otherwise. One is thus immediately liberated from its confines and opened to new, collective and therefore *political* possibilities of living. This quasi-zoological life anticipates in the contemporary moment the sabbatical form in which life will stand at the end of time, not coinciding with any of the predetermined forms into which governmental power is more and more intent on forcing it as it asks for its identification papers. In this earthly paradise, life lives its pure liveability, unlimited possibility, and this *is* its new (and common) 'form-of-life'. The specific functions of living are rendered inoperative, which is to say viewed as (if) deactualised, and thus are opened to new, as yet unactualised possibilities (*Kingdom and the Glory,* 251).

This rendering inoperative of any particular pre-given (destined or biologico-genetically 'hard-wired') task, is considered by Agamben to assign man to *politics*. We have seen above that this task of deactivation is described by Agamben as the task of political action itself. In the context of Spinoza, Agamben

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[27] A future work by the present author will explore just this dimension as it unfolds explicitly in the fourth Volume of Homo Sacer. As indicated in passing whenever this question has arisen, we have yet to find a great deal of serious philosophical work on this aspect of Agamben's thought, although it is beginning to show forth here and there: we would advert to German Primera's work and a forthcoming text by Ido Govrin as shining examples of this.

speaks of life's 'contemplation' of its own power to act and its own inoperativity as opening the properly political dimension as such: *'What the poem accomplishes for the power of saying, politics and philosophy must accomplish for the power of acting. By rendering economic and biological operations inoperative, they demonstrate what the human body* can do; *they open it to a new, possible use'* (*Kingdom and the Glory,* 252). The machines that constrain our possibilities have let us go. They ran down. And somewhere in the new uses we can make of them, political communities might be formed.

Esposito on Indifference

The machines in Esposito's thought, for all their similarity to those that we find in the *Kingdom and the Glory,* do not run *down* in the way that they are destined to in Agamben's philosophy of history. Even if Esposito urges us to dismantle the machines, this is not with a view to stopping them altogether, but rather to allow them to function in a different way. The poles of the machine do not seem to reach a point of indifference such as the one which Agamben deems the moment of bare life, or bare being. Indeed, Esposito's resistance to this notion bears witness to that. For Esposito, the machine acts so as to subordinate one part of a duality to another, a functionalisation which is the precondition for achieving identity and unity. This unitary identity will then enter into an exclusive relation with that which opposes it, constituting an immunity utterly separate from community, a person completely closed off to the impersonal. This opposition is indeed to be ameliorated, but the machine that created it does not automatically run itself into the ground so as to produce a form of indifference spontaneously; for Esposito, indifference — if we can so describe this new relation — must be produced actively by those who would 'sabotage' such a machine.

But to establish whether this difference is truly central in the confrontation between Agamben and Esposito, we might fruitfully compare his devices with another kind of machine that crops up in Agamben: the anthropological or anthropogenic machine.

The Anthropogenic Machine and Homo Sacer

We have already suggested that the inoperativity at the heart of the governmental machine is that of both god and man, but at the same time Agamben on occasion risks suggesting that the human and its non-functionality should be given a certain priority here. If one were to read this in a humanistic way, one might say that it is all very well to reduce God to the inoperativity of non-existence but if one allows man and his *polis* to retain a functionality then one will simply have allowed the shadow of god to be projected on the walls of the cave before us, and he will live on in us. This would fall short of the subtlety of Agamben's text, but it gives us some sense of what remains to be done interpretively with respect to it.

The machine of the human may therefore lurk at the heart of the governmental machine, and this allows us to broach a question that has often

pricked Agamben scholars: if *The Open* is the place in which this anthropogenetic machine is broached, why is it not considered to be part of the Homo Sacer series? Might this be because it describes a machine that stands in some way prior to the political and economic machines that this series investigates? We might dare to suggest as much if this machine's core is formed by the purposelessness of man. In any case, without being able finally to offer a definitive answer to these questions, let us conclude this essay by examining the anthropological machine, for the light that it might shed on what has gone before.

The machine opens up and sutures a gap at the heart of human life, constituted by the division within man between his humanness and his animality, a distinction which is taken to defines man as a species, and which must precede his metaphysical definition, fastening as it does the animality of man to his rational and linguistic character. Man is himself, most fundamentally, a kind of machine for producing the human: '*Homo sapiens*, then, is neither a clearly defined species nor a substance; it is, rather, a machine or device *[una macchina o un artificio]* for producing the recognition of the human *[umano]*' (*Open*, 26/34). The anthropogenic machine, with its twin poles of man and animal, is a mirror which the former holds up in order to admire himself and to envisage himself as opposed to his mirror image, to that opponent which he nevertheless partially includes within himself, like the ape that he is fond of telling himself that he is not.

In the humanism of Pico as in the naturalism of Linneaus, this anthropological machine is 'an ironic apparatus [*dispositivo*]'[28] (*Open,* 29/35) which suggests that the nature of man is precisely to be withdrawn from all particular natures. His essence is to be without pre-given essence, relieved of any specific task (*Open*, 30). The anthropological machine function thanks to this lack of essence: into this void comes rushing a series of 'missing links' between man and animal, speaking being and living being (*Open,* 37–8). Agamben specifies that this zone between the nonhuman and the human cannot be once and for all filled in with a positive element: 'Like every space of exception, this zone is, in truth, perfectly empty, and the truly human being who should occur there is only the place of a ceaselessly updated decision in which the caesurae and their rearticulation are always dislocated and displaced anew. What would thus be obtained, however, is neither an animal life nor a human life, but only a life that is separated and excluded from itself — only a *bare life*' (*Open,* 38). Confronted with the confinement of man to this zone — a reduction which would assume its ultimate form in the concentration camp — a 'task' is assigned to us: 'faced with this extreme figure of the human and the inhuman, it is not so much a matter of asking which of the two machines (or of the two variants of the same machine [the ancient and modern versions of the anthropological machine]) is better or more

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[28] Which Agamben is here quite content to use synonymously with '*macchina*', speaking on the following page of an 'ironic *machine* [*macchina*]' (*Open,* 30/36, emphasis added).

effective — or, rather, less lethal and bloody — as it is of understanding how they work so that we might, eventually, be able to stop them' (*Open,* 38).

Agamben speaks of the anthropological machine as 'idling' (*gira... a vuoto,* running on empty, or, in the Italian idiom, 'turning' or 'gyrating' in a void — even 'spinning' in a void, to recall a vocabulary that became briefly popular in analytic philosophy) (*Open,* 80/82), no longer urging history on by producing new decisions on the separation of man and animal, and no longer generating a new task for the human. Presumably the aim of 'stopping' this empty machine once and for all is to prevent this merely idling motor from flaring into life once again, and simply continuing to rotate eternally in its undead state, such that the old image of man comes to perpetuate itself.

Recalling our earlier comparison of Esposito's machine with the dialectic, it is here Walter Benjamin, rather than Hegel himself, who allows Agamben to compare the machine in its idle state with a dialectic that has come to a standstill, falling just short of achieving sublation:

> neither must man master nature nor nature man. Nor must both be surpassed in a third term that would represent their dialectical synthesis. Rather, according to the Benjaminian model of a 'dialectic at a standstill', what is decisive here is only the 'between', the interval or, we might say, the play between the two terms, their immediate constellation in a non-coincidence. The anthropological machine no longer articulates nature and man in order to produce the human through the suspension and capture of the inhuman. The machine is, so to speak, stopped [*fermata:* in English, the musical term for a pause or a lingering extension of a note or chord that is already sounding]; it is 'at a standstill', and, in the reciprocal suspension of the two terms, something for which we perhaps have no name and which is neither animal nor man settles in between nature and humanity and holds itself in the mastered relation, in the saved night. (*Open,* 83)

For Esposito, on the other hand, it seems structurally necessary that the machine — and so the dialectic — continue to operate, since immunity and community (or whatever poles are in play) still enjoy what might be called a dialectical relation more Hegelian than certain commentators would have us believe: individuation must always happen, and it is immunitary, in one of two possible senses, hostile or hospitable, isolated from the community or involved in some other relation that would be precisely dialectical, and which would be arrived at by means of a re-engineering of the machine, that would — it seems — *render* it dialectical.

For Agamben, the standstill of the dialectical machine, and the indifference into which the two moments of the machine have sunk, is, quite to the contrary, to be made permanent. Once the machine is stopped, the collapse

of the two poles that it once held apart and now holds forcibly together becomes irrevocable: this means that the indistinction of the multiple qualified forms of life will assume a different form of indifference — 'form-of-life', in which the two types of life are so tightly bound as to be inseparable. Formed life and biological life overlap in a way that has never been spoken about above a whisper, putting about a rumour of something disreputable:

> in our culture man has always been the result of a simultaneous division and articulation of the animal and the human, in which one of the two terms of the operation was also what was at stake in it. To render inoperative the machine that governs our conception of man will therefore mean no longer to seek new — more effective or more authentic — articulations, but rather to show the central emptiness, the hiatus that — within man — separates man and animal, and to risk ourselves in this emptiness: the suspension of the suspension, Shabbat of both animal and man. (*Open,* 92)

Here we must simply read what Agamben says of this moment of permanent arrest, and of the new form of life — none of *zōē, bios,* or bare life — which springs up amidst the ruins:

> the life that shines in the 'saved night' of nature's (and, in particular, human nature's) eternal, unsaveable survival after it has definitively bid farewell to the *logos* and to its own history. It is no longer human, because it has perfectly forgotten every rational element, every project for mastering its animal life; but if animality had been defined precisely by its poverty in world and by its obscure expectation of a revelation and a salvation, then this life cannot be called animal either. [...] The *agnoia* [quoting Basilides, the Gnostic, speaking of material life abandoned by all spirituality], the nonknowledge which has descended upon it, does not entail the loss of every relation to its own concealment. Rather, this life remains serenely in relation with its own proper nature [...] as a zone of nonknowledge. (*Open,* 90–91)

This would be a life that is not bare but 'formed' down to its most intimate components, what was once conceived as the absence of power rethought as a moment at which the purest potential is revealed. This will place us in a state that Agamben, like Esposito after him, does not hesitate to compare to the passive intellect that Dante and Averroes inherited from Aristotle, a genuinely collective state of potentiality in which only the species as a whole, taken over the entire extent of its history, may be capable of actualising it.

With this collective, we have reached a point at which the respective solutions to the problem of the troublesome machine supplied by Agamben and

Esposito have been set in sharper relief, thanks to this excursion through the anthropological machine that first separates man and animal in various ways before collapsing this distinction into a new form that is either to be bare life perpetually at the mercy of sovereign power, if the machine eternally idles, or, if the machine can be deactivated for good, an inoperative life in which man embraces his animality in a new way, without being forcibly identified with it: a life that is political but which was not *forced* to be such by the sovereign dictate that imposes ever more frequent states of emergency, ever new 'crises', in order to encroach upon ever more intimate aspects of its subjects' lives.

The need to make this transition is the result of a fateful (philosophy of) history, that describes the way in which the two poles of the gyrating machine are gradually forced together, as the machine starts to run — and rotate — on empty, concealing from itself the emptiness of human inoperativity that will always have supplied its power. To face up to that void and study it with its veils rent allows one to surpass the possibilities of human life that oppose it to its impersonal animal or vegetative life, and to enjoy its indifference.

For Esposito, this indifference is never fated to occur, but if it is to occur at all, it must be brought about, and that in the way of a rejoining of personal and impersonal life such that the former is laid out flat on the plan (or plane) of the latter. For Agamben, the machine that keeps its two poles apart was always destined to run down thanks to the inoperativity of the human essence upon which the anthropological machine is premised; while for Esposito, the machine, once it has been put back together, seems to keep running indefinitely. It will thus continue to separate the two halves of the human being, albeit in a new way, but it will never allow them to become submerged in the absolute indifference that Agamben advocates: it is as if a certain immunitary protection of individual (*human*) life may and perhaps must always remain in place for Esposito, and this will not be altogether incompatible with a communal life; while for Agamben there is no community if immunity is insisted upon. We might risk going so far as to say that there are singularities but no individuals.[29]

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[29] *Incipit* the review of Agamben's *Where are we now?* that appears later in the present volume, in which this hypothesis is explored in the context of Esposito and Agamben's responses to the events of the last two years.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ua7ElsQFZPo&list=PLX9HYG3Fkpkg7QAJsDOHHbFf_
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