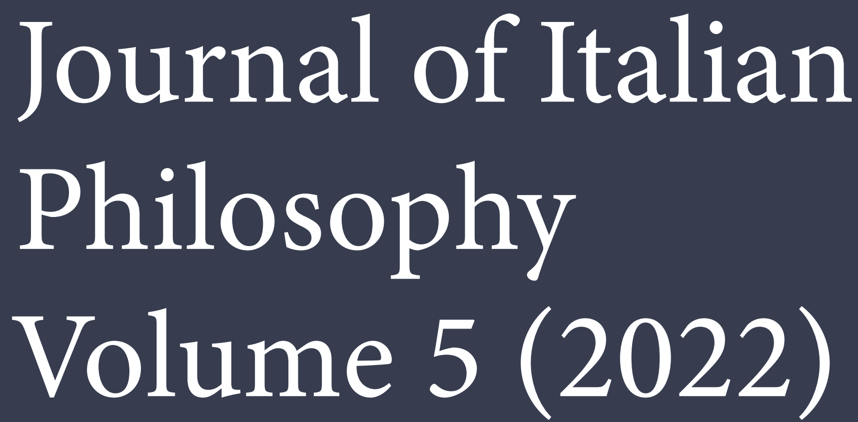

Journal of Italian Philosophy Volume 5 (2022)

Edited by

Michael Lewis

Journal of Italian Philosophy
Volume 5 (2022)

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ISSN 2515-6039

Editorial

At least two of the traits that Roberto Esposito proposes as part of a characterisation of Italian thought from the beginning may be taken to weave the present volume together: the renunciation of a transcendental mode of thinking, and concomitant with that an amelioration of the metaphysical divide that separates rational man from irrational nature and its animals. This involves placing thought and life on the same immanent level.

At stake in nearly all of our texts, explicitly or implicitly, is an attempt to bring thought and life closer to one another, or more generally, and contrary to a predominant tradition of metaphysics, to think whatever is specific to the human (which is often thought itself) as inseparable from the living thing that it also is and that other types of life also are. But in each and every case this is achieved without giving in to a facile naturalism more befitting of another tradition of thought. The essays contained herein thus exemplify the Italian philosophy to which our journal has devoted itself, for if Italian thought can be captured in a single description it is this attempt to depose a certain oppositional way of thinking about human nature and to place man and animal on a continuum without conceding everything — or even very much at all — to a naturalisation of the human.

Alberto Parisi demonstrates how a consideration of language that refuses to ignore its constitution by the aspirated breath allows one to move beyond the quasi-transcendental conception of the connection between language, meaning, and world to which deconstruction was compelled to confine itself: the living creature with its *phōnē* respires just as much as those who sublimate their breath in *logos*. Living creatures have voices, according to Aristotle; or, we might say, so as to emphasise the supposed difference between humans and animals, the latter 'make noises': they squeak, chitter, squark, and warble, and for these pretty but not particularly intelligible sounds to become human, they need the kind of articulation that *letters* provide. With this modulation, these musical emanations that seem sometimes to amount to little more than automatic reactions to pleasure and pain become capable of expressing supernatural ideas: ethics, justice, and law. Thus the political community of human beings opens within an articulation of the natural voice. Parisi demonstrates how the animal's song, along with the breath that animates it, have been conceived differently in the Italian tradition from Giorgio Colli to Giorgio Agamben, Adriana Cavarero and Emanuele Coccia, in relation to the reading of metaphysics that envisions it as being devoted to the dream of a pure unlettered voice that is infinitely present to itself.

With a new conception of breath, the relation between human and animal

need no longer be understood solely on the basis of what is said by metaphysics to come *later* (writing and its letters) but may be thought in terms of the speech that comes first and flourishes almost everywhere in the animal kingdom. Parisi resuscitates pneumatology and indeed reveals it never to have been stifled on the Italian peninsula. He thereby sheds much needed light on the relation between Italian thinkers, Agamben and Cavarero especially, and Derrida, on the question of speech and writing.

As Parisi indicates, following Emanuele Coccia, respiration allows us to think together not just man and animal but both of these together with the plant, and the capacity of all these organisms to adapt themselves to their environment is the subject of Pier Alberto Porceddu Cilione's essay on *oikeiōsis*.

Cilione demonstrates that this notion, the becoming 'at home' (*oikos*) of the animal with its own constitution which in turn allows it to settle in to its milieu or 'niche', provides us with one of the most powerful ways in which to formulate Giorgio Agamben's 'solution' to the problem of biopolitics, which is to say the type of 'life' that he urges us to conceive in the desuetude of the sovereign apparatus that creates the opposition between *zōē* and *bios* before collapsing it into bare life at the end of history. Beyond all three we happen upon a fourth kind of life that seems to be neither human nor animal – nor divine.

Notions such as this are easily mistaken for naturalistic terms, but they name a life that simply escapes the grasp of the conceptual oppositions which we shall come to identify with the poles that govern the various machines that populate Agamben's work and which are ultimately grounded upon the machine – or apparatus (*dispositivo*) – that is language, with its fundamentally oppositional structure. Agamben's work is shown by Cilione to be a search for the excluded middle, which is the ultimate niche into which our future life must insinuate itself. If this does indeed overcome the transcendental approach, then it nevertheless does not fall back into the naturalistic.

Agamben retrieves the Stoic notion of *oikeiōsis* in order to delineate an alternative ontology of selfhood, suppressed by the accumulated weight of the legal notion of self-possession (property) and the responsibility it entails. This yields a conception of reflexivity that spans the animal and the human, in that *oikeiōsis* refers to the way in which any organism, perhaps plants as well, acquires a sense of its own extremities as tethered to its very core. It is the means by which the mereological relation is formed and life acquires the elementary autonomy that is the interdependence of parts and whole: in animals this takes the form of spontaneous motion, self-motivation, and in humans a certain (rationally controlled) liberty with respect to nature itself. If we are to think a new and blessed life – in which bodies get used to themselves, use themselves, and are used in the novel sense that Agamben assigns to this word, 'use' – then the notion of a certain self-'conciliation' or 'familiarisation' might provide us with a privileged way in.

Oikeiōsis bespeaks a self-relation that is at the same time a relation to others, an explosion of the individual that opens it from the very first moment onto a

certain commonality. Cilione's account is followed by two texts, originally given as talks at the same symposium in 2016 at the Brighton-Sussex Medical School, which directly, in the case of Tom Frost's piece, and indirectly devote themselves to the question of the precise relation that is said to hold between life's immunity and its community, to use the terms that Esposito has popularised. In other words, they pursue the question of this fourth kind of life, the life that an 'affirmative biopolitics' would urge upon us, into the political arena, where the relation between individuality and collectivity becomes pressing. That this has become all the more so of late opens the second of these essays onto the later book review that deals with Giorgio Agamben's *Where are we now?*

Frost's text stages its encounter around the notion of *munus*, not nearly as central to Agamben's work, at least on first glance, as it is to Esposito's. *Munus* names the obligation owed to others, or the set of official duties that one is expected to carry out in aid of one's community; this 'debt' stands at the heart of Esposito's notions of com-munity and im-munity. In the final analysis, Frost juxtaposes Esposito's affirmative biopolitics with Agamben's putative rejection of all biopolitics and all apparatuses which subjectivate life, so as to pose the tantalising question of the 'little difference' that separates the present world from the utopia that might – here and there, in the most unsuspected corners – already be with us, but whose glimmers the current exacerbation of biopolitical restrictions on human life risks snuffing out for good.

The following contribution stages the confrontation on a level that is avowedly not that of biopolitics, at least in the strict sense, and concerns itself with what Frost considers in the guise of the apparatus of capture and which might perhaps be understood by Esposito as an 'institution': Agamben has recently written that, in light of what has happened to us over the last two years, it is time to set human life free from institutions, a possibility that Esposito's position, particularly in his later thought, explicitly rules out. But here we ask the question of just what an apparatus – or rather a 'machine' – is. In the context of Esposito's *Two* and Agamben's *The Kingdom and the Glory* these machines operate in a curiously similar fashion, oscillating between two poles and feeding off the life that they have ensnared, to the point of exhaustion. In this way we hope to determine what is to be done with these machines at what seems to be a turning point in their history.

The following three essays pursue tracks that may be said to diverge from the biopolitical tradition into supposedly less 'radical' areas of thought, but nevertheless they may be seen to exemplify in another manner the conception of Italian thought that we began by identifying. In each case the timeliness of such apparently untimely figures as Benedetto Croce, Norberto Bobbio, Luigi Pareyson, and Carlo Sini is forcefully demonstrated, along with the fact that often the most orthodox and conservative in appearance can prove to be the most authentically radical, particularly in times when the radical left has so dishonoured itself in so many

respects. To be liberal under totalitarian rule calls for the greatest daring.

The time is ripe not just for a consideration of the living being's role as part of the civic body, but for an examination of the deliberate obliteration — which some call 'ideology', some 'censorship' — of those who might criticise the apparently hegemonic conception of that role. Equally, now is the moment to cast some light on the rather eclipsed tradition of liberal — anti-authoritarian — thought in Italy and elsewhere, at a time when liberty is in such short supply and apparently bad odour. This may be taken to demonstrate the way in which thinkers upon whom shadows of various kinds have fallen may at certain times come unexpectedly to enjoy the limelight and reflect some of their brilliance back onto current events.

Taking these essays in reverse order: Roberto Redaelli demonstrates that Carlo Sini may help us to navigate our way between the supposed idealism of the 'postmodern' and the absolutist realism of the Speculative Materialists. He is able to do so thanks to his notion of a certain skilful practice (generalised so as to encompass even its opposite — theory) which allows the human subject to make its way around its environment. This notion of practice might be said to move in the same direction as the 'excluded third' dear to those thinkers of life who wish to rescue it from the clutches of the oppositional machine, lending as it does a certain positivity to what might otherwise be the object of a negative-theological (or *purely* transcendental) discourse.

Just as it is through breathing that the living being and the world come to suffuse one another, and through *oikeiōsis* that they come to accommodate themselves to one another, here the relation between man and world is no longer understood according to the Modern conception of a subject and an object (this anti-Cartesianism was also identified by Esposito as a striking tendency of Italian thought). Indeed, the way in which a practice constitutes its own subject and object rather than being preceded by them bears a striking resemblance to Agamben's notion of 'use'.

If the relation — use or practice — that life takes up with itself is immediately a relation with others, then the telling of that life in the form of an autobiography must include an account of these others. Franco Manni's semi-autobiographical account of his relations with Croce and Bobbio depicts a common life at once intellectual and personal. The very possibility of such a thing as an 'intellectual (auto)biography' testifies to the intimate intertwining of thought and life, philosophy and living, while the account of an intellectual apprenticeship demonstrates that such a biography need not be merely individual but may uncover the way in which teaching — the teaching of philosophy in particular, it might be said — can make possible an intellectual (and personal) community comprised of those who live and breathe the same air and take in the same lofty philosophical atmosphere.

Daniele Fulvi in a text on evil in Pareyson (a notion that recent thinkers like Simona Forti have also not been afraid to rehabilitate) shows us that even in what Esposito might label — critically — a 'personalistic' philosophy, in this case a

personalism of an existentialist type, given to stressing the freedom of the individual (hence the ineluctable tendency towards a certain liberalism or libertarianism within existentialism), such a person is constituted only in a relation to something that transcends it. In Pareyson's case this is not another human being on the same plane of immanence, but rather Being or God: thus the individual from the very first does not do without a communal relation, it is just that here this assumes the form of a bond in the sense of *religio* rather than an obligation to a finite other. But even here, God is taken to have a personal form, as existing through a free act of will rather than being necessitated by his concept as the ontological argument affirms. Thus, even when one is abandoned, given over entirely to one's self, one is never altogether alone, and the person is always at least two.

There is also another ever so slightly concealed relation between Pareyson and the biopolitical thinkers that have occupied the greater part of our attention thus far: the existentialist urge towards the concretion of singular existents is entirely commensurate in its underlying thrust with the turning of thought in the direction of the real that we have picked out as a potential characteristic of Italian thought. To what extent the philosophers of biopolitics might be said discreetly to enjoy an existentialist filiation, even when their terminology seems distant from it, would merit further study (in the present volume, Tom Frost draws attention to the privileging of *existentia* over *essentia*, mode over substance, the priority of the hypostatic event, that Agamben sometimes broaches in the wake of a certain existentialistic moment in the early Levinas and the Neo-Platonists; and this without yet even mentioning the Heideggerian legacy).

In the section of the journal devoted to Reviews, the question of life in a non-human form is addressed by Ermanno Castanò's reading of a text on animality edited by Felice Cimatti and Carlo Salzani. He demonstrates, following Cimatti and Esposito, among others, that Giambattista Vico's rejection of Descartes' dualism between thought and extension allowed Italian thought from the very beginning to conceive the relation between man and animal in a way that would not receive the attention it was due until our own century, with the waning of the Cartesian paradigm. This is the relation to animals that Francis of Assisi embodied, in which the law of sovereign power, the symbolic 'no' that is said to separate us absolutely from the animal realm, has declined and the paradise from which it expelled us may once again be glimpsed.

If the Aristotelian hierarchy of souls runs, effectively, from the lifeless stone to the barely living plant, to irrational beasts and the rational animal that is man, hovering indeterminately between the lifeless and the living, around stone, plant, and animal, lies the virus, failing to abide by even the most elementary principle of human thought, the principle of identity, being subject to a continuous potential metamorphosis. For something that by any measure barely exists, it has had — indirectly — immeasurable consequences for the human polity in recent times. Thus we conclude with two review essays devoted once again to the relation

between community and immunity. Beyond the interpretations of Esposito given earlier, we find in Giorgio Astone's review of Donatella Di Cesare's text on 'resident foreigners', a philosophy of migration in which *debt* (in the sense of *munus*) remains central, as does the immunisation that ensues when one washes one's hands of obligations to others. The state functions in an immunising fashion when it stems the freely moving flow of migration — so much akin to the supposed dispersion of the virus — so as to clearly delineate its boundaries and the conditions that might allow someone from beyond the seas to belong to it. Once again, it seems to be state sovereignty that is responsible for such 'life and death decisions', and this impels Di Cesare in an anarchistic direction. At stake, throughout this volume, is the extent to which a community is prepared to sacrifice itself in the name of an immunity that preserves its identity, and the question of who is to say that it should.

From Voice to *Pneuma* and Back: Italian Pneumatologies Against Derrida's Grammatology

Alberto Parisi

In the last few decades, pneumatology has undergone a gradual but noteworthy revival. Reflections on air, wind, breath, and their primary linguistic product — the voice — as well as atmospheres and *Stimmungen*, have made a consistent appearance in various fields of the humanities and the social sciences at large.[1] The global event of the Covid pandemic has only given these approaches, paradoxically, new life.[2] There is in our breath — many seem now to agree — something worth studying but, more importantly, something decisive for human beings and for their world, if not foundational, with all the dangers that such a formulation implies.

And yet to some others, grounded perhaps in certain post-structuralist traditions, this will come as a surprise. After the ground-breaking works of Jacques Derrida and his grammatology fifty years ago, his retrieval of writing from phono- and logo-centrism, one could hardly have expected such a return of Derrida's first principal targets: the voice and the breath of self-presence, namely Spirit, *Geist*.[3] Indeed, the paradox seems to be that if, as Michael Naas once noted, grammatology had come to 'announce the end or the closure of a certain Greco-

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[1] Concerning different perspectives on and disciplinary approaches to breathing, from continental philosophy to political science, from environmental studies to the medical humanities, see *Atmospheres of Breathing*, ed. L. Škof and P. Berndtson (Albany: SUNY Press, 2018). On the voice, see *Zwischen Rauschen und Offenbarung: zur Kultur- und Mediengeschichte der Stimme*, ed. F. Kittler, T. Mancho and S. Weigel (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2002). On *Stimmungen* and atmospheres, central are the reflections by the Neue Phänomenologie school started by Hermann Schmitz and advanced by Gernot Böhme. Hermann Schmitz, *System der Philosophie*, 5 vols. (Bonn: Bouvier, 1964–1980). Hermann Schmitz, *Atmosphären* (Freiburg: Alber, 2014). Gernot Böhme, *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, trans. J. Thibaud (London: Routledge, 2016). For a general overview of the debate on atmospheres and *Stimmungen* see *Atmosphere and Aesthetics: A Plural Perspective*, ed. T. Griffero and M. Tedeschini, (Cham: Springer, 2019). Also fascinating is the rediscovery of the importance of the wind in Japanese and more broadly Eastern Asian thought, as well as in relation to 20th century continental philosophy. Lorenzo Marinucci, 'Structures of Breathing: East Asian Contributions to a Phenomenology of Embodiment', *Studi di Estetica* 45, no. 2 (2017): 99–116. Also in Black Studies, there has been a new interest in breath: Ashon T. Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

[2] Achille Mbembe, 'The Universal Right to Breathe', *Critical Inquiry* 47, no. 2 (2021): 58–62.

[3] Pneumatology is here understood as any kind of reflection on *pneuma* or *spiritus*, words that for the Ancient Greeks and Romans meant at the same time spirit and breath, or more generally air.

Christian pneumatology', its effects have been the opposite.[4] Or rather, the situation that has arisen from the ruins of deconstruction is much more complicated.

In this article, I argue that such a situation becomes more comprehensible if one grapples with a specific line of Italian philosophy that first appeared as Derrida was composing his early writings and, running parallel to them, gives centre stage to the voice and, subsequently, breath.[5] The thinkers I have chosen to examine here are Giorgio Colli, Giorgio Agamben, Adriana Cavarero, and Emanuele Coccia. In fact, if a place of interest on the global scene has by now been re-established for Italian philosophy, thanks to the debate around the so-called 'Italian difference', the reflections on pneumatology proposed by these philosophers have been underestimated.[6] And yet some of these thinkers are considered among the leading philosophers of our time.

What one finds, by turning to these thinkers, is that the return to voice and breath that one observes in many fields nowadays does not need to be a return to a metaphysics of presence of the kind theorised by Derrida.[7] Rather it is the attempt to re-imagine the voice and its relationship to language, beyond the polarity of 'speech-writing' and 'subject-world', which characterises Western philosophy.

1. Derrida's *écriture*

In 1967, the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, with the publication in a single year of what were to be three incredibly influential texts, began his life-long battle against logo- and phono-centrism in favour of writing (*écriture*), or what he called

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[4] Michael Naas confines Derrida's enmity towards pneumatology to European pneumatology. And indeed, less Euro-centric approaches are being developed around the world (see footnote 1). At the same time, although one could argue that the new pneumatologies are less and less Christian (Crawley's book is an interesting exception), most of them accept or try to retrieve a certain ancient Greek notion of *pneuma*. Michael Naas, 'Pneumatology, *Pneuma*, *Souffle*, Breath (OG 17; DG 29)', *Reading Derrida's* Of Grammatology, ed. S. Gaston and I. Maclachlan (New York: Continuum, 2011), 30.

[5] In this sense, such a line of development should then be juxtaposed to and studied side by side with the philosophical traditions analysed by Lenart Škof in one of the most important books of the recent *breath turn*. Lenart Škof, *Breath of Proximity: Intersubjectivity, Ethics, Peace* (New York: Springer, 2015).

[6] The expression derives from Antonio Negri's essay, firstly published by Nottetempo, and then reprinted in the English anthology of essays of the same title. Antonio Negri, *La differenza italiana* (Roma: Nottetempo, 2005). *The Italian Difference: Between Nihilism and Biopolitics*, ed. L. Chiesa & A. Toscano (Melbourne: re.press, 2009). See also: Roberto Esposito, *Living Thought: The Origins and Actuality of Italian Philosophy*, trans. Z. Hanafi (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2012). For a noteworthy summary of the various philosophical positions in Italian philosophy in the second half of the 20th century, see Giuseppe Cantarano, *Immagini del nulla. La filosofia italiana contemporanea* (Milano: Mondadori, 1998).

[7] This also does not mean that some attempts to rethink the voice and breath cannot indeed fall back into metaphysics once again.

arche-writing (*archi-écriture*). This implied, however a fundamental critique of pneumatology, which would only be noticed by critics much later.

Developing Heidegger's critique of Western philosophy as 'metaphysics', Derrida argued that the origin of metaphysics lay primarily in a favouring of the voice over writing. Indeed, he maintained, it is due to the experience of the voice that something like universality, ideality, and all the binary oppositions upon which these concepts are based (universal/particular, ideal/sensible, *essentia/existentia*, soul/body), as well as the idea of a pure subject and a pure presence could arise. This is what he discerned in Plato's 'pharmacy',[8] in Husserl's phenomenology,[9] and in Rousseau's and Saussure's linguistic theories:[10] according to his studies, the fundamental experience of 'metaphysics' amounted to the experience of the voice.

Such a claim, however, remains incomprehensible unless we understand what Derrida means by voice. For him, the experience of the voice means the experience of hearing-oneself-speak or, in French, the experience of *s'entendre-parler*. What is at stake for Derrida in the voice as *s'entendre-parler* is the *entendre*, a verb that in French can mean, at one and the same time, 'to hear', 'to understand', and to 'intend', a direct cognate of the German *Intention*, a central concept of Husserl's phenomenology. It is on the meaning of *entendre* that his criticism of the voice turns: the voice is the voice of self-presence because in the act of hearing one's own self speak all of these meanings come to coincide and the subject/consciousness both hears and intends itself at the same time. Or as he puts it:

> When I speak, it belongs to the phenomenological essence of this operation that I hear myself [*je m'entende*] at the same time that I speak. The signifier, animated by my breath and by the meaning-intention (in Husserl's language, the expression animated by the *Bedeutungsintention*), is in absolute proximity to me. The living act, the life-giving act, the *Lebendigkeit*, which animates the body of the signifier and transforms it into a meaningful expression, the soul of language, seems not to separate itself from itself, from its own self-presence.[11]

At this moment, when my voice is present, I am whole. I am here and fully here only in this voice, which I hear, possess, and in which I understand the meaning I wanted to impart to it. Meaning (intention/*entendre*) and presence

[8] Jacques Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy', in *Dissemination*, trans. B. Johnson (London: Athlone Press, 1981). First published in *Tel Quel* in 1968.

[9] Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. D. B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

[10] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. C. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

[11] Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 77.

(hearing/*entendre*) coincide and do so without the necessity of an outside or of any medium. It is here — Derrida claims — that the dream of a pure interiority, of universality and of pure presence is created and metaphysics begins.[12]

Interestingly, Derrida only seldom mentions what makes this experience of the voice possible, but when he does his judgement is final. Notice a particular *undertone* in the previous quotation. The voice, the origin of metaphysics, the origin of all the conceptual chasms of Western philosophy is, in turn, based on the *souffle* (breath), on *pneuma:*

> When I speak, it belongs to the phenomenological essence of this operation that I hear myself [*je m'entende*] at the same time that I speak. The signifier, **animated by my breath** [*souffle*] and by the meaning-intention [...] is in absolute proximity to me. The living act, the life-giving act, the *Lebendigkeit*, which animates the body of the signifier and transforms it into a meaningful expression, **the soul of language** [*l'âme du langage*], seems not to separate itself from itself, from its own self-presence.[13]

When describing the voice, Derrida automatically conjures up pneumatological language. The experience of the voice that he describes is based in its turn on the possibility of breath and of something like a 'soul' or a *Geist* (spirit). Indeed, almost anticipating some of the criticisms that will make an appearance later in the present work, Derrida claims in his introduction to *Speech and Phenomena*:

> For it is not in the sonorous substance or in the physical voice, in the body of speech in the world, that he [Husserl] will recognise an original affinity with the logos in general, but in the voice phenomenologically taken, speech in its transcendental flesh, in the breath, the intentional animation that transforms the body of the word into flesh, makes of the *Körper* a *Leib*, a *geistige Leiblichkeit*. The phenomenological voice would be this spiritual flesh that continues to speak and be present to itself — to hear itself — in the absence of the world.[14]

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[12] 'The operation of "hearing oneself speak" is an auto-affection of a unique kind. On the one hand, it operates within the medium of universality; what appears as signified therein must be idealities that are *idealiter* indefinitely repeatable or transmissible as the same. On the other hand, the subject can hear or speak to himself and be affected by the signifier he produces, without passing through an external detour, the world, the sphere of what is not "his own"'. Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 78.

[13] Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 77.

[14] Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 16.

What is problematic according to Derrida's view is not the corporeal and physical voice, but rather the internal, silent voice of the consciousness/conscience, the animating soul, or rather, the spirit, as he keeps repeating through accumulations in more than one language: in other words, pneumatology. Even if the criticism is not about the physical voice, everything begins from the *souffle*, the breath, the same 'pure breath' that, in *Of Grammatology*, he would claim to lie at the foundations of Rousseau's onto-theological vision.[15]

It is for this reason that grammatology can after all be read as an anti-pneumatology. Derrida hints at it once and quite enigmatically, but after the previous discussion, it becomes quite clear:

> Natural writing is immediately united to the voice and to breath. Its nature is not grammatological but pneumatological. It is hieratic, very close to the interior holy voice of the Profession of Faith, to the voice one hears upon retreating into oneself: full and truthful presence of the divine voice to our inner sense.[16]

As Michael Naas has pointed out, what makes this passage ambiguous is the reference to a writing that is pneumatological instead of grammatological.[17] But to make sense of it, it is enough to stress the adjective 'natural'. With 'natural writing' what is meant here is a writing that preserves its origin, almost a divine writing, such as the Scriptures would be, in which the voice of God is always present and expressing itself. This kind of writing, Derrida claims, can therefore be considered pneumatological — it has a direct link to the breath and the voice of the speaker — and has nothing to do with grammatology.[18] But then grammatology and pneumatology should really be considered apart and in opposition for Derrida. The way out of metaphysics that he envisions in the *gramma*, in the letter, a grammatology, a theory that is founded not on the originary voice of presence but on a non-originary difference offered by writing (*écriture*), means a complete rebuttal of pneumatology.

A few months after Derrida's death, his colleague and then dear friend Jean-Luc Nancy honoured him with a brief text reporting three sentences he had heard from Derrida during his life, and which had never been written. At stake, Nancy wrote, was the necessity to report Derrida's voice itself, perhaps for one last time, 'because it is the voice that carries the traces and creates the differences, it is vocal writing (and not, obviously, the silent and transcendental voice)'.[19] Furthermore,

[15] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 247–55.
[16] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 17.
[17] Naas, 29.
[18] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 17.
[19] Where an English translation does not exist or is not indicated, the translation is mine. Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Trois phrases de Jacques Derrida', *Rue Descartes* 48 (2005): 67–69. Nancy himself reflected on the voice at various times in his career and in ways that diverged from his teacher.

he added, Derrida himself claimed in 1980, against some people who wanted, in his presence, to discredit the voice: 'But I have never said anything against the voice!' And, indeed, Derrida's later works are full of very different references to the voice in its physicality, above all to its rhythm, its tone, and its intonations, as fundamental aspects of *écriture*. As he wrote in *Monolingualism of the Other*, for example:

> If I have always trembled before what I could say, it was fundamentally [*au fond*] because of the tone, and not the substance [*non du fond*]. And what, obscurely, I seek to impart as if in spite of myself, to give or lend to others as well as to myself, to myself as well as to the other, is perhaps a tone. Everything is summoned from an intonation. And even earlier still, in what gives its tone to the tone, a rhythm. I think that all in all, it is upon rhythm that I stake everything.[20]

His criticism of speech notwithstanding, Derrida saw the physical voice as a place of *différance*, as another text in which traces are always at work: against the pneumatological interior voice of presence, he tried to stress the voice as tone and rhythm.

Towards the end of his life, he made this implicit view of the voice even more clear: 'I expanded the notion of trace to include the voice itself, with the idea of reconsidering the subordination in philosophy, from Greek antiquity, of writing to the word (logocentrism), and to the living present of the voice (phonocentrism)'.[21] Derrida's plan was never to subordinate the voice, but rather to make of the voice itself a trace, a writing. But for him, this never meant a return to or a rediscovery of pneumatology.[22]

Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Vox Clamans in Deserto' in *The Birth to Presence*, trans. B. Holmes et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

[20] Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other, or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. P. Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 48. I wish to thank Ernest Julius Mitchell for this reference and for many other suggestions regarding the present work. See also Verena Andermatt Conley and Jacques Derrida, 'Voice II...' *boundary 2*, vol. 12, no. 2 (1984): 68–93.

[21] Jacques Derrida and Jérôme-Alexandre Nielsberg, 'Jacques Derrida, penseur de l'évènement', *L'Humanité*, January 28th, 2004.

[22] It is also at the basis of his critique of Heidegger in *Of Spirit*. Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. G. Bennington and R. Bowlby (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989). For more on Derrida's critique of breath see Škof, 127–56. Perhaps the closest thing to a different, materialist pneumatology that Derrida wrote is his early essay on Artaud: Jacques Derrida, 'La parole soufflée' in *Writing and Difference*, trans. A. Bass (New York: Routledge, 2001).

2. Giorgio Colli against writing

To understand how a certain line of Italian philosophers came to develop a new pneumatology against the prohibition of deconstruction, it is necessary to begin at an earlier point and with a philosopher who, although less well-known to Anglophone scholars and still untranslated into English, was readily available and widely read by the philosophers discussed in the final part of this article: Giorgio Colli. What one finds in Colli's 'philosophy of expression', as he called it, is a powerful and noteworthy attack on writing, which he developed at almost exactly the same time that Derrida was publishing his defence (1969) and which was destined to mark later Italian responses to deconstruction.

At first sight, as Edoardo Toffoletto has also noticed, Colli's critique of writing appears as a mere repetition of what Derrida calls the logo- or phono-centrism of the Western philosophical tradition.[23] He repeats the classic Platonic arguments that one can find in the *Phaedrus*, and which Derrida had deconstructed in 'Plato's Pharmacy' (as well as the books already mentioned).[24] Colli claims that: writing is 'exterior', a mere 'surrogate' (Derrida would say 'supplement'); it is mortifying and illusory, because it gives a fake impression of durability and eternity; instead of clarifying, it opens to 'multiple interpretations;' finally, detaching words from the subjects of enunciation, it transforms their speeches into mere spectacle.[25]

However, what is fascinating about Colli's philosophy is that he reaches these conclusions, diametrically opposed to Derrida's conception of writing, by starting from extremely similar premises to Derrida's. Indeed, behind Colli's apparent phonocentrism, there is not a proper logocentrism, but rather a critique of language and the word (*logos*). At the origin of Colli's philosophy of expression there is the belief that words are completely unable to reach universals, because the whole world is representation, expression, continuous reference of something to something else, without a possible leap towards the *arché* of these series.[26] There is, literally, nothing beyond the text.[27] But the text happens already at the level of the voice and of words, and this situation leads Colli to derive precisely the opposite theory to Derrida: it is not in the intention of the voice, namely in self-presence, to which the voice testifies, that universals are born; but in and through writing.

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[23] Edoardo Toffoletto, 'Espressione e scrittura. Dall'economia ristretta all'economia generale', in *Alle origini del* logos*. Studi su* La nascita della filosofia *di Giorgio Colli,* ed. G. M. Cavalli e R. Cavalli (Torino: Accademia University Press, 2018), 138.

[24] Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy'.

[25] Colli, *Filosofia dell'espressione*, 197-200.

[26] Toffoletto agrees that it is thanks to this claim that Colli's philosophy of expression can be spared the label of 'metaphysics of presence': 'Colli's suggestion can hardly be reduced to a metaphysics of presence, since all the elements (from proxemics and the voice to the experience of the instant), on which the metaphysics of presence depends, are considered in the philosophy of expression as expressions and not as something immediate'. Toffoletto, 144.

[27] And yet there is an *arché*, which is perhaps the decisive difference between these Italian philosophers and Derrida. Colli, *Filosofia dell'espressione*, 97.

> The living word recalls directly the universal [Colli clarifies numerous times that this is, however, an illusion and a falsification], while when one confronts writing, which should recall it indirectly, one skips the step of the word, or rather one confuses word and universal and takes them to be one thing.[28]

According to Colli, when speaking, one believes oneself to be directly touching universals but, at the same time, one is reminded of the fact that this is not the case, because of the weakness of words. It is in writing, on the other hand, that universals are given free reign, and one believes that they are everything one is left with. It is writing that produces abstract universals and, in the end, the possibility of something like objective discourse, science.

As Colli argues more straightforwardly in *La nascita della filosofia*, it is then with writing that metaphysics begins and not with the voice. Philosophy, as Colli seems to call what Derrida, following Heidegger, named metaphysics, is precisely *'philo-sophia'*:

> On the other hand, Plato himself allows us to attempt such a reconstruction, [...] when he calls his own literature 'philosophy', opposing it to the earlier *'sophia'* (wisdom). There are no doubts on this point: at various times, Plato designates the age of Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Empedocles as the era of the 'sages', before whom he presents himself merely as a philosopher, namely as a 'lover of wisdom', which means one who does not possess wisdom.[29]

For Colli, *wisdom* was the largely oral tradition of Greek poetry and religion, already murky by the time of Plato, who (like every philosopher after him) constantly tried to recover it by covering it further through the act of writing. Colli argues that metaphysics, which he calls *'philo-sophia'*, was precisely this fundamental forgetting of the spoken voice of wise men and women — sybils and Pythias included — in favour of *writing*.[30]

Colli and Derrida start from extremely similar premises to reach divergent conclusions. And yet, what they are looking for is extremely similar too. Colli tells us so right in the middle of his critique of writing. What writing erases is 'what by necessity counts the most, the living language in its breath rhythm, rooted in animated things'.[31] The two have, paradoxically — and this will be true for all the philosophers studied in this article — the same aim: to retrieve the physical voice in its intonation, tone, and rhythm. There seems to hide beneath both traditions a common Nietzschean root, which leans, however, to the side of Colli and the other

[28] Colli, *Filosofia dell'espressione*, 200.
[29] Giorgio Colli, *La nascita della filosofia* (Milano: Adelphi, 1975), 110–11.
[30] Colli, *La nascita della filosofia*, 109-116.
[31] Colli, *Filosofia dell'espressione*, 197-200.

Italian philosophers we are examining. In an unpublished fragment from 1882, which Colli would have known very well since he was, with Mazzino Montinari, the editor of the critical edition of Nietzsche's complete works, Nietzsche writes:

> 296. The most comprehensible part of language is not the word itself, but rather tone, force, modulation, tempo, with which a series of words is spoken — in short, the music behind the words, the passion behind this music, the person behind this passion: thus all of those things that cannot be written. So it has nothing to do with writing *[Deshalb ist es nichts mit Schriftstellerei]*.[32]

At the bottom of their philosophical search, there is the necessity to find a different voice. But this seems to have hardly anything to do with writing.

3. Agamben's critique of Derrida

Colli's critique of writing is certainly not the only or even the main factor in the development of a certain interest in the voice and pneumatology in Italy in opposition to Derrida's grammatology. This article only wishes to take Colli, whom Agamben claimed to be among the three most important Italian philosophers of the 20th century, as representative of moods and attitudes that were prevalent in Italy at the time Derrida was renewing the philosophical and literary scene in France.[33] Indeed, when read in the context of Colli's attack on writing, certain developments in Italian philosophy become much clearer, with particular regard to Agamben's and Cavarero's critique of Derrida and his conception of the voice.[34]

Agamben's first reading of Derrida appeared extremely early. Already in an article about the discipline of linguistics in 1968, entitled 'The Tree of Language', Agamben argued against contemporary linguistics by claiming that both linguists and their critics, among whom he mentioned explicitly and solely Derrida, had not been able to abandon the conception of the sign that defines metaphysics.

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[32] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol. 14, *Unpublished Fragments from the Period of* Thus Spoke Zarathustra *(Summer 1882–Winter 1883/84)*, trans. P. S. Loeb and D. F. Tinsley (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), 75. On Nietzsche and breath see also Michael Lewis, 'A Voice that is Merely Breath', *The Philosopher* 106, no. 1 (2018). As Lewis points out, Derrida had noticed that Nietzsche had the word 'being' derive etymologically from 'breath'.

[33] 'On the bookshelf down the left there is a picture of Giorgio Colli, whose works, together with Enzo Melandri's and Gianni Carchia's, will certainly endure as testaments to 20th Century Italian thought. Of the others, who are presented on television as the major philosophers of our times, nothing at all will remain'. Giorgio Agamben, *Autoritratto nello studio* (Milano: Nottetempo, 2017), 128.

[34] Although numerous books have been written on Agamben and his 'philosophical lineage', very few studies have analysed the importance of Colli for Agamben. A very recent exception is Alexander Ferguson's dissertation, 'Agamben's Philosophy of Language: Reflections on *Experimentum Vocis*', MA dissertation, University of Bologna, 2021.

> Despite radical critiques by philosophers — who have recently even spoken of 'the historical closure' of the 'age of the sign'[[35]] — the dogma of the sign remains intact. In this sense, it can be said that contemporary linguistics remains faithful to Saussure's semiological project to the very end. Language, for this project, remains *phônê sêmantiké;* a sonic emission that signifies something.[36]

According to Agamben, linguists and critics alike keep preserving the original conception of the sign as an indivisible union of signifier and signified and they do so because they understand language as *'phônê sêmantiké'*, as a 'signifying voice:' a voice in which, to use Derrida's terms, the meaning (intention/*entendre*) and the hearing (*entendre*) coincide.

It would take Agamben ten more years to formulate his fundamental criticism of Derrida's grammatology in a more complete form. In 1977, in the very final chapter of *Stanzas*, Agamben returned to the problem of the sign but this time focused explicitly on the role of the letter and writing in the history of metaphysics. According to Agamben, Derrida was an extremely significant thinker, and he will keep maintaining this until at least the 1990s:[37] because Derrida had finally shown, in extremely clear terms, the 'solidarity between the history of Western metaphysics and the interpretation of signification as the unity of a signifier and a signified'.[38] However, Derrida had committed one mistake, albeit a fundamental one: he believed that he had found a way out of metaphysics in the letter, in the *gramma*. Suddenly, the issue with Derrida's theory is precisely its central tenet, that same tenet which Colli's philosophy of expression could not accept: the recovery of the priority of writing over the voice.

Writing is not a way out of metaphysics, but why not? Because writing is, ironically, as Colli had claimed, at the very origin of metaphysics. But while Colli was writing at the same time as Derrida, Agamben is writing afterwards and can

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[35] There is here a footnote in the original text and the reference is to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, which had just been published the year before. Giorgio Agamben, 'L'albero del linguaggio', *I problemi di Ulisse* 63 (1968), 112. The essay has recently been republished (with an English translation) in this journal. Giorgio Agamben, 'The Tree of Language', *The Journal of Italian Philosophy* 1 (2018), 19.

[36] Agamben, 'The Tree of Language', 19.

[37] Still in 1989, in the preface to the French edition of *Infancy and History*: 'The voice has never been written into language, and the *gramma* (as Derrida has in due time demonstrated) is but the very form of the presupposing of self and of potency'. Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History*, trans. L. Heron (New York: Verso, 1993), 8–9. Translation modified. On the Agamben-Derrida debate before the publication of *What Is Philosophy?* (2016) see: Kevin Attell, *Giorgio Agamben: Beyond the Threshold of Deconstruction* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015) & William Watkin, *The Literary Agamben* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 4–38.

[38] Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, trans. R. L. Martinez (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 155. Translation modified.

explicitly take a stand against his theory. Writing is at the origin of metaphysics because metaphysics is not simply 'the interpretation of the fracture of presence as a duality of appearance and essence, of signifier and signified, of sensible and intelligible'; but rather 'that presence be always already caught in a signification'.[39] The issue is again that of the *phone semantike:*

> Both gramma and *phone* in fact belong to the Greek metaphysical project, which, defining 'grammar' as the reflection on language and conceiving of the *phone* as *semantike* (that is, as the sign of a 'writing in the soul'), thought of language from the outset from the point of view of the 'letter'.[40]

From the very beginning, Greek metaphysics, what is usually called philosophy, is a reflection on grammar, on a voice that has meaning, in the sense of a voice that reads something written in the soul: this tradition thinks language always already from the point of view of the 'letter'.

However, this formulation from *Stanzas* is not extremely clear. There seems to be a missing step in the argument, a step Agamben continues to contemplate to this day.[41] What is difficult to understand is why it should be the letter that causes presence to always already be caught up in a signification and not the voice, the *phone*, which signifies something. The reason is finally given in *Language and Death* (1982). The aim of the book is to show that metaphysics is, precisely as Derrida claimed, a search for the Voice.[42] But that this eternally inconclusive search is caused by the original articulation (*arthron*) of the animal voice into a *phone semantike*.[43] And what has made possible, in turn, such an articulation is precisely the *gramma*, the letter, and writing.

To show this, Agamben decides to interpret once again a famous passage from Aristotle's *De interpretatione*, which Derrida had read as phonocentric. A closer look at Agamben's reading will show his vicinity to Colli. Aristotle's text runs as follows:

> That which is in the voice [*ta en te phone*] contains the symbols of mental experience, and written words are the symbols of that which

[39] Agamben, *Stanzas,* 156.
[40] Agamben, *Stanzas*, 156.
[41] Agamben returns to the problem of the *phone semantike* and of grammar in *What Is Philosophy?* as well as in some of his reflections following the Covid pandemic in *Quando la casa brucia*. However, the critique of writing is the same. Giorgio Agamben, *What Is Philosophy?* trans. L. Chiesa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 1–28. Giorgio Agamben, *Quando la casa brucia* (Macerata: Giometti & Antonello, 2020), 40–48.
[42] Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death*, trans. K. E. Pinkus and M. Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 35-36.
[43] Agamben, *Language and Death*, 39.

> is in the voice. Just as all men do not have the same writing [*grammata*], so all men do not have the same voices [*phonai*], but the mental experiences, which these directly symbolise, are the same for all, as also are those things [*pragmata*] of which our experiences are the images.[44]

According to Agamben, Aristotle explains here the signifying nature of language through the interconnectedness of three elements: 'that which is in the voice interprets and signifies the mental experience that, in turn, corresponds to the *pragmata*'.[45] What remains unexplored and what was already puzzling to ancient commentators was the role of the *grammata*, of writing. Why did Aristotle introduce writing here? Following the ancient commentators, who passed on this interpretation to Western culture, Agamben argues that once one understands language's power of signification as 'a reference between voices and mental experiences, and between mental experiences and things', letters then become necessary to interpret the voices, which otherwise would once again escape signification.[46]

This is the heart of the matter. Letters intervene – Agamben claims – to save the hermeneutical circle and to allow signification in the first place. In this way, they achieve a privileged status, which ancient Greek grammatical thought summarised by defining the letter as both a sign (like the voice, the mental experiences, and the objects) and 'also an element of voice (*stoicheion tes phones*)'.[47] It is only because of the letter that the material sound, the animal voice, could be articulated into a signifying voice: it is the letter that creates this internal difference within the voice between a disarticulated voice, the material sound, and what in Derrida would be 'the transcendental, silent voice'. But, then, this means that, as Colli claimed, it is in and through writing and not through the voice that universals and the idea of a universal subject are formed:

> This means that, from the beginning, Western reflections on language locate the *gramma* and not the voice in the originary place. In fact, as a sign the *gramma* presupposes both the voice and its removal, but as an element, it has the structure of a purely negative self-affection, of a trace of itself. [...] Metaphysics is always already grammatology and this is *fundamentology* in the sense that the *gramma* (or the Voice) functions as the negative ontological foundation.[48]

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[44] Aristotle, *The Works of Aristotle*, vol. 1, *De interpretatione*, trans. E. M. Edghill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), 16a.
[45] Agamben, *Language and Death*, 38.
[46] Agamben, *Language and Death*, 38.
[47] Agamben, *Language and Death*, 39.
[48] Agamben, *Language and Death*, 39.

The purely negative self-affection that Derrida believed himself to have found in the experience of the *s'entendre-parler* is actually a product of the letter itself. Derrida did not find the way out of metaphysics, but simply determined its fundamental problem.

4. The voice in Italy: from Agamben to Cavarero

It is not simple to reconstruct, forty years later, the influence that Agamben's reflections on the voice – which means his critique of Derrida's grammatology – have had on Italian culture. And yet, it is necessary to lay a few pathmarks in order to understand how such a reflection on the voice could lead to a new interest in breath, a new pneumatology.

In the early 1980s a series of interesting conferences and events took place that were devoted to the voice. The proceedings of one such series was collected in the book, *Fonè. La voce e la traccia* and still awaits further study.[49] But perhaps the book that best encapsulates the interest in the voice that developed in Italy at that time and which has still not been extinguished is Corrado Bologna's *Flatus vocis. Metafisica e antropologia della voce*. Written initially in 1981 as an entry for the *Enciclopedia Einaudi* – on Agamben's suggestion – and published in 1992, the book makes use of many of Agamben's findings to formulate a wide-ranging, pluralistic view of the voice.[50] Bologna's approach can be, at times, ambiguous. Sometimes it is hard to differentiate philosophical views from one another – Derrida's and Agamben's claims, for example, are juxtaposed without any real critical discussion of their premises.[51] And yet Bologna's *Flatus vocis* has a particular merit: it opened the reflection on the voice to different influxes. Pneumatological ones proved the strongest. He developed, for example, the analysis by Elémire Zolla, an Italian writer and scholar of mysticism, of the various aerial metaphors used for the soul in different traditions from his *Le potenze dell'anima. Morfologia dello spirito nella storia della cultura* (1968).[52] And he reinterpreted Agamben's pneumatological readings of Mediaeval love poetry from *Stanzas* in the context of the voice, where Agamben had hardly made such an explicit connection.[53] One could say that with Bologna's book, the voice returned to being a pneumatological issue, though he did not at the time employ that word.

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[49] The series of talks took place in Florence between 1982 and 1983 and was then repeated in 1984 in Paris at the Centre Pompidou. Among the speakers were Jacques Derrida himself, Emmanuel Levinas, Julia Kristeva, Giorgio Agamben, Giorgio Caproni, and many others. *Fonè. La voce e la traccia,* ed. S. Mecatti (Firenze: La Casa Usher, 1985).

[50] Corrado Bologna, *Flatus vocis. Metafisica e antropologia della voce* (Bologna: Il mulino, 1992), 16.

[51] Bologna, *Flatus vocis*, 23–27.

[52] Elémire Zolla, *Le potenze dell'anima. Morfologia dello spirito nella storia della cultura* (Milano: Bompiani, 1968).

[53] Bologna, *Flatus vocis*, 41–44. Agamben, *Stanzas*, 90–109.

But the most powerful expression of this new development can be found in Adriana Cavarero's philosophy, in which the critique of writing in Colli and Agamben is reinterpreted through the pneumatological references found in Bologna and in an explicitly materialist fashion, thanks to the interventions of Julia Kristeva's and Hélène Cixous's feminist philosophies. In her book, *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (2003),[54] in which she explicitly mentions Colli but not Agamben, it is claimed that the history of metaphysics should be read as the history of the *devocalisation* of the *logos.*[55] In line with the critique of writing analysed in the first part of this article, but bringing it to its materialist extreme, Cavarero shows that metaphysics is the history of the way in which the material voice was slowly ostracised from the realm of thought and made something merely sensible.[56] Once again, what she finds is that something like the difference between sensible and intelligible, particular and universal, which Derrida had claimed to be caused by the experience of the voice, is caused instead by the experience of the loss of the voice. She rereads Plato and Aristotle in ways similar to Colli and Agamben, sometimes even borrowing directly from Agamben, as in her analysis of the *phone semantike.*[57] But she takes these claims to an extreme, rethinking the voice from the ground up, more explicitly than Agamben has ever done.

Cavarero returns the voice to its very materiality: breath.[58] While she uncovers the constant attempt of Western philosophy at devocalising *logos*

[54] Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. P. A. Kottman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005). Cantarano was right when he read Cavarero's previous book, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, in explicit contrast to Derrida's conception of writing, as he rightly began his first chapter with Colli. Interestingly Agamben is almost entirely missing from his discussion and Coccia could not yet have been included. Cantarano, *Immagini del nulla*, 13–18, 34–36. Cf. Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, trans. P. A. Kottman (New York: Routledge, 2000). Originally published in Italian with the title, *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti: Filosofia della narrazione*.

[55] One could say that Cavarero's argument mirrors Gérard Verbeke's famous reconstruction of the development of the conception of the spirit (*pneuma*) from the Stoics to Augustine. According to Verbeke, the initially material *pneuma* was gradually made immaterial and 'spiritualised', in particular with the advent of Christianity. In the same way, Cavarero argues that language and thought were slowly spiritualised and the material voice made immaterial. Gérard Verbeke, *L'évolution de la doctrine du pneuma du stoicisme a S. Augustin* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1945), 511–544.

[56] Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 33–46.

[57] Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 75–78.

[58] In bringing the metaphysical project back to the materiality of breath, Cavarero does not seem too far from Verbeke's interpretation of the history of pneumatology (see footnote 54) but also from Antonio Negri's idea that materialism is what is always repressed in the history of philosophy. Antonio Negri, 'Kairos, Alma Venus, Multitudo', in *Time for Revolution*, trans. Matteo Mandarini (New York: Continuum, 2004), and already in *The Savage Anomaly: The*

(language and thought), she also turns to traditions, preceding or immanent to the metaphysical one, in which the physical voice — as air, as breath, as fleeting materiality — was considered to play a fundamental role in the thinking and linguistic process. She returns, for example, to the 'origin' of the Judeo-Christian tradition and reflects on the importance of breath *(ruah)* and voice *(qol)* in *Genesis*, where the voice of God is understood materially.[59] But perhaps one of her most interesting rediscoveries is the work of a now mostly forgotten 20th-century Cambridge philologist, Richard Broxton Onians.

In his book, *The Origins of European Thought: About the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time and Fate*, Onians emphasised the shift in the ancient Greek understanding of body, mind, and soul from Homer and the Presocratics to Plato and later philosophers. In particular, Cavarero stresses one of Onians' most fascinating findings, namely that: 'before the advent of metaphysics, it was more natural to believe that thought was a product of the lungs'.[60] Onians shows that later conceptions of the soul as breath and air, which one can find in Diogenes of Apollonia or in the Stoics, are already partially abstractions and reductions of an original traditional belief according to which consciousness, or thinking and emotions, take place in the lungs in and through respiration.[61] Thinking was speaking and speaking was breathing, Cavarero claims. The Greek word for soul (*psychè*) derives from the verb *psycho:* to breathe, just as the Latin *anima* comes from *anemos*, the Greek term for wind or breath, as Elémire Zolla has explored at length, with Bologna following her lead.[62] This link between thought and breath, for Cavarero, is the truth that metaphysics came to erase.

Like Agamben, Cavarero acknowledges her debt to Derrida's deconstruction, but she also knows how powerful a critique she poses to his grammatology. Cavarero is, after all, retrieving the voice from the pit in which, if not Derrida himself then deconstruction had left it. That is why she concludes her book with an appendix 'Dedicated to Derrida'. Here, she explains how the French philosopher, like the rest of the metaphysicians, never talked about the voice in its materiality, or he at least misread the voice in his interpretations of modern and ancient philosophers. She takes as an example Derrida's book on Husserl, *Speech and Phenomena*, and shows that he takes Husserl's conception of the voice as the internal, silent voice of pure consciousness and reads it automatically as the voice

Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), xix–xxiii.

[59] Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 19–25.

[60] Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 62.

[61] Richard Broxton Onians, *The Origins of European Thought: About the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time and Fate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 32–34. Extremely similar findings are at the basis of Hermann Schmitz's New Phenomenology. Hermann Schmitz, *System der Philosophie*, vol. 2.1, *Der Leib* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1965), 373–445.

[62] Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 66.

in general. As she wrote in a shorter version of this appendix published in French in 2014:

> There is in fact the rather serious risk that the voice of phenomenological consciousness, here deconstructed by Derrida, is a voice of thought, totally insonorous. Since Derrida himself insists on the 'living' presence of which the voice is precisely the guarantor, the question is crucial: of which voice are we speaking? Does this voice vibrate in the throat? Does it issue from the mouth and touch upon the ears [...]?[63]

The reason why this question is crucial, according to Cavarero, is that 'in its acoustic materiality, in its sonorous communication — vibrating and, therefore, living — the voice never has, in Plato as in Husserl, a foundational role'.[64] For Cavarero, Derrida follows too closely the theories he deconstructs and is not able to differentiate sufficiently between the internal, silent, phenomenological voice and the sonorous, material one. And it is for this reason that he privileges writing over the voice.

Cavarero's critique of Derrida might appear at first sight superficial: as we have already shown, Derrida himself knew his attack on the voice to be directed solely against the phenomenological voice, the interior, silent voice of consciousness. He too was interested in retrieving the voice as tone, intonation, and rhythm. Therefore, in this sense, Cavarero's critique seems to tackle a simple straw man, and quite an ugly one at that. And yet, if read in the context of the larger work and its broader arguments, the appendix conceals a kernel of truth. Indeed, what seems to be at stake in Cavarero's understanding of the voice and her implicit critique of grammatology is not really the difference between the silent voice of consciousness and the material, sonorous voice but rather what makes both possible: air, breath, spirit. This is perhaps the real critique that Cavarero's book puts to Derrida. If he had indeed believed that another conception of the voice was possible, he also thought that this could not be based on the *pneuma*, the *souffle*. He never thought that a different pneumatology, a materialist pneumatology, was possible.

5. The breath of the world: Coccia's plants

Emanuele Coccia's book *The Life of Plants* is probably one of the most fascinating and profound contemporary attempts at re-imagining pneumatology for 21st-century thought. It is certainly not by chance that it was written by an Italian philosopher, writing in French, a one-time student of Agamben now based at Derrida's EHESS. Coccia's ideas in this book seem almost too straightforward, but

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[63] Adriana Cavarero, 'La voix de Derrida', *Rue Descartes*, no. 82 (2014): 33. But also Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 224.

[64] Cavarero, 'La voix de Derrida', 33.

they hide a sophisticated mingling of ancient cosmologies with contemporary philosophical and biological theories, a mixture of the highest forms of spiritualism with a pervasive materialist intensity. What he achieves is a revitalisation, through a precise and subtle comparison with contemporary and older biological theories, of one of the most influential and yet mostly forgotten pneumatologies of the Western tradition, and one that, *pace* Derrida, is not *spiritualist*, but rather *materialist:* ancient Stoic cosmology.[65]

In *The Life of Plants* (2016), Coccia tries to go beyond 20th century Heideggerian understandings of the world, which he claims are still based on the relationship between the human being and the animal,[66] through a rediscovery of those ever-present beings that have remained, in the history of Western philosophy, almost invisible — plants. Starting from plants means, for Coccia, to start from a simple, straightforwardly intuitive, biological fact and take it seriously: plants created what humans call the world, namely a space that humans can inhabit. They created the world by making the atmosphere in which human beings live:

> They have transformed for good the face of our planet: it is through photosynthesis that oxygen came to feature so heavily in our atmosphere; it is thanks to our plants and their life that higher animal organisms can produce the energy necessary for survival. It is through them and with their help that our planet produces its atmosphere and makes breath possible for the beings that cover its outer skin. The life of plants is a cosmogony in action, the constant genesis of our cosmos.[67]

Through the process of photosynthesis, plants created breathable air. For Coccia, what plants can teach us, first and foremost, is the priority of the breath.[68] But this

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[65] There is a famous debate around the question of whether Stoicism could be considered a form of materialism. The Stoics had, in fact, a very peculiar and complex conception of matter, but at the same time one of their most fundamental beliefs was that everything one can see in the world is corporeal. The incorporeals were only four: time, place, void, and the sayables. *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, ed. H. von Armin (Leipzig: Teubner, 1903–1905), II, 331. From now on cited as *SVF.* For the debate see Max Pohlenz, *Die Stoa: Geschichte einer geistigen Bewegung*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1948), 64–69.

[66] In this regard, Coccia explicitly cites Agamben's *The Open: Man and Animal* and its analysis of the 'anthropological machine'. Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. K. Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004). With Agamben, Coccia edited an anthology on angels in the three main Abrahamic religions. Giorgio Agamben and Emanuele Coccia, *Angeli: Ebraismo Cristianesimo Islam* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2009). Furthermore, Agamben wrote an introduction to Coccia's first book, *La trasparenza delle immagini: Averroè e l'averroismo*, by Emanuele Coccia (Milano: Mondadori, 2005).

[67] Emanuele Coccia, *The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture*, trans. D. J. Montanari (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 9.

[68] Coccia, *The Life of Plants*, 35–53.

mere biological fact has enormous, metaphysical consequences. He writes:

> In making possible the world of which they are both part and content, plants destroy the topological hierarchy that seems to reign over our cosmos. They demonstrate that life is a rupture in the asymmetry between container and contained. When there is life, the container is located in the contained (and is thus contained by it); and vice versa. The paradigm of this mutual overlap is what the ancients called 'breath' (*pneuma*).[69]

This priority of the breath, to which plants testify, implies that to live is, according to Coccia, 'immersion', that to live in a world is to be immersed in it. But such formulations remain obscure, unless one understands what 'the ancients called 'breath' (*pneuma*)', which means to understand Stoic pneumatology.

According to the Stoics, the whole *cosmos* is an organism completely pervaded by *pneuma*, a *corporeal* breath that gives life to it and to everything in it.[70] Analogically, the same counts for every other being, humans included: humans are bodies penetrated by *pneuma*, what is usually called the soul.[71] What is fascinating about this theory, and what probably attracted Coccia in the first place, is that according to the Stoics, everything in the world is material, the soul included.[72] Yet, this created a huge issue for ancient Stoicism and it is the solution they found for this issue that Coccia has transformed into the central tenet of his philosophy. If both body and soul are corporeal, their critics insisted, then how could one be *in* the other, as everyone can see that the soul is *in* the body? The only solution was to admit the possibility of something like a total mixture and interpenetration. Thus, Chrysippus argued that in nature there are three kinds of union: 1) mere connection or juxtaposition, in which two things are simply together by virtue of being contiguous, as in the case of a heap of grain; 2) fusion, when two things completely lose their substantiality and qualities to form a new object, such as in the case of medicaments or perfumes; and finally, 3) total mixture, when two things completely interpenetrate one another but do not lose their 'nature', their substances and their qualities in the process, and thus could later be separated once again, as in the case of a mixture of water and wine.[73] According to Chrysippus, it is through this third kind of union that the soul is in the body (and vice versa), and, at the cosmological level, that the corporeal spirit pervades the world and every entity in it.

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[69] Coccia, *The Life of Plants*, 10.
[70] *SVF* II, 471–73.
[71] *SVF* II, 772–79.
[72] The main argument for the corporeality of the soul is that only bodies can act on bodies and, therefore, the soul could not be able to act on the body if it were incorporeal. *SVF* II, 790.
[73] *SVF* II, 463–81.

Coccia's idea of the world as a state of immersion now becomes comprehensible. Coccia has taken Stoic pneumatology and its characteristic theory of complete mixture to the extreme. If before everything else, before every other possibility of our being, there is first and foremost 'breath' and breath is in things as *krasis*, as a complete mixture and interpenetration, then this means that the world is not a place that confronts us — as an object confronts a subject — but a state of immersion.[74] We are already constantly immersed in the world and the world is always already immersed in us, thanks to and through air.

> To inhale is to allow the world to come into us — the world is in us — and to exhale is to project ourselves into the world that we are. To be in the world is not simply to find oneself in a final horizon containing everything that we are and will be able to perceive, live, or dream. From the moment we start to live, think, perceive, dream, breathe, the world in its infinite details is in us, materially and spiritually penetrating our body and our soul [*âme*], giving form, consistency, and reality to everything that we are. The world is not a place; it is a state of immersion of each thing in all other things, the mixture that instantaneously reverses the relation of topological inherence.[75]

On the basis of Stoic pneumatology, Coccia has developed a new ultra-materialist pneumatology, which by understanding the soul, the psyche itself, as corporeal, namely as breath, goes beyond any polarity typical of the Western metaphysical tradition and undermines every conception of a pure interiority and a pure subject. This pneumatology achieves precisely the opposite of what Derrida thought pneumatology (and the voice) implied.

It should come as no surprise that such a pneumatological conception of the world would then imply the critiques of writing and of the conception of language found in the other Italian philosophers we have spoken of. In a review essay on Pierre Guyotat's literary works published in the same year as *The Life of Plants* in the journal *Critique*, which bears the telling title 'La cosmologie du souffle' (The Cosmology of Breath), Coccia directly connects his new pneumatology to the problem of language. The myth against which his pneumatology — as well as Guyotat's texts — fight is the myth of language as the 'main organ and place of separation'.[76] The European tradition, from Anaxagoras onwards, has made of language as *logos* something detached from the world, which thanks to this separation can order and differentiate things, ending the eternal movement and mixture of everything. For Coccia, Structuralism — but Derrida's deconstruction is cited negatively a few lines later and seems still to be encompassed in his critique — is just the conclusion of this process:

[74] Coccia, *The Life of Plants*, 66.
[75] Coccia, *The Life of Plants*, 66-67.
[76] Emanuele Coccia, 'La cosmologie du souffle', *Critique* 824–825, no. 1 (2016): 121.

> Structuralism could be considered the ripest fruit of this long-lasting myth: under its aegis, language, understood as a separated cause, has become the principle of intelligibility of everything existing, by constituting itself as the realm of difference and differentiation. Language would be the medium in which and through which everything becomes capable of differentiating itself and of opposing everything else: and it is from this difference, whose nature is purely linguistic, that the value, the greatness, and the nature of things would derive.[77]

Coccia claims that it is this separation of language that has created the illusion of something like a 'pure ideality, a space detached from becoming, from matter'.[78] The prejudice that something like a spiritual human subject could exist separately from all materiality and becoming derives from an understanding of language as immaterial. All those concepts whose origin Derrida had found in the voice Coccia recognises as a consequence of the ontological separation of language from the world.

It will not be surprising once again that Coccia would find the origin of the myth of the separation of language in the phenomenon of writing and in the letter. He reaches this conclusion through Guyotat's works but the similarities with and the hidden references to Colli, Agamben, and Cavarero are undeniable:

> Guyotat's answer is very surprising: it is writing that prevents language from coinciding completely with the totality of its own possibilities. It is indeed writing that, before anything else, produces the illusion of language as something fixed, 'given once and for all', as if of 'divine origin', while 'we speak a language that is a language in becoming, that has not always been spoken in this way, that will not be spoken in this way in fifty, or thirty years.[79]

It is writing that has given the impression that language could be something different from the world, something unchangeable and divine; and it is on this difference that the difference between subject and world, sensible and intelligible, material

[77] Coccia, 'La cosmologie du souffle', 122.

[78] Coccia, 'La cosmologie du souffle', 122.

[79] Coccia, 'La cosmologie du souffle', 129. A new defence of writing appears in Coccia's latest book, *Filosofia della casa*, but it is here based on the premises of *The Life of Plants:* writing is even said to have, perhaps, nothing to do with language; it is simply another, fundamental way in which humans can pervade and be pervaded by life, by the breath of the world. Emanuele Coccia, *Filosofia della casa* (Turin: Einaudi, 2021), 72–74. In his recent dissertation on Agamben's *What Is Philosophy?*, Alexander Ferguson has pointed out that, in the end, Agamben's philosophy too, which owes so much to its writing style, seems to need a retrieval of writing. Ferguson, 'Agamben's Philosophy of Language'.

and immaterial is predicated. And if writing is what prevents language from coinciding with itself it is because of the letter, because the letter is an extra-linguistic element.[80] As Agamben has shown, the letter is both an element of the voice and a sign of itself or, as Coccia claims by citing the Latin grammarian Priscian, the letter is 'a visual image of language'. What this implies is that it detaches language from itself, from what it is originally: namely rhythm and breath.

Coccia's pneumatology encompasses the critique of writing found in Colli, Cavarero and Agamben. And at the same time, it opens up towards a different conception of language. Against the European tradition that thinks language as writing and, therefore, as the place of difference, Coccia invites us to rethink language as the space of complete mixture, and this means to rethink language on the basis of breath (*pneuma*). This is what he finds in Guyotat's works as well: once one understands 'every speech act' as 'breath and life of a body' and if one understands breath through the paradigm of *krasis*, which he takes from the Ancient Stoics, language cannot be separated from the world any longer;[81] it *is* this very world in the totality of its possibilities. According to this view, 'there is no need to invent another language. It is enough to transform the letters of the alphabet into those accents of the breath that animates the world'.[82]

The voice is not, as the metaphysical tradition thought, the place in which letters are inscribed. As we have already demonstrated, it was that event that had caused the split between transcendental and physical voice, between immaterial and material voice. But in Coccia's view, this difference does not stand any longer and without such a split there is no other voice to be reached, neither the eternal voice of presence nor the always already lost breath that engenders it. And letters become in the end mere accents of the voice of the world.

6. Conclusion

Pneumatology and the thought of the voice are indeed one thing, as Derrida had shown. Yet, the Italian philosophers examined here have demonstrated that neither the voice nor the *pneuma* lie at the origin of metaphysics. The illusion of a pure interiority and an eternal presence, which created all of the original, hierarchical, binary oppositions in which Western thought has been trapped from its very inception – universal and particular, *essentia* and *existentia*, soul and body, subject and object, consciousness and world – cannot be traced back to the voice, as Derrida thought. And this is because the experience of the voice can hardly be reduced to a silent *s'entendre-parler* of a spirit with itself. According to these philosophers, such a misunderstanding of the voice is possible only because of writing. It is only thanks to the letters inscribed within the vocal sounds that something like a silent voice completely detached from its materiality could be made visible.

[80] Coccia, 'La cosmologie du souffle', 130.
[81] Coccia, 'La cosmologie du souffle', 123–25.
[82] Coccia, 'La cosmologie du souffle', 131.

Both Derrida and his Italian critics have always been interested in the voice and its materiality as intonation, tone, and rhythm. What escaped Derrida is that this voice is only thinkable in and through breath, a breath that calls into question the very nature of the word 'spirit'.[83] Indeed, to return the voice to its materiality means to rethink materially everything that the Western tradition has associated with the term 'spirit'. The *spiritualist* conception of the spirit must be abandoned if we are to understand our very soul, our cognitive and emotional life, as breath. Agamben himself seems gradually to have moved towards a similar position. In one of his recent reflections, he writes: 'That soul and body are indissolubly joined – this is spiritual. The spirit is not a third between soul and body: it is just their helpless, wonderful coincidence'.[84]

Paradoxically, to think the spirit materially means to go beyond the dichotomy materialism-spiritualism, itself a legacy of metaphysics. *Pneuma*, at once breath and spirit, is not the foundation of metaphysics, which from the beginning divides being into two planes, but rather what comes before any rift, what holds everything together.

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[83] Perhaps the basis on which to re-imagine the voice as breath is already present in the Stoic pneumatology discussed above, which thinks the voice as the material '*tonos tou pneumatos*' (tone of the spirit) or, in Seneca's translation, the '*intentio spiritus*' (intention of the spirit). Seneca, *Naturalium quaestionum libri*, ed. H. M. Hine (Leipzig: Teubner, 1996), II.6.3–4.

[84] Agamben, *Quando la casa brucia*, 14.

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Giorgio Agamben: Understanding *Oikeiōsis*

Pier Alberto Porceddu Cilione

Abstract: Giorgio Agamben saw in the concept of 'use' the term that enables us to understand the oscillation between *having* and *being*, *property* and *inappropriateness*, *being rooted in one's own land* and *being in exile*. The same oscillation between *property* and *inappropriateness* governs our use of language. Our mother tongue represents what is the most intimate and most personal, what ratifies our origin, what assigns us to a community. But this familiarity, this habit or habitude, is illusory: something, at the centre of our use of language, expropriates *itself* and expropriates *us*. In order to understand this oscillation, Agamben uses the Stoic concept of *oikeiōsis*, which preserves the semantic dimension of 'familiarity', of 'habitude'. 'Use' and *oikeiōsis* become the keys to a better understanding of the problem of 'inhabiting' our language, our body, and, through the concept of landscape, the world itself.

This article's aim is to analyse a specific Stoic inheritance in the context of Giorgio Agamben's *oeuvre*, and to justify the meaning and the role of a key Stoic concept, the concept of *oikeiōsis*, in the wider context of contemporary philosophical debates. The concept of *oikeiōsis*, already present in the earliest stages of Stoic philosophy, denotes the possibility of understanding, through Agamben's interpretation, the mutual relationship between several key concepts of philosophy. On closer inspection, the concept of *oikeiōsis* enters Agamben's conceptual lexicon rather late, but it is important to emphasise that this does not mean that the Italian philosopher had not focused on issues implicitly linked to the concept long before. Already his reflection on the theme of 'property' and 'extraneousness', later specified in the conceptual oscillation between 'appropriation' and 'inappropriateness', required a formulation that obeyed Agamben's 'method'. Not only does the contemporary lexicon require, to be conceptually appropriate, a genealogical and archaeological exercise, but also, conversely, the past (in this case, the Stoic philosophical lexicon) is illuminated by the specific exigences of contemporaneity, far from a mere historical and antiquarian investigation. More specifically, the concept of *oikeiōsis* works as a possible mediator of certain terminological oppositions which, in Agamben's opinion, fundamentally articulate our way of living in the world, and our way of experiencing it. These oppositions constitute the fundamental terms of this phase of Agamben's reflection: the oscillation between 'homeland' and 'exile', 'property' and 'extraneousness', 'appropriation' and 'misappropriation', 'style' and 'manner'. It will then be understood that the concept of *oikeiōsis* is the name for the relationship between

progressive 'familiarisation with' and 'estrangement from' contemporaneity with respect to itself and to its own tradition. The concept of *oikeiōsis* is not a term simply 'transplanted' into a contemporary context and re-functionalised according to Agamben's specific conceptual needs; it rather becomes the term that names the relationship between 'appropriative' and 'disappropriative' *diastole* and *systole*, and it is this relationship that our contemporary philosophical consciousness entertains with itself and with its tradition.

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In Agamben's work, the presence of the European philosophical-literary tradition encloses an underlying ambivalence.

On the one hand, the Italian philosopher's texts, asserting a privileged access to the analysis of contemporaneity, are placed in a space that radically 'secedes' from the historical continuity of philosophical reflection, ratifying the fact that those who practise philosophy today are, in fact, practising philosophy 'after philosophy'. Philosophy — after *all*. Contemporaneity, representing a character of absolute *novitas*, a place of 'otherness' compared with the conceptual coordinates of the past, has severed any link with European textual and artistic tradition. In this sense, rather than constituting itself as the slow transmission of a shared heritage, it becomes the space of an irrevocable shipwreck.[1] Dominated by the progressive *pathos* of the historical and techno-scientific development, contemporaneity ratifies its estrangement from the spiritual production of the past. Therefore, contemporaneity constitutes a threshold on which what is produced in a 'previous' historical and axiological space is deprived of conceptual legitimacy, silently slipping into a past that cannot be recovered.

On the other hand, it is clear that all the pages written by Agamben are constituted through a meticulous relationship with the vast Western literary, philosophical, and artistic canon, indicating a persistent presence of those spiritual testimonies in the context of the present. How should this ambivalence be understood? It is no exaggeration to say that the reflection on this ambivalence constitutes one of Agamben's fundamental philosophical commitments. The archaeological and genealogical strategies of Agamben's 'method', rather than revealing their obvious debt to Nietzsche and Foucault, signal the philosophical foresight with which Agamben deals with this problem. Contemporaneity affirms itself and substantiates itself precisely to the extent that it is aware of the fact that the past, broadly speaking, is stripped of all legitimacy.

Access to contemporaneity, however, is guaranteed only by the functional relationship with a tradition, that is, indeed, devoid of effectiveness, but which forms the ideal place for contemporaneity to reflect on itself and therefore find its proper dimension. Archaeology, rather than a regression to a supposed 'original'

[1] See Giorgio Agamben, 'Situazione di Ezra Pound', in Ezra Pound, *Dal naufragio di Europa. Scritti scelti 1909–1965* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2016).

archē, is constituted as 'the sole means of access to the present'.[2] The solution to this paradox lies in the fact that contemporaneity is the place where the present questions itself by investigating the past, since Europeans 'can gain access to their truth only by means of a confrontation with the past, only by settling accounts with their history'.[3] Far from being the abstract space of the *modus*, of the mere 'contingency', contemporariness is the permanent *locus experimentalis*, in which the past is measured on the basis of the present.

Similar to what is mapped out by Agamben, contemporaneity, reflecting on itself, denotes the fact that the present is not enough, for the simple reason that it is originally constituted by forces that derive from earlier chronologies. Contemporaneity is not enough by itself: the infinite exercise of contemporary philosophy coincides with the effort of consciously living one's own appropriative relationship with contemporaneity. Agamben's resumption of the concept of *oikeiōsis* becomes legitimate precisely because of this ambivalent mutual relation between past and present. From here, the problem that arises is how to measure *in which way* and *in what sense* the effectiveness of the past must be thought of in the present context. One could assume that the conception of the past proposed by Agamben is an invitation radically to rethink the very concept of 'effectiveness'. What is the philosophical consistency of the European spiritual tradition if contemporaneity claims the destitution of the effectiveness of this very past? What exactly does it mean that a text, a work, a philosophical conception, a scientific theory, is no longer 'effective', no longer 'working', no longer 'operative' (in the sense in which laws are in force and currency valid)? In what sense does a text or a concept, belonging to a tradition that the contemporary has abrogated, nevertheless demand a presence — operative and effective — in the present?

Contemporary philosophy therefore seems to be constituted as a permanent experiment on the possibility of a new *and* ancient conceptual effectiveness, which, coming from a past that contemporaneity calls to obliterate, is reactivated in a suspensive and problematic space. The prudence with which contemporary philosophers handle the conceptual lexicon of our speculative tradition underlines the problematic semantic consistency of each of its terms, precisely indicating this ambivalence. Contemporaneity is nothing more than the intersectional space between a past that never ceases to pass, and a present that, while claiming its absolute estrangement from that past, finds itself innervated by those previous presences, that emanate from that past. Just to underline the epochal magnitude of this problem, Agamben writes that 'the crisis that Europe is going through [...] is not an economic problem [...], but a crisis of the relationship with the past. Since obviously the only place in which the past can live is the present, if the present is no longer aware of its past as living, universities and museums

[2] Giorgio Agamben, *Creation and Anarchy*, trans. A. Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), 1.
[3] *Ibid.*

become problematic places'.[4] Contemporary philosophical reflection should not simply think of the present in its 'proper' dimension, but it should know that the present is an intersectional space between what has been 'present' in the past, and what will be present 'as past' in the future.

It is in this context that Agamben's reprise of the Stoic concept of *oikeiōsis* should be understood. This concept carries this double register within itself. The presence of the concept of *oikeiōsis*, re-inscribed by Agamben in the current debate, marks not only this paradoxical functioning of a present, knowing that it has severed any essential link with Stoicism (if not in the form of a philological reconstruction, which has ceased to be valid), but at the same time marks its presence and effectiveness.

2.

Considered by Max Pohlenz 'the beginning and the foundation of Stoic ethics',[5] the term *'oikeiōsis'* is difficult to translate into modern languages, due to the need to capture the semantic density of the term *'oikos',* from which the term *oikeiōsis* is formed. The term *oikeiōsis* opens a semantic field with two fundamental pillars: 'familiarisation' and 'appropriation'. In order to grasp the original meaning of the term, modern languages need the Latin mediation of the term *familia*, *familiaris*. The concept of 'familiarisation' indicates the process by which a being enters into a relation of 'familiarity' with itself or with an environment. Stoic ethics insists on the idea that every living being enters a relationship of growing familiarity to itself. This feeling of *relatio ad se* arises as the fundamental constitutive requirement of the relationship of the living being to itself. The second semantic pillar, however, is even more clearly inscribed in Agamben's speculative path. The concept of *oikeiōsis* as 'appropriation' plays a fundamental role in numerous texts by the Italian philosopher. In Agamben's perspective, therefore, it is necessary, in the concept of *oikeiōsis*, to look at the conceptual constellation that has its fundamental roots in the idea of 'property', in that of 'use', and in the very idea of the 'inappropriable'. Precisely because of this strategic centrality, it is not an exaggeration to say that the concept of *appropriation* constitutes one of the fundamental themes of Agamben's intellectual research. Is it now possible to give a working definition of the term *oikeiōsis*?

As Jean-Louis Labarrière has pointed out in the *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon,*

> 'appropriation' is the literal translation [...] of the Stoic term *oikeiōsis*, derived from the word *oikeioô* [οἰκειόω], 'to make familiar' and later

[4] *Ibidem.*

[5] Max Pohlenz, *Grundfragen der stoischen Philosophie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1940), 11.

> 'to make specific to, to appropriate'; 'to appropriate to oneself', in the reflexive sense, 'related to the family, to the estate; belonging to the family', whence 'proper to'.[6]

It is relevant to notice that *oikeiōsis* is opposed to *allotriōsis*, 'alienation', and indicates what nature has originally 'appropriated or attached to us or conciliated with us'. The term also has an affective dimension that is very poorly rendered by 'appropriation'.[7]

> Providing the transition from the physical to the ethical, the notion of *oikeiōsis* is used by the Stoics in two different arguments, which makes understanding and translation even more difficult. This notion suggests that living beings do not seek primarily pleasure, but instead what is 'appropriate' to each of them, starting with the preservation of their own constitutions. This entails a certain form of self-esteem and implies that in accordance with this tendency or primary impulse (*prōtē hormē*), we can posit for rational beings this double equation: living in accord with nature = living in accord with reason = living in accord with virtue.[8]

As Jean-Louis Labarrière states,

> *oikeiōsis* also has the purpose of founding relationships of justice between human beings by ensuring that self-esteem is the foundation for the love for one's relatives, a love that must be understood as love for their own good. This love is destined to broaden so as to encompass all rational beings, thus founding in nature the social bond, or even the cosmopolitanism cherished by the Stoics, whether this is merely a cosmopolitanism of the wise, as in the older Stoicism, or that of all human beings, as in Panaetius and later writers.[9]

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[6] Jean-Louis Labarrière, 'OIKEIÔSIS' [*οἰκείωσις*] in Barbara Cassin (ed.), *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon,* trans. Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra, and Michael Wood (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

[7] See *ibid.* For a general overview of the Stoic concept of *oikeiōsis*, see Robert Bees, *Die Oikeiosislehre der Stoa*, 2 vols. (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2004–2005); Émile Bréhier, *Les Stoïciens*, (ed.) P. -M. Schuhl (Paris: Gallimard/La Pléiade, 1962); Brad Inwood and Pierluigi Donini, 'Stoic Ethics' in K. Algra et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); S. G. Pembroke, 'Oikeiōsis' in A. A. Long (ed.), *Problems in Stoicism* (London: Athlone, 1971); Gisela Striker, 'The Role of *Oikeiōsis* in Stoic Ethics' in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy, Vol. 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

[8] Jean-Louis Labarrière, 'OIKEIÔSIS', *ibid.*

[9] *Ibid.*

It is interesting to observe that Cicero, 'contrary to his usual practice, does not give the Greek term *oikeiōsis*, but instead leaves it to his interpreters to give priority to *conciliatio* (literally, "association", "union") or *commendatio* (literally, "recommendation")'.[10] The current Italian translation of *oikeiōsis* is 'appropriazione', 'appropriation': Agamben's reflection on the term starts from here.

3.

It might not be wrong to think that the genealogy of Agamben's interest in this term dates back to his old acquaintance with Hölderlin's texts. It is Agamben himself who, in his autobiography, points out the fundamental encounter with the great German poet's lyrics, letters, and aesthetic writings.[11] A passage that has little less than a talismanic value, and which is quoted in many of Agamben's works, is the famous letter that Friedrich Hölderlin sent to his friend Casimir Ulrich Böhlendorff on December 4th, 1801, and which constitutes a fundamental milestone for the understanding of Hölderlin's aesthetics. Here Hölderlin writes,

> In the progress of culture, the truly national will become the ever less attractive. Hence the Greeks are less master of the sacred pathos, because to them it was inborn, whereas they excel in their talent for representation, beginning with Homer, because this exceptional man was sufficiently sensitive to conquer the Western Junonian sobriety for his Apollonian empire, and thus to veritably appropriate what is foreign. With us it is the reverse. […] Yet what is familiar must be learned as well as what is alien. This is why the Greeks are so indispensable for us. It is only that we will not follow them in our own, national [spirit] since, as I said, the free use of what is one's own [*der freie Gebrauch des Eigenen*] is the most difficult.[12]

Understanding this passage of extraordinary density would presuppose an analysis of the complex thematisation that Hölderlin's aesthetics makes of the issue of the 'translational' relationship between Ancient Greek and German, between Greece and Germany, between antiquity and modernity, between 'celestial fire' and 'Junoesque sobriety' (note here that, without a clear understanding of this *stasis* and this problematic *philia* between ancient Greece and modern Germany, little is understood of European spiritual history, in particular between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries). In the context we are interested in, the passage is of great

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] See Giorgio Agamben, *Autoritratto nello studio* (Milan: Nottetempo, 2017), 44–45.

[12] Friedrich Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters on Theory*, trans. T. Pfau (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), 149–150; trans. mod.

interest, because it could have constituted the first impulse for Giorgio Agamben's elaboration of a renewed attention to the concept of 'property', of 'appropriation'. It can well be said that the passage holds a revelation: the term 'proper', the problem of the relationship of 'property', the theme of 'appropriateness', of 'appropriation', and of its reverse, the 'inappropriate', all of which are derived from this first Hölderlinian formulation, become decisive for Agamben's speculative 'method'. Also, the reactivation of the term *oikeiōsis* should therefore be inscribed in this trajectory. Notice that the Hölderlinian formula ('the free use of what is one's own is the most difficult') articulates three key terms of Agamben's own reflection: *proper*, *use*, and *freedom*, which — although not so clearly thematised — constitute the tacit premise for that emancipatory exigence that touches every page written by the Italian philosopher.

This is not the place for an in-depth analysis of that Hölderlinian passage, but it is useful to reflect on how the conceptual device of the 'proper' and 'property' works. Hölderlin is clearly dealing with themes in which poetic and cultural issues between Greek and German attitudes based on the binary oppositions previously mentioned are intertwined. There is a 'proper element', a specific 'property' *('das Eigene')*, in which we are originally inscribed as 'cultural' and 'spiritual' creatures. The idea of 'national' must certainly also be understood as what is close to 'birth': the whole Latin etymological constellation of *'nascor'*, *'nasci'*, and 'nation' contributes to this notion. But this original element, which is 'proper' because it is inscribed in the original/archaic dimension of 'birth', is always captured in a polarity with an extraneous element, with a dislocation, with a misappropriation (the *'disappropriata maniera'* ['inappropriate manner'] of Giorgio Caproni, a poet closely and passionately read by Agamben).

The experience of 'homeland', which inscribes us in a 'birth', because it is in a relation with the experience of an 'exile', is always as such an experience of a foreign territorial dislocation, of a 'colony' ('*Kolonie liebt der Geist…*', 'the Spirit loves the colony', as a famous passage from the great Hölderlinian elegy, *Brot und Wein* affirms). Our mother tongue, which defines our identity and our cultural context, is certainly a place of 'property' (one's *proper* language, *our* language, the language we can speak in an *appropriate* way), but it is constantly crossed by 'distorting' elements, by internal forces of translation, by etymological loans, by the distant origins of its lexical roots, by barbarisms, by the 'inappropriate' use of its terms. The relationship to oneself, just like the relation that an individual language maintains with itself, is a relation of 'appropriation', of *oikeiōsis*.

4.

It is useful to keep in mind that, in Agamben's texts, the concept of *oikeiōsis* must be inscribed in an even broader constellation than the one outlined so far. The concept of *oikeiōsis* is always found in relation to other key terms of Agamben's reflection. As we saw earlier on, the concept of *oikeiōsis* works as a possible

mediator between certain terminological oppositions which, in Agamben's opinion, fundamentally articulate our way of living in the world and our way of experiencing it. What are these conceptual oppositions? They constitute the fundamental terms of this phase in Agamben's work: the oscillation between homeland and exile, property and extraneousness, appropriation and misappropriation, style and manner. If the concept of 'use' means 'to oscillate unceasingly between a homeland and an exile: to inhabit',[13] the term 'use' is thus given the task of thinking about the space in which these conceptual oppositions seek their mediation, the place in which they operate and are suspended, at the same time.

Following research by Thomas Bénatouïl,[14] Agamben points out that the topic of 'use' (specifically that of 'self-use', in the Stoic context) intersects with that of *oikeiōsis*, of 'appropriation' of or 'familiarisation' with oneself (UB, 49). But Agamben goes on to claim that we are not dealing with a mere conceptual 'intersection' here, or some terminological coincidence, but with the fact that 'the doctrine of *oikeiōsis* becomes intelligible only if one understands it as a doctrine of use-of-oneself' (*ibid.*). It is no coincidence that Agamben's more elaborate passages on the Stoic doctrine of *oikeiōsis* are to be found in his vast investigation of the 'use of bodies'. It is precisely at a strategic point in this text that Agamben confronts the original sources of Stoicism. A passage from the *Life of Zeno* by Diogenes Laertius contains some essential lines for reconstructing the Stoic doctrine of *oikeiōsis:*

> Τὴν δὲ πρώτην ὁρμήν φασι τὸ ζῷον ἴσχειν ἐπὶ τὸ τηρεῖν ἑαυτό, οίκειούσης αὐτῷ τῆς φύσεως ἀπ᾽ἀρχῆς, καθά φησιν ὁ Χρύσιππος ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ Περὶ τελῶν, πρῶτον οίκεῖον λέγων εἶναι παντὶ ζῴῳ τὴν αὐτοῦ σύστασιν καὶ τὴν ταύτης συνείδησιν: οὔτε γὰρ ἀλλοτριῶσαι είκὸς ἦν αύτὸ <αὐτῷ> τὸ ζῷον, οὔτε ποιήσασαν αύτό, μήτ᾽άλλοτριῶσαι μήτ᾽οίκειῶσαι. άπολείπεται τοίνυν λέγειν συστησαμένην αύτὸ οίκειῶσαι πρὸς ἑαυτό: οὕτω γὰρ τά τε βλάπτοντα διωθεῖται καὶ τὰ οίκεῖα προσίεται.
>
> An animal's first impulse, say the Stoics, is to self-preservation, because nature from the outset endears it to itself, as Chrysippus affirms in the first book of his work *On Ends:* his words are, 'The dearest thing to every animal is its own constitution and its consciousness thereof'; for it was not likely that nature should estrange the living thing from itself or that she should leave the creature she has made without either estrangement from or affection for its own constitution. We are forced then to conclude that nature in

[13] Giorgio Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, trans. A. Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 87–88. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as UB.

[14] See Thomas Bénatouïl, *Faire usage: la pratique du stoicisme* (Paris: Vrin, 2006), 21–22.

> constituting the animal made it near and dear to itself; for so it comes to repel all that is injurious and give free access to all that is serviceable or akin to it.[15]

In this passage, we learn that the idea of *oikeiōsis* is originally linked to the 'self-love' of the living. This self-love constitutes a primary impulse of the animal (a *prōtē hormē*) and enrols the living being in the orbit of 'self-preservation'. The *prōton oikeion* is therefore not only what has been familiar to every being since birth, but that which must be understood as something that belongs to its own constitution, and to the sensation that it has of itself (see UB, 50). Aligned with a 'providential' vision of nature, typical of a certain Stoicism, *physis* (nature) therefore makes the living being familiar to itself, 'appropriate', 'appropriate to itself'.

From the text of Diogenes Laertius, we can extract a passage by Chrysippus according to which, 'the most proper thing', 'the dearest thing' (*prōton oikeion*) of every living being is its own 'constitution' (*sustasis*) and its own 'consciousness' (*suneidēsis*), i.e. the 'co-science' (*sun-eidēsis*) of its own constitution, the 'proper' feeling of inhabiting the scheme of its own self-conscious body.

In Agamben's interpretation, there is another interesting element. It is important to note that, in *The Use of Bodies*, Agamben points to the fact that Max Pohlenz, following a different reading, reads the term *'sunaisthēsis',* or 'co-sensation', in the passage quoted from Chrysippus, rather than the term *'suneidēsis'*. For a long time a Professor of Aesthetics, Agamben must have been struck by the idea that the concept of *oikeiōsis* (i.e. this process of 'appropriation' to oneself) is only conceivable from the experience of a *sunaisthēsis*, a 'co-feeling' of oneself and of one's own constitution (see UB, 50). If we should read the term *sunaisthēsis* contained in the passage of Diogenes Laertius, we must then admit that the term *oikeiōsis* not only denotes a coincidence of the living being with itself based on an 'appropriative' plan of *physis*, but also indicates that, at the core of the 'appropriative' relationship, the living being entertains with itself a fundamental *feeling*. According to this interpretation, every being would then be constituted by a fundamental 'synesthetic' dimension, that appropriates it to itself. The living being, in its fundamental inscription in the space of nature, lives in an 'appropriate' way, to the extent that a fundamental 'aesthetic synthesis' makes it feel 'familiar' and 'dear' to itself.[16]

Therefore, aesthetics, instead of being a theory of 'external' perception (i.e. a theory of *experience*) or the ideal place where the relationship between a subject and the world is constituted through the senses, would then become the fundamental 'science of appropriation' of the living being to itself. Aesthetics would

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[15] Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. R. D. Hicks (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Series, 1925), 7.85. See Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 49–50.

[16] On this point, see Daniel Heller-Roazen, *The Inner Touch: Archaeology of a Sensation* (New York: Zone, 2007).

thus denote the fundamental 'co-sensation' inscribed in the habitation of the self *within itself*, which coincides with its process of *self-appropriation*. As Agamben writes, '*oikeiosis*, familiarity with the self, is thinkable, in this sense, only on the basis of a *synaisthesis*, a con-sentiment of the self and of one's own constitution' (*ibid.*).

This analysis, however inevitable for understanding the Stoic doctrine of *oikeiōsis*, works, in Agamben's text, as an introductory consideration to the fundamental theme of his research, the theme of 'use'. How should this term be understood? Agamben's *The Use of Bodies* opens with a meticulous etymological and linguistic analysis of this term, investigating above all the meaning of the Greek verb *'chrēsthai'* and its corresponding Latin verb *'uti'*. The first task of Agamben's research is to deconstruct the misleading 'instrumental' meaning that the verb 'to use' has in many modern languages. This analysis of the construction of the verb *chrēsthai* (see UB, 24–25) reveals how difficult it is to trace the uses of this verb to a single meaning. At first glance, the verb *chrēsthai* 'does not seem to have a proper meaning but acquires ever different meanings according to the context' *(ibid.*, 24). Based on the uses of the verb, and the terms that follow it, *chrēsthai* can mean 'to consult an oracle', 'to have sexual relations', 'to speak', 'to be unhappy', 'to punch someone', 'to feel nostalgia'..., without us being able to understand the sense common to all these uses. 'The fact is that the verb in question seems to draw its meaning from that of the term that accompanies it' (*ibid.*, 25).

Analysing a series of uses of the verb *chrēsthai* and *uti*, Agamben concludes that the verb in question cannot have the modern sense of 'using something'. On the contrary, 'each time it is a matter of a relationship with something, but the nature of this relationship is, at least in appearance, so indeterminate that it seems impossible to define a unitary sense of the term' (*ibid.*). With the help of a monographic study by Georges Redard published in 1950, Agamben hypothesises that the term 'use' does imply a relationship between a subject and an object, but this relationship is 'an *occasional* relationship of *appropriation'* (*ibid.*), where the subject 'uses' something transiently. But it is the pattern of the subject/object relationship that, on closer inspection, is misleading and inadequate. At this point, the element that helps the scholar most is the fact that *chrēsthai* is a middle voice verb (*media tantum*) as opposed to an active one.

Redard, quoting an article by the supervisor of his research, refers to the great linguist Émile Benveniste. Benveniste, in his book, recalls that the active verbs 'denote a process that starts from the subject and goes outside it', whereas in the middle voice, 'the verb indicates a process that takes place in the subject: the subject is internal to the process'.[17] The subject, therefore, in the middle voice, *'effectue en s'affectant'*: it does something, but, at the same time, it is affected by its own operation. As Agamben points out,

[17] Émile Benveniste, *Actif et moyen dans le verbe* (1950), quoted in Georges Redard, *Recherches sur χρή, χρῆσθαι. Étude sémantique* (Paris: Champion, 1953), 44; see UB, 24–30.

> On the one hand, the subject who achieves the action, by the very fact of achieving it, does not act transitively on an object but first of all implies and affects himself in the process; on the other hand, precisely for this reason, the process presupposes a singular topology, in which the subject does not stand over the action but is himself the place of its occurring. (UB, 28)

It is only at this point that Agamben attempts to define 'use' by investigating the complexity of the verb *chrēsthai:* 'it expresses the relationship one has with oneself, the affection one receives as it is in relationship with a given entity' (*ibid.*). It is now easier to understand why Agamben claims that there is a connection between the meaning of *chrēsthai* and *oikeiōsis*, between 'use' and 'appropriation'. *Oikeiōsis* is nothing more than *the appropriate use of oneself*, the name that denotes the fact that the living being, knowing the sensation of its limbs, knows *how to use them.* There is thus a semantic overlap between *chrēsthai* and *oikeiōsis.* The living being is familiar with its body, because it knows the use — or the uses — that are imprinted in it.

Translated into Latin as *'conciliatio'*, the Stoic term *oikeiōsis* achieves, through the terminological and conceptual mediation of Seneca, a deeper meaning. In Agamben's opinion, Seneca, in Letter 121 to Lucilius, takes a significant step in illustrating the following idea: the *conciliatio* that the living being has of itself is 'prior to everything', because it is what appropriates me to myself; but, at the same time, this *oikeiōsis* does not simply work as a fundamental, unconscious, and natural impulse; it must be thought of as something like a *use of itself*, as a process through which the living being, *using itself*, learns to get to know itself. Therefore, '*oikeiosis* or *conciliatio* does not have as its ultimate object the constitution of the individual, which can change over time, but, by means of it, its very self' (UB, 54). *Oikeiōsis*, in this sense, should not be thought of as a fundamental need unconsciously inscribed by nature in the living being — as it might seem from the notion of *oikeiōsis* as *prōtē hormē* in Zeno and Chrysippus — but rather as a *progressive* familiarisation of oneself with oneself, through the idea of *usus mei* and *cura mei*, so emblematically described by Seneca in the letter quoted by Agamben. According to this analysis, the self turns out to be an *aesthetic* and *relational effect* of *oikeiōsis*, rather than its cause: 'this self — despite the fact that the Stoics seem at times to pre-constitute it in a nature or an innate knowledge — is therefore not something substantial or a preestablished end but coincides entirely with the use that the living being makes of it' (*ibid.*). On closer inspection, therefore, the *oikeiōsis* names the process by which the living being *uses itself to appropriate itself*, knowing that, in the very process of familiarisation with itself, its own self is affected. The self is the *'oikeiotic'* effect that the familiarisation process has on itself. It is therefore the 'use of oneself' that always unfolds in a paradoxical 'action' denoted by a middle voice verb, *is affected by operating*, that produces its own 'co-sensation'.

At this point, it is useful to clarify an important conceptual aspect of this affair: if it is true that *oikeiōsis* denotes a process rather than a state, one should not think that it has a 'teleological' character. Agamben has already mentioned how the self, produced by an *oikeiotic* process of *usus sui*, should not be thought of as a substantial entity, nor as the manifestation of a specific *telos* (goal, end). Indeed, on closer inspection, *oikeiōsis* itself cannot have a teleological character, because it surely is something innate and originally written in the living being; at the same time, however, it functions as the *effect of a use*, as the effect of a relationship (or rather, as what guarantees this use-relationship). One might think that *oikeiōsis* is therefore an ongoing process, but its processual character should be thought of as non-teleological.

In every moment of this relationship, appropriation and disappropriation, familiarisation and estrangement are given: the *use* denoted by the concept of *oikeiōsis* is nothing but the oscillation between a feeling of coherence and a feeling of dispersion. The *oikeiōsis* names a process, not because it denotes a teleologically oriented path from an *archē* to a *telos*, but because it cannot be defined as something that holds in fullness. There is never a fulfillment of the appropriation process, nor *plērōma* of the *oikeiōsis*. At all times, *oikeiōsis* is the memory of an appropriate 'origin' and the transition to an appropriation's *ideal*, but in the process itself, 'familiarity' and 'estrangement', 'property' and 'estrangement', 'homeness' and '*Unheimlichkeit*', '*Heimat*' and 'colony', 'homeland' and 'exile' always coexist. Appropriation is always inappropriate, compared to the need of appropriation it poses to itself.

5.

We can therefore ask ourselves if, given these considerations, the idea of *oikeiōsis* could not become a much wider paradigm than the one outlined by the Stoic conceptualisation. Agamben's resumption of the concept of *oikeiōsis* seems to move precisely in this direction. If *oikeiōsis* denotes this suspensive processual space in which the living being, using itself, incessantly oscillates between 'appropriation' and 'misappropriation', it can be thought that this oscillation denotes the fundamental constitution of every 'use' relation, of everyone's relation to themselves and/or with an entity, through which a progressive self-constitution is made possible. *Oikeiōsis* therefore names every space of appropriative oscillation, in which the self, entering into relation with itself and/or with an entity, is modified by this same relationship and is affected by its own use.

It is now clearer why Agamben's work honours, starting from the title, the question of the body, in order to assess the validity of this interpretation, or — better said — one's 'proper' body. Prolonging — but also contesting — a deep-rooted phenomenological tradition (from Husserl to Merleau-Ponty and beyond), Agamben points out that the fundamental marker to denote the relationship that the subject holds with the body is that of 'property'. The subject 'owns' a body,

'possesses' it by virtue of an act of 'property', but this property represents a paradoxical *status*, it represents an odd relation. The 'proper' body is certainly *my* body, the body which is the object of an 'appropriative' relation; at the same time, however, it cannot be thought of as an 'objective' entity (like an external 'tool', nor *used* as a tool) tied to the alleged subject through a mere relation of 'possession'. Phenomenologically understood, I *am* a *Leib:* I don't *own* a *Körper*. It is certainly misleading to think that the self *owns* its body by virtue of a 'proprietary' relationship. I *have* a body, but I *am* also a body: the self that I am is the *subject* of a body, which should paradoxically be constituted as the object of a property.

How, then, should the body be thought of, if it oscillates between *being* and *having*, between appropriation and estrangement, between an inappropriate subjectivity and a missed objectivity? What is the 'proper' body, that body that the phenomenological tradition has not ceased to investigate without being able to solve the problem of its 'property' and its 'use'? According to Agamben, one could say that one's 'proper' body constitutes that paradoxical space in which the subject/the body coincides with, and, at the same time, does not coincide with itself. The body is therefore a paradoxical entity, because it is the object and subject of a property, but, at the same time, it escapes any proprietary determination. The body — it is now clear — is the *spacing* of *oikeiōsis*, the place where the impossible process of appropriation takes place.

In Agamben's texts, *body*, like *language* or *landscape*, is a figure of the 'inappropriable', places where the process of *oikeiōsis* denotes an exigence of appropriation, but where — at the same time — it is impossible, where it is indefinitely deferred. The body, it could also be said, is the *embodiment of oikeiōsis;* it is the place where the self is perceived as a folding of its own 'use'. The *chrēsis tou sōmatou* is the space of oscillation between *my* body and the body which I can never say to be *mine*. Why can my body never be mine? Why can it never be the object of a full appropriation? Why is such appropriation *impossible*? The body, as Agamben considers it, is 'inappropriable', because, despite being unquestionably *my* body, my proper body, it always escapes my proprietary grip. This appropriation is originally out of phase with itself. In a state of need, in sickness, in shame, when it feels a sense of inadequacy, my body alienates itself from itself: a process of *allotriōsis* forecloses the *oikeiōsis*. A sick body, a body that imposes its needs on the subject, is an *inappropriate* body, a body injured in its process of familiarisation with itself: it is an 'estranged' body. We can now better understand the sense in which *oikeiōsis* cannot be thought either as a *prōtē hormē* or as a *telos*. *Oikeiōsis* represents the transcendental field in which the possibility of appropriation opens up, in which the possibility of an absolute familiarisation is inscribed from the outset, but where such appropriation is also always missing and deferred. The *oikeiōsis* denotes every process of appropriation, every spacing in which the oscillation between appropriateness and appropriation, property and estrangement, *oikeiōsis* and *allotriōsis*, homeland and exile, is possible.

6.

In Agamben's conceptualisation, another typically 'inappropriable' dimension is represented by language. Just like the body, language is subject to the same 'appropriation' paradoxes as are inscribed in the relation between corporeality and subjectivity. My mother tongue, my native language, is certainly *my* language, the language that I *possess*, which I use with the skillfulness of an instinctual impulse. In the use of my mother tongue, the *chrēsis tou logou* seems to be constituted as an un-reflected *prōtē hormē*. Yet upon closer inspection, what can 'owning a language' really mean? What kind of 'property' can be given in the process of language appropriation? I can say that I 'own' a language, in the sense that I am in control of the appropriate uses of all its terms, but I certainly cannot understand myself as owning it, nor can it be conceived as an object of possession, nor as the effect of a *Vorhandensein*. My mother tongue is *my* language, because it determines my identity and my belonging, but it always escapes my grasp. The *oikeiōsis* process that would allow me fully to control language's possession is impossible and endless. In fact, our relationship with language also closely resembles the one which we entertain with our body. The same oscillation between property and inappropriateness governs our use of language. Just as the body's 'property' is by no means an obvious fact, so the same economy of appropriation and expropriation governs our relationship with language. In this sense, Agamben writes,

> [t]here exists, from this perspective, a structural analogy between the body and language. Indeed, language also – in particular in the figure of the mother tongue – appears for each speaker as what is the most intimate and proper; and yet, speaking of an 'ownership' and of an 'intimacy' of language is certainly misleading, since language happens to the human being from the outside, through a process of transmission and learning that can be arduous and painful and is imposed on the infant rather than being willed by it. (UB, 86)

Our mother tongue seems to be what is most intimate and most 'proper' to us, what ratifies our 'cultural birth' (Hölderlin's *'das Eigene')*, our origin, what assigns us to a community, what is kept in our innermost familiarity, what is the most appropriate. But this familiarity, this habit, this use, this loyalty, is illusory: something, at the centre of our use of the language, is expropriated. 'And while the body seems particular to each individual, language is by definition shared by others and as such an object of common use' (*ibid.*). This oscillation between property and estrangement, between appropriation and inappropriateness, culminates in the concept of habit, of familiarisation. It is in this sense that Agamben uses, again in this context, the concept of *oikeiōsis*, drawing a parallel between the *sustasis/sunaisthēsis* of the living and the *chrēsis* of language:

> Like the bodily constitution according to the Stoics, that is to say, language is something with which the living being must be familiarised in a more or less drawn-out *oikeiosis*, which seems natural and almost inborn; and yet — as *lapsus*, stuttering, unexpected forgetfulness, and aphasia testify — it has always remained to some degree external to the speaker. (*Ibid.*)

However, it is not only a question of a misappropriation marked by lapsus and aphasias. Each conscious speaker finds themselves within the infinite process of familiarisation that they enjoy with their own language. Just like the Stoic *suneidēsis*, the speaker believes themselves to be originally inscribed in their 'proper' language (which is rather *imposed* on them from the outside, endowed with a mysterious cogency and 'objectivity'). The speaker speaks this language skillfully according to a *prōtē hormē*, but the more they reflect on this point and the more they feel that the language escapes them, the more they perceive it as an inappropriable, and an internal awareness of always speaking it in an 'inappropriate way' grows. Not only that, but the growing linguistic awareness coincides with the infinite need for an appropriation process, trying to use language in order to reveal its appropriateness and its misappropriations. According to Agamben, the kind of speaker who is most acutely aware of language's oscillation between property and extraneousness, between homeland and exile, and between *Heimat* and colony, is the poet.

Agamben notes that poetic language is precisely what carries out this process of infinite appropriation. Poets are in fact those who address the notion of 'living the language' (which is to say, those who question its 'use'). As inhabitants of a language (and culture) that is both one's 'own' and 'foreign' at the same time, poets work for the estrangement of what is given (the language in its common use) in order to implement its possible appropriation:

> This is all the more evident in those — the poets — whose trade is precisely that of mastering language and making it proper. They must for this reason first of all abandon conventions and common use and, so to speak, render foreign the language that they must dominate, inscribing it in a system of rules as arbitrary as they are inexorable. (UB, 86)

Agamben continues: 'the appropriation of language that they pursue [...] is to the same extent an expropriation, in such a way that the poetic act appears as a bipolar gesture, which each time renders extraneous what must be unfailingly appropriate' (*ibid.*, trans. mod.). Therefore, the poet (or the ideal figure of a conscious language speaker) is the one who, *using* the language, acutely perceives the oscillation between appropriation and misappropriation. Language too constitutes a spacing of the *oikeiōsis* — a place of impossible topology — which represents the field of the

appropriation process. Those who speak a language in a reflexive way feel that *every term* of *each language* is *inappropriate*, and only an infinite process of appropriation could bring the *logos* closer to that ideal target, which, once reached, could finally denote the meaning *appropriately*. In this sense, philosophy becomes the conceptual space of *oikeiōsis*, the space in which *all the terms of language*, although inappropriate, are in the process of reaching their appropriation, their property, their absolute appropriateness.

7.

The third dimension of the inappropriable that Agamben analyses is that of *landscape*. In what sense does the landscape, as well as the body and language, represent an 'inappropriable'? Like body and language, landscape, in Agamben's view, represents a paradoxical place in which our relationship with the world cannot take the form of an absolute appropriation, but where the sense of mutual 'belonging' and 'appropriation' is acutely felt. The landscape is therefore nothing more than the *phenomenon* of the world (and the world *as* phenomenon), viewed from 'my' perspective, from the point of view of a subject who is neither extraneous to, nor involved in, the very act of looking. The relationship between the mutual appropriation of the subject and the world is deactivated and suspended. The landscape is thus an inappropriable, because, oscillating between a human reality and a natural reality, it embodies its undecidable difference:

> When we look at a landscape, we certainly see the open and contemplate the world, with all the elements that make it up (the ancient sources list among these the woods, the hills, the lakes, the villas, the headlands, springs, streams, canals, flocks and shepherds, people on foot or in a boat, those hunting or harvesting...); but these things, which are already no longer parts of an animal environment, are now, so to speak, deactivated one by one on the level of being and perceived as a whole in a new dimension. We see them as perfectly and clearly as ever, and yet we already do not see them, lost — happily, immemorially lost — in the landscape. Being, *en état de paysage*, is suspended and rendered inoperative, and the world, having become perfectly inappropriable, goes, so to speak, beyond being and nothing. No longer animal or human, to the one who contemplates the landscape is only landscape. That person no longer seeks to comprehend, only to look. If the world is the inoperativity of the animal environment, landscape is, so to speak, inoperativity of inoperativity, deactivated being. (UB, 91)

The landscape is therefore the *oikeiotic* state in which Being is suspended and made inoperative. By suspending the difference between animal and human, the

one who contemplates sinks into the landscape and the landscape sinks into her. If the suspensive and inappropriate dimension of the landscape abolishes the difference between human reality and natural reality, and deactivates Being, it still maintains an interesting conceptual connection with the problem of spatiality. The subject both belongs and does not belong to the landscape that surrounds them: oscillating between 'homeland' and 'exile', the 'using' of space's 'taking place', the subject experiences a world that is both appropriable and inappropriable. What the gaze faces is a space/landscape that is 'mine', yet always melancholically consigned to memory. The deactivation of Being is what is experienced when the subject faces the world as an inappropriable. We can therefore say that the landscape is the 'spatialisation' of the *oikeiōsis;* it is the effective determination of *oikeiōsis as spacing* and *as spatialisation*. In this sense, human beings are always entrusted to the impossible process of the appropriation of space and time, melancholically split between the certainty of absolute appropriation and the extraneous majesty of the inappropriable.

8.

Why is the question of *oikeiōsis*, and the 'use' that Agamben makes of it, so relevant to contemporary philosophical reflection? The relevance of this question unfolds in two dimensions, one of a historical order, the other conceptual. As we have seen, Agamben 'knows' that the philosophical tradition has been shipwrecked: in the contemporary world, 'doing philosophy' means doing philosophy 'after philosophy'. On a historical level, therefore, the question of *oikeiōsis* is related to the factual disappropriation of philosophy with respect to itself. The attempt to reactivate the 'ancient' *names* of philosophy (including the term '*oikeiōsis*') always clashes with the fact that they no longer seem usable, they seem to have lost all validity, abandoned to an incurable inappropriateness.

On a conceptual level, however, philosophy knows that its task is to seek the definitive appropriation of its names, otherwise the use it makes of them would be conceptually *inappropriate*. In this sense, *oikeiōsis* is the name we give to the *spacing of conceptual appropriation*, in which each word of a given language fluctuates. Whenever a philosophical name is 'given', the problem of its *oikeiōsis* arises, that is, the problem of the degree of its appropriateness. Each philosophical term lies between its unreflexive use, and its full appropriateness.

Although philosophy seems to belong to a past that no effort of appropriation can save, it lives in the awareness that the effort of appropriating its names is the enduring substance of its meaning. In this sense, the *oikeiotic* process is possible and impossible at the same time. It is possible because it is already at work. The life of language is nothing but this incessant *translation process* that takes leave of the inappropriate to reach the *firmissima tellus* of a 'perfect' appropriation. But this process, being always in place, is never concluded: strictly speaking, it never ends. It will never find peace, because it corresponds to the infinite task of the self-

appropriation of thought. Contemporary philosophy is nothing more than this awareness of doing philosophy 'after philosophy', as if the *oikeiōsis* of its own conceptual history were impossible. But, at the same time, it knows that it faces the task of an infinite appropriation, even though it knows that such a task is impossible. In our time, philosophy knows that philosophy is 'impossible', because it is consigned to an inappropriate past and to an inappropriate present. But, at the same time, it also knows that it has a future, since, perhaps, it has never begun.

Community and the Third Person in Esposito and Agamben

Tom Frost*

I. Introduction

This paper considers the thought of Giorgio Agamben and Roberto Esposito, leading contemporary thinkers of biopolitics, and contrasts their writings on community. Part of this analysis considers the respective roles immunity has in each philosopher's thought. In between the start of my writing and my finishing the final version of this essay, the COVID-19 pandemic struck. The pandemic has brought into sharp focus Esposito's writings on immunity and Agamben's views on biopolitics. Both Agamben and Esposito start from the point that the world today is in a state of crisis. Human rights abuses, wars, torture, global heating, totalitarian states, economic crises, political turmoil and more – all exist in the world today. Bird and Short state that 'increasingly no single crisis can be seen to function independently of others' (Bird and Short 2013, p.1). But what this means is that today there is nothing that can be isolated, instituted, immunised, as something apart, something that might be considered *proper* only to itself (Bird and Short 2013, p.1). What is 'proper' is one's own. The world appears as the sustained crisis of the proper. Agamben and Esposito seek to reconfigure community beyond the proper, and both tie the crisis of the proper to biopolitics (Bird 2018, p.49).

II. Life, Biopolitics and the *Dispositif*

Agamben and Esposito engage in a 'radical rethinking', to borrow Esposito's term, of the idea of being human, and its connection to being a person (Esposito 2012b, p.147). For Esposito, it is through the *dispositif* that the human being is transformed into both a subject, and an object, of power relations (Esposito 2012c, pp.17–30). As Esposito has argued, 'personhood' is one of the most widely accepted concepts in law, bioethics, and politics today, yet the idea of the 'person'

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is a *dispositif* or apparatus which welds together man's animality and his political being (Esposito 2012c, pp.19–23).[1] The person is biopolitical in character.[2] Agamben also explains how the human being is transformed into a subject by noting that the Greeks had two terms for expressing what we mean by the word 'life'. *Zoē* expressed the simple fact of living common to all beings, and *bios* indicated the way of life proper to an individual or group (Agamben 1998, p.1). As Agamben explains in *The Open*, the concept of 'life' never is defined as such. What this means is that:

> [T]his thing that remains indeterminate gets articulated and divided time and again through a series of caesurae and oppositions that invest it with a decisive strategic function [...] everything happens as if, in our culture, life were *what cannot be defined, yet, precisely for this reason, must be ceaselessly articulated and divided.* (Agamben 2004, p.13)

This ceaseless articulation and division leads to the claim that 'the fundamental activity of sovereign power is the production of bare life as originary political element' (Agamben 1998, p.181). Agamben follows Carl Schmitt's sovereign exception, the way in which sovereign power excludes those who are simply alive when seen from the perspective of the polis (Campbell 2006a, p.13). *Homo sacer* is the name of the political figure excluded from the political life (*bios*) that sovereignty institutes; in this way, biopolitics is inscribed in the sovereign exception. This biopolitics intensified in the twentieth century to the point that it is transformed into thanatopolitics for both totalitarian (for example, Nazi Germany) and democratic states (Campbell 2006a, p.13). As a result, politics is always biopolitical and forever in ruins.

Esposito's approach refuses to superimpose Nazi thanatopolitics too directly over contemporary biopolitics, as Agamben does. Instead, he ties the Nazi

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[1] Esposito and Agamben build on Michel Foucault's work on the *dispositif*. The *dispositif* represents the network of power relations which articulates how a power not based upon classical conceptions of sovereignty manifests itself and is a key term in Foucault's thought. Gilles Deleuze made the point that these *dispositifs* or apparatuses 'are neither subjects not object, but regimes which must be defined from the point of view of the visible and from the point of view of that which can be enunciated [...] And in every apparatus *[dispositif]* the lines break through the thresholds, according to which they might have been seen as aesthetic, scientific, political, and so on' (Deleuze 1992, p.160). A genealogy of the 'person' is beyond the scope of this article, but Peter Goodrich has produced a thorough and detailed account (Goodrich 2012, pp.50–65).

[2] Both Agamben and Esposito draw on Foucault's biopolitics and biopower, which formed part of a larger analysis of governmentality (de Boever 2010, pp.37–38). Biopower seeks to transform and influence human life, to optimize health and prolong life (Foucault 1978), even at the cost of terrible suffering (Noys 2005, p.54). What biopolitical practices and strategies entail is not just the ability to foster life, but also allow life to die (Foucault 1978, p.255). This means that the death of any individual is insignificant, as life continues at the level of the population (Palladino 2011).

biopolitical apparatus to the project of immunising life through the production of death. Death becomes the object and therapeutic instrument for curing the German body politic. Esposito does not challenge Agamben's reading of the sovereign exception as an aporia of Western politics and one the Nazis intensified so that the exception became the norm. Instead, he privileges the figure of immunisation as the horizon within which to understand Nazi policies (Campbell 2006a, p.14). This foregoes Agamben's connection of sovereignty and biopolitics; the specificity of the Nazi experience for modernity resides in its actualisation of biology (Esposito 2008, p.117). Esposito states:

> I have tried to move the terms of the debate by providing a different interpretive key that is capable of reading [Agamben] [...] All done without renouncing the historical dimension, as Agamben does [...] As you know, this hermeneutic key, this different paradigm, is that of immunity. (Quoted in Campbell 2006b, p.50)

Yet in fact it is precisely here that this biopolitical terrain offers two competing visions of emancipation. Foucault sought the potential for an ethical and aesthetic self-creation in the emergence of the new, be it a form of power, counter-conduct, or an ethical culture of the self (Dean 2013, p.165). In a similar vein, Agamben and Esposito offer two competing (yet similar) forms of freedom. In their thought, Agamben and Esposito have used immunity, community, and the figure of the third person in related but divergent ways to underwrite their proposed forms of political emancipation. This essay explores the use of *munus* in both Agamben and Esposito's development of the third person. It is through the concept of immunity (and *munus*), and despite Esposito's own account, that Agamben and Esposito's works come into contact. This will come as more of a surprise to Agambenian scholars than it will to scholars of Esposito.

Esposito understands that immunity is intertwined with community. Community has the common obligation of the *munus* at its heart. Community and immunity have an etymological relation to the Latin *munus*. Two meanings of *munus* — *onus* and *officium* — may be translated as obligation and office (and it is the latter meaning which Agamben focuses upon). The *munus* is a gift which is received and demands to be repaid in return (Esposito 2009, p.xiv; Esposito 2011, p.5). Thinking community through *communitas* constructs community around a gift, one that members of the community cannot keep for themselves. There is no community without this gift. The obligation of gift-giving operates as a 'defect' as it involves an element of 'donating' a part of individual identity (Esposito 2012d, p.15; Campbell 2006a, p.4). Obligations tend to involve negation if they always remain to some degree unmet.

At the heart of Esposito's community is the 'impersonal', or the third person. This third person overcomes the apparatus, or *dispositif*, of the person, a term which allows for the living being to become a person through differentiating

themselves from others who could not be persons. Esposito seeks to restore community through deepening the internal contradiction between community and immunity, creating an excess through which each body is mutually exposed to every form of otherness, a 'lives-in-common'. This seeks to create a positive form of biopolitical existence which opens community to a new common use.

Agamben presents a deliberately older historically and alternative genealogy of the same notion of *munus*. This genealogy can be read as building on Esposito's work, especially as Agamben's text mentioning *munus* was penned several years after Esposito's. For Agamben *munus* has slightly different political and ontological implications. Specifically, *munus* is a foil for Agamben's modal ontology. The *munus* is an office, and a form of liturgy and apparatus which seeks to control, manage, divide, and exclude life. The *munus* does not set the stage for an affirmative biopolitics and community. Rather the *munus* breaks the ethical connection between the subject and their actions and gives us our modern understandings of office and duty. The *munus* is a *dispositif*, which perpetuates the ceaseless division and separation of life Agamben traces back to ancient Greece. Agamben's approach to a third form of life (which he terms form-of-life) aims to think beyond the exclusionary paradigms of the *munus* and biopolitics. Drawing on Franciscan monasticism, Agamben seeks to illustrate how a third form of life can exist as an *ethos*, a common way of life. Yet this form-of-life, as much as it seeks to present a new politics, remains far more elusive by its very construction than Esposito's community. This can be evidenced through this essay's focus on the current immunising context in which we live.

Esposito's vision is one of an optimistic *affirmative* biopolitics; Agamben seeks to deactivate biopolitical forms of control over life to live life just as it is through a modal ontology. For Agamben, there remains the possibility that politics may cease to be biopolitics. To this end, Agamben seeks to present in his thought a genealogy of fundamental concepts of political thinking to make it clear just what constitutes the concept of politics today. In short, we would not know without that genealogy what it is we need an alternative to. As Greg Bird explains, across all his writings Agamben has searched for ways to articulate a modality of being an existent that occurs precisely in the modality that prepares the existent to be-thus, or in his more recent writings, to be a form-of-life. Agamben's pinnacle is, like Esposito, an optimistic ontological *ethos* (Bird 2016, p.168). Esposito carries this formulation one step further, seeking to differentiate his positive biopolitics from Agamben's approach as follows:

> what does it mean to say that politics is enclosed within the boundaries of life? [...] the answer to this question should not be sought in the folds of a sovereign power that includes life by excluding it [Agamben's position]. Rather, what I believe it should point to is an epochal conjuncture out of which the category of sovereignty makes room for, or at least intersects with, that of immunisation. This is the general

> procedure through which the intersection between politics and life is realised. (Esposito 2011, pp.138–39)

Despite Esposito's focus on immunity, the differences between the two thinkers' politics are not as vast as first appears. Nevertheless, perhaps the clearest distinction in their work can be found in the responses of Esposito and Agamben to the COVID-19 pandemic. Revealingly, Agamben seemingly refuses to sketch out the details of how his modal ontology would translate into concrete politics, whereas Esposito is much more forthcoming with details of how an affirmative biopolitics can and should be translated into actions to benefit the *communitas*.

III. Esposito, Immunity, and Community

As stated, Agamben and Esposito come into contact with one another through immunity and the *munus*. Esposito's affirmative biopolitics is based on a politics of life as opposed to a politics over life (Campbell 2006a, p.3). The relation between *communitas* and *immunitas* is a reciprocal one where each term is inscribed in the logic of the other. This distinction defines Esposito's political philosophy (Bird 2016, p.171). The opposition of immunity and community is deconstructed through presenting an alternative, more hospitable understanding of the immune system.

Community is inhabited by the communal, that which is not my own. Community in Esposito is founded upon a negative dialectic, a common obligation, or common law, that 'puts us in common'. Yet this common law prescribes nothing else but the exigency of community itself (Esposito 2012d, p.14). Community is necessary as we have always-already existed in common: 'The common is not characterised by what is proper but by what is improper, or even more drastically, by the other; by a voiding, be it partial or whole, of property into its negative' (Esposito 2009, p.7).

Community only offers itself in an ever-flawed way and is solely a *flawed* community. What holds us together as beings-in-common is that flaw (Esposito 2012d, p.18). Members of the community are bound by the obligation to give back the *munus* that defines them as such (Esposito 2011, p.6; Bird 2016, p.152). As Campbell argues, discussing the obligatory nature of gift-giving as a defect:

> This debt or obligation of gift-giving operates as a kind of originary defect for all those belonging to a community. The defect revolves around the pernicious effects of reciprocal donation on individual identity. Accepting the *munus* directly undermines the capacity of the individual to identity himself or herself as such and not as part of the community. (Campbell 2006a, p.4)

The structure of the gift is inherently asymmetrical as it cannot be reciprocated, and the community demands ever more gifts from its members. The *munus* radically disrupts the way sharing is articulated in traditional models of community that are based on property, whether it be collectively owned property or the possession of a common identity. In the *munus* we are contracted or drawn together in 'the transitive act of giving'. This modality binds us together while obliging us to perform services on behalf of the *com-munis*. Communal duties and obligations are prioritised over rights and interests. With the *munus* members share 'an expropriation of their own essence, which isn't limited to their "having" but one that involves and affects their own "being subjects"' (Esposito 2009, p.138): 'The *munus* opens up, transforms, and exchanges subjects: expropriates and diminishes them to the point that they are wholly lacking; and binds and indebts them to their contractual obligations' (Esposito 2009, p.4).

Community cannot be understood in isolation from immunity. Esposito takes up the problem of immunity where Jacques Derrida left off and he carries it into the *historical* unfolding of immunity in relation to the problem of biopolitics and the relation between immunity and community (Lewis 2015, p.217).[3] Esposito attempts to historically construct an explanation of how the political events of modernity can be narrated (Lewis 2015, pp.226–227; Esposito 2011, pp.17, 146, 150–153; Campbell 2006b, pp.53–55).

A close relationship exists between immunity and individual identity. The members of the community need to protect themselves from the demands made by their common life and community (Vatter 2017). Immunity is the internal limit which cuts across community; immunity constitutes and reconstitutes community precisely by negating it (Esposito 2011, p.10). Rather than centring simply on reciprocity, community doubles back on itself, protecting itself from a presumed excess of communal gift-giving (Esposito 2012d, pp.58–59). Immunity offers an escape from the expropriative effects of community and protects the individual from the risk of 'contact' or 'contagion' with those who are not immune, therefore safeguarding against the loss of individual identity (Esposito 2008, pp.51–52; Campbell 2006a, p.4). Immunity creates a boundary: to protect the individual, gaining an immunity involves infecting the body with an attenuated form of the infection which then protects against a more virulent infection of the same type (Esposito 2011, p.7; Lewis 2015, p.221). In other words, community or

[3] My focus here is Derrida's 'Faith and Knowledge', where he describes the way in which both religion and science in their traditional forms rely on the notion of an absolute instance that would remain 'immune' in the sense of 'unscathed'. Derrida attempts to demonstrate the impossibility of such an immune instance by attending to the very logic of immunity itself, according to which it is always possible for immunity to turn back on itself and become *auto*immunity (Derrida 2002, pp.79–80). Autoimmunity makes it possible for the integrity of the organism to be destroyed, it can precipitate the end of life, but it also opens the possibility of prosthetic grafts, transplants, and implants which can prolong life (Lewis 2015, p.218).

communality can be lost (even a little) to save it. It follows that the condition of immunity signifies 'nonbeing' or the 'not-having' in common (Esposito 2008, p.51).

IV. The Degeneration of Community

Immunity is a mechanism that functions by using what it opposes. It reproduces in a controlled form exactly what it is meant to protect us from (Esposito 2011, p.8). Immunitary protection outflanks and combats what negates life through an exclusionary inclusion (Langford 2015, p.105).[4]

Immunity both presupposes and negates community as '[t]o survive, the community, every community, is forced to introject the negativity of its own opposite, even if the opposite remains precisely a lacking and contrastive mode of being of the community itself' (Esposito 2008, p.52). Esposito is here referring to all communities, showing how immunity operates, and setting the stage for rethinking our way out of the current predicament. It is, in a sense, a retrospective rethinking of community with that aim in mind. As Esposito argues, this form of immunisation can become destructive:

> Instead of adapting the protection to the actual level of risk, [immunisation] tends to adapt the perception of risk to the growing need for protection — making protecting itself one of the major risks. (Esposito 2011, p.16)

Political philosophy sees community as a wider subjectivity, or something like a quality that is added to a subject's nature (Esposito 2009, p.2). For Esposito, the *munus* that the *communitas* shares is not a property or possession (Esposito 2009, p.6). Community is not a mode of being or an intersubjective recognition where individuals are reflected in each other to confirm their individual identity (Esposito 2009, p.7).

Esposito traces through the etymology of *communitas* the presence of the *munus*, which is characterised by its fundamental impropriety (Esposito 2009, p.3). The relationship between subject and community is one of common non-belonging. Being-in-common is centred around our finitude (our death) and our destitution (the fact that there is no shared property that links us as subjects). We are simply connected in *communitas* through a lacuna or void, rather than a shared quality or essence (Esposito 2009, p.8).

In contrast, political thought since Thomas Hobbes sees the void or finitude in Esposito's *communitas* as something to be expelled. Modern political philosophy arises as a framework of immunisation that rises up against the intertwining of finitude and community that one finds in Esposito's conception of

[4] There is an obvious connection here to Agamben's sovereign decision and the inclusive exclusion of bare life from the *polis* (Agamben 1998, p.7).

communitas (Langford 2015, p.79). Hobbes simplifies the connection between finitude and community through its thematisation as a philosophy of human nature. Ultimately *communitas* is reduced to 'a gift of death' (Esposito 2010, p.13), and the void of the *munus* is replaced with a more radical void, seeking to eliminate its perceived danger by eradicating it (Esposito 2010, p.13).

Unless we radically rethink community, we can never achieve an affirmative bond of common obligation, and we will remain in our immunised relationships where the 'purely negative right of each individual to exclude all others from using what is proper to him or her' characterises our commonality (Esposito 2011, p.25). An affirmative biopolitics must affirm life and the gift of community. Community can only be recognised as an interruption and transformation of immunity. The concept of immunity cannot be rejected or eliminated (Langford 2015, p.136). Esposito argues that the contemporary political task is to find ways to inaugurate the delicate procedure of separating the 'immunitary protection of life from its destruction by means of the common; to conceptualise the function of immune systems in [a] different way, making them into relational filters between inside and outside instead of exclusionary barriers' (Esposito 2013, pp.87–88). The immune system must be reconceived as the very possibility of a genuine intertwining of self and other (Lewis 2015, p.224).

The genuine intertwining of self and other is an 'auto-tolerance'. This is distinct from autoimmunity, which is a self-reactive turn, akin to a civil war, where there is no external enemy. The inside fights against itself until it self-destructs (Esposito 2011, p.164). In respect of auto-tolerance, Esposito gives the example of pregnancy, and the tolerance of the mother's immune system for the foetus's, to support this reading of immunity (Esposito 2011, pp.164, 167, 170; Lewis 2015, p.224). This embracing of otherness is a condition for the formation of identity:

> A perspective is thus opened up within the immunitary logic that overturns its prevailing interpretation. From this perspective, nothing remains of the incompatibility between self and other. The other is the form the self takes where inside intersects with outside, the proper with the common, immunity with community. (Esposito 2011, p.171)

Only by a further 'deepening of the internal contradiction' of the immunitary paradigm can thinking open the possibility of a different philosophy of immunity (Esposito 2011, p.18). The immune system embodies a porous logic of identity which is related to our community with others (Esposito 2011, p.174), a mutual exposure which exposes us to every form of otherness (Lewis 2015, p.224; Esposito 2011, p.165). The other constitutes us from deep within. We *are* the other, we are strangers to ourselves (Esposito 2012d, p.26). Each becomes an '"other"' in 'a chain of alterations that cannot ever be fixed in a new identity' (Esposito 2009, p.138). Freedom is an 'experience', and is viewed as something to defend or conquer, possess, or extend. In this way it is a 'pure negative' (Esposito 2012d, p.50). This

procession is not enacted by the Other, as it is in the case of Emmanuel Levinas, but by the *munus*, which in Esposito's writings occupies the space of the *third*.

How can Esposito's form of life be relational, or communal? Does the duty to give back the *munus* completely absorb the being of the one who owes? As Bird posits:

> Are members of a community merely functionaries of an office, such as a priest who has given his entire life, ultimately sacrificed it, to the cause of the church, or can one be obliged to contribute without losing oneself in the process? [...] Can one belong to a *com-munus* without being wholly othered, altered, or made to be entirely *altruistic* to the point that it would be impossible to distinguish oneself from [one's] community? [...] Can't we be both singular and plural in the *munus*? This is one of the fundamental tensions in Esposito's philosophy (Bird 2016, pp.170–71).

V. The Person

Esposito traces the answer to these questions in the 'impersonal', which will lead us beyond the *dispositif* of the person. For Esposito, a *dispositif* is something that represents a process of subjectification and a vehicle through which a regime of personhood is instituted (Campbell 2011, p.67). Esposito states:

> If the point of philosophical reflection is to critically dismantle contemporary opinion, to radically dismantle contemporary opinion, to radically interrogate what is presented as immediately clear to all, then there are few concepts so in need of dismantling as that of 'person'. (Esposito 2012c, p.17)

The being who is designated a 'person' has value attached to them: 'only a life that has crossed beforehand through the symbolic door of the person is believed to be sacred or is to be valued in terms of its qualities since only life is able to produce the proper credentials of a person' (Esposito 2012c, p.18).

The impersonal is implicit in the concept of a person; no one is born a person. Some may become a person, but only through differentiating themselves from others who were not persons, but who were rather semi-persons or things (such as slaves) (Esposito 2010, p.126). The concept of 'person' implies a doubling. In the essential indistinction between the two figures of subject and object, of subjectivisation and subjection we find the role and function of the *dispositif* of the person. That role is to divide a living being into two natures made up of different qualities — the one subjugated to the mastery of the other — and thus to create subjectivity through a process of subjection or objectivisation (Esposito 2012c,

p.21). The mind, the non-corporeal, masters the corporeal, meaning one part of the person is dominated by another, frequently the animal body by the rational — and properly human — mind; man is a person only if he masters the animal part of his nature (Esposito 2012c, p.22).

The *dispositif* of the person therefore contains mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion with respect to the realm of personhood (Esposito 2010, p.126). 'Person' therefore becomes a technical term. To be a person is to be divided and for it to be possible to subjugate one part to another.

To be recognised as a person a difference must be identified from others who are categorised as no longer persons, not yet persons or not persons — another inclusive exclusion (Campbell 2011, p.69). There are therefore two aspects of the *dispositif*, a unity and a separation, which are mutually constitutive of one another:

> It isn't possible to personalise someone without depersonalising or reifying others, without pushing someone over into the indefinite space that opens like a kind of trap door below the person. (Esposito 2012c, p.24)

Esposito's critique of the person is presented as an unmasking of a *real* meaning of the *dispositif* of the person where the impersonal is the irreducible and untameable outside to the *dispositif* — not that which is excluded by it, but that which is *heteronomous* to its regime of meaning (Russell 2014, p.221). The third person, or 'impersonal', opens the concept of the person to an 'estrangement' and to 'a set of forces that push it beyond its logical, and even grammatical boundaries' (Esposito 2012b, p.14).

Esposito argues for a notion of the 'impersonal' through the lens of Simone Weil's notion of justice, using the term 'person' instead of 'subject' to think an affirmative biopolitics (Campbell 2011, p.66). Drawing on Simone Weil, Esposito argues that if rights belong to the person then justice is situated in the impersonal. The notion of rights is connected to the *dispositif* of the person since they are exclusionary in nature in both their private and depriving features. Once understood as the prerogative of established subjects, right excludes in and of itself all the others that do not belong to the same category (Esposito 2010, p.130). Subjective rights belong within 'the enclosed space of the person' (Esposito 2012b, p.3). Weil argues that the person has always constituted the originary figure endowed with rights.

Rights — all rights — exclude all those that do not belong to the category of the subject or citizen and are held in relation to specific juridical categories like property.[5] It is for this reason that Esposito states: 'the essential failure of human rights, their inability to restore the broken connection between rights and life, does

[5] For a reading of Esposito which uses his thought to reconfigure juridical categories of rights, see Stone (2014).

not take place in spite of the affirmation of the ideology of the person but rather because of it' (Esposito 2012b, p.5).

Justice, on the other hand, is universal, and belongs to everyone and is for everyone, whilst not being anywhere except on the side of the impersonal, common life (Esposito 2010, p.130). The goal of this justice is to think about rights by shifting the emphasis from person to impersonal, reversing the proper into the improper and the immune into the common. The impersonal involves the exclusion of 'proper names' and is a way of being human that finally coincides with only itself (Esposito 2012d, p.122). The impersonal is not to be conceived as 'simply the opposite of the person — its direct negation — but something that, being of the person or in the person, stops the immune mechanism that introduces the "I" into the simultaneously inclusive and exclusive circle of the "we"' (Esposito 2009, p.102). On my reading of Esposito, this impersonal life is immanent, common to all, but never generic. The impersonal provides an ontological basis for community, given that it is the site of universal justice. To connect justice to community: an affirmative biopolitics sees community as a transformation of immunity that intertwines the self and the other. The other constitutes us in the sense that we are the other, and each becomes an other in a chain of alterations that cannot become fixated in a new identity. This is enacted by the *munus*, occupying the position of the impersonal (see Esposito 2012d, pp.120–22; Esposito 2008, pp.191–94). A concern for justice is connected to a concern for community, a concern for being-in-common.

The thought of life as a thought of immanence — against the differentiation and division of life from within itself — is the initial horizon which Esposito shares with Agamben (Langford 2015, p.144). For Agamben, the biopolitical horizon is delineated through an emendation of the original Foucauldian notion of biopolitics. Biopolitics is projected backwards onto the very origin of Western politics in which the inclusion of bare life in the political realm is made the original nucleus of sovereign power (Langford 2015, p.143). This creates a divergence with Esposito concerning the conception of the immanence of life (Langford 2015, p.144). For Esposito biopolitics is not a terrain on which life founders. Rather, we must commence from:

> the same categories of 'life', 'body' and 'birth'; and then [convert] their immunitary (which is to say self-negating) declension in a direction that is open to a more originary and intense sense of *communitas*. Only in this way — at the point of intersection and tension among contemporary reflections that have moved in such a direction — will it be possible to trace the initial features of a biopolitics that is finally affirmative. (Esposito 2008, p.157)

This biopolitics must involve a universal justice as an ontological basis for community. The third person points toward a philosophy of life that has

systematically dismantled the category of the person through 'a logic that privileges multiplicity and contamination over identity and discrimination' (Esposito 2012b, p.145). But crucially, the ontological primacy of the impersonal that is supposed to interrupt and overturn the regime of meaning determined by the concept of the person does not establish some new configuration of meaning into which biopolitical thinking could settle (Russell 2014, p.221). He states:

> The impersonal is a shifting border: that critical margin, one might say, that separates the semantics of the person from its natural effect of separation; that blocks its reifying outcome [...] the impersonal is its [the person's] alteration, or its extroversion into an exteriority that calls it into question and overturns its prevailing meaning. (Esposito 2009, p.14)

How, then, is the singularity of life to be preserved within this play of community, justice and the impersonal? Bruno Bosteels has argued that Esposito's rejection of political subjectivity leads him to take a decision in favour of passivity or inaction, substituting philosophical critique for revolutionary politics (Bosteels 2010, p.237). An affirmative biopolitics always involves decisions about life, its meaning, its different demands, its preservation and its expansion. At the origin of singular life 'there is a battle to be fought or at least a dissensus to be registered' (Esposito in Campbell and Luisetti 2010, p.112). Maintaining that singular existence will be a question of thinking an immanent antagonism, as conflict is always already a part of any order (Esposito in Campbell and Luisetti 2010, p.111). When interviewed in June 2020, Esposito stated that real change is not about convincing people but involves political struggle. The political is about the 'fundamental conflicts of the modern condition' and 'society is instituted through deeply embedded political conflict [...] For there to be real and effective change, a political struggle is needed' (Esposito 2020). It must involve a constant questioning of whether singular life is coinciding only with itself, whether communal living is only being-in-common, or whether immunitary impulses are turning the impersonal into a person and being-in-common into a community defined through a shared essence.

VI. Agamben on Office, Liturgy, Duty, Ethics

Agamben's genealogy of *munus* does not focus on the immunitary paradigm, but rather seeks a deeper connection back to the claim that life as a concept is ceaselessly articulated and divided. In *What is an Apparatus?* Agamben explains that '[t]he event that has produced the human constitutes, for the living being, something like a division [...] This division separates the living being from itself and from its immediate relationship with its environment' (Agamben 2009, p.16).

The divisions of life pass like a 'mobile border' within the living human being and operate as an apparatus or *dispositif* through which the decision as to what is human and what is not human becomes possible (Agamben 2004, p.15).

To draw the connection between *munus* and the *dispositif*, my starting point is Agamben's reference to *munus* in *Opus Dei* (Agamben 2013a), which is presented as an addendum to his 2011 study, *The Kingdom and the Glory* (Agamben 2011). *The Kingdom and the Glory* sought to lay bare the theological foundations of the governmental paradigm of modern political economy. *Opus Dei* starts with a claim that in Western ontology, being is subordinated to praxis. Being is measured according to its praxis, or its operativity (Agamben 2013a, p.44). This praxis has, in Agamben's view, exercised a huge influence on the way in which modernity has thought its ontology and its ethics, its politics and its economy (Agamben 2013a, p.xii). This work brings Agamben into contact with Esposito's thought (although this is a connection never admitted in *Opus Dei).*

Opus Dei is a technical term that designates the priestly liturgy. The Greek *leitourgia* means 'public work'. Beyond the Pauline corpus, the terms *leitourgein* and *leitourgia* figure only twice in the Bible (Luke 1:23; Acts 13:1–2), and even in Paul's writings the term maintained the meaning of a service for the community (Romans 15:27, 2 Corinthians 9:12). The Letter to the Hebrews presupposes an identity between the actions of Christ and liturgy; Christ's sacrifice on the cross is a liturgical action that is both absolute and can be carried out only once (Hebrews 9:28, 10:12). Christ coincides completely with his liturgy, a sacrifice which must be endlessly repeated through the covenant (instituted at the Last Supper) to renew its memory (Hebrews 10:3). The *leitourgia,* by the third century CE, comes to acquire the characteristics of a stable and lifelong office, a special activity, a Eucharist which continuously reactualises Christ's sacrifice and renews the foundational and eternal character of Christ's priesthood (Agamben 2013a, p.15).

The liturgical character of Christ's sacrifice is connected by Agamben to the doctrine of the Trinity. Agamben's focus in relation to the Christian Trinity is the term *oikonomia*, the Greek term for economy. *Oikonomia* signified the administration of the home (*oikos*) and other improvisational forms of management (Agamben 2009, p.8). Agamben argues that this managerial meaning of the term survives into Christian Trinitarian thought. God must manage his relationship with creation. This means managing God's relationship to God. One God brought all things into existence from non-existence. The Christian revelation of God involved God making Himself known in the Person of Jesus, the Messiah, raising Him from the dead and offering salvation to men through Him, and the pouring out of His Holy Spirit upon the Church (Zartaloudis 2010, p.88). The Trinity – God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit – has its own economy, which allows God to manage the economy of redemption and salvation. *Oikonomia* became an apparatus through which the Trinitarian dogma and the idea of a divine providential government of the world were introduced to the Christian faith (Agamben 2009, p.10).

Oikonomia became translated into the Latin *dispositio*, from which the French *dispositif* is derived (Agamben 2013a, p.11). For Agamben, it is not possible for a subject to escape the control of the *dispositif*, or to utilise the *dispositif* to construct a form of freedom which transcends the individual:

> I shall call a dispositive literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviours, opinions, or discourses of living beings. Not only, therefore, prisons, mad houses, the panopticon, schools, confession, factories, disciplines, juridical measures, and so forth (whose connection with power is in a certain sense evident), but also the pen, writing, literature, philosophy, agriculture, cigarettes, navigation, computers, cellular telephones and — why not — language itself, which is perhaps the most ancient of apparatuses. (Agamben 2009, p.17)[6]

Therefore, Agamben proposes (in his own words) a 'massive' division: on the one hand, living beings, and on the other, *dispositifs* in which living beings are incessantly captured:

> To recapitulate, we have then two great classes: living beings (or substances) and dispositives, and between these two, as a third class, subjects. I call a subject that which results from the relation and, so to speak, from the relentless fight between living beings and dispositives. (Agamben 2009, p.19)

An apparatus designates that in which, and through which, one realises an activity of governance devoid of any foundation in being — apparatuses always produce their subject (Agamben 2013a, p.11). The subject is produced and utterly dominated by *dispositifs*, and the *munus* operates precisely as such a *dispositif*. Even if for Esposito we cannot remove immunity from our conceptions of life, Agamben seeks to massively expand the meaning of *munus* beyond its immunitary understanding.

Agamben returns to the liturgy, arguing that in liturgically celebrating the new covenant, the ministry celebrates the *oikonomia*'s memory and renews its presence (Agamben 2013a, p.22). The liturgy is an apparatus, and the priest acts as an 'animate instrument' whose action is split in two. The early Church protected the reality of the sacrament from the subjective qualities of the person performing the office. The *opus operatum* refers to the validity and effectiveness of actions. The *opus operans* refer to the moral and physical actions of the agent (Agamben 2013a,

[6] The English translation of *What is an Apparatus?* renders *'dispositivo'* as 'dispositive'. I have followed this spelling in direct quotations from the volume, but otherwise use the italicised *'dispositif'* in this article. There is no difference in meaning intended between the two spellings.

pp.23–25). This meant that any moral or ethical flaws on the part of the priest would not affect the validity of the sacrament. For Agamben this meant that the ethical connection between the subject and their action is broken (Agamben 2013a, p.25). What is determinative is only the function of the agent in carrying out the action, not their intent. By defining the peculiar operativity of its public praxis in this way, the Church invented the paradigm of a human activity whose effectiveness does not depend on the subject who sets it to work (Agamben 2013a, p.28).

Liturgy, for Agamben, is the origin of our modern ideas of 'office'. Before the nineteenth century, we find in liturgy's place (as a *dispositif*, not as an equivalent to the 'third' in Esposito) the Latin *officium* (Agamben 2013a, p.xi). The paradigm of the office consists only in the operation by means of which it is realised. It acts independently of the qualities of the subject who officiates it (Agamben 2013a, p.xiii). Agamben explains that the term indicating the political liturgy of the Roman Empire was *munus*. *Munus* corresponded to *leitourgia* in Roman political and juridical vocabulary. There is thus a nexus between *munus*, office, liturgy, *oikonomia* and the *dispositif*. *Munus* designated the function that the officials carried out; Christ's sacrifice was a *publicum munus*, a public performance, a liturgy done for the salvation of humanity. *Munus* as *officium* carries a meaning of 'an effective action' which is 'appropriate to carry out' given one's social condition. An office (or *munus*) is what causes an individual to comport himself in a consistent way (Agamben 2013a, pp.65–66).

Like Esposito, Agamben traces in *munus* the notion of a way to conduct one's common life. Unlike Esposito, the *munus* cannot be redeemed. It is an *officium* which renders life governable, by means of which the life of humans is 'instituted' and 'formed' (Agamben 2013a, p.75). The sphere of *officium* as that in which what is in question is the distinctively human capacity to govern one's own life and those of others. The official, in carrying out their office, their *munus,* is what he has to do and he has to do what he is: he is a being of command. In this way, being is transformed into having-to-be. This having-to-be becomes a duty, and ethics is transformed from an *ethos* or way of being into a duty or having-to-be a certain way (Agamben 2013a, pp.80–85).

Starting in the seventeenth century, *'officium'* and *'munus'* become translated as 'duty'. 'Duty' underlies Kantian ethics (this is a position which both Esposito and Agamben share). *Munus* becomes coterminous with the ideas of virtues and *habitus*. The goodness of a virtue is viewed as its effectiveness; an act carried out thanks to the inclination of an individual's virtuous habit is 'the execution of a duty' (Agamben 2013a, pp.101–103). This duty is a *debitum;* in religious terms it is an 'infinite debt', a debt that is inexhaustible. Kantian ethics introduces the figure of a virtue that can never satisfy its debt, and the idea of an infinite task or duty (Agamben 2013a, p.107). In this way, *munus* (office), or duty, founds the notion of a human *habitus*.

This reference to debt is in direct contrast to Esposito. Whereas for Esposito community is founded upon a lack or debt, Agamben thinks of debt and duty in a

slightly different, yet crucial, way. Kantian ethics collapses ethics into an action whose sole motivation is duty or debt (Agamben 2013a, pp.111–12). Such a duty operates as another apparatus attempting to divide life into those beings who follow their duty and those who do not.

In Kant, what guarantees the effectiveness of duty is the law (which is what Esposito referred to as the Unfulfillable) (Agamben 2013a, pp.108–114). Duty is defined as 'the necessity of an action from respect for the law' (Agamben 2013a, p.112). Ethical duty is 'to be able to do what one must' (Agamben 2013a, p.115). Ethics therefore becomes an imperative, presupposing an ontology which claims to know how the world 'has to be' (Agamben 2013a, pp.118–119). The imperative is performative. It decrees that one must behave a certain way (Agamben 2013a, pp.124–126). Agamben opposes any conception of ethics which determines that you *must* behave a certain way. To this end, he wants to think an ontology beyond operativity, or beyond a *must* (Agamben 2013a, p.129). In such a philosophy, Agamben speaks positively of debt, but not in the Kantian sense of needing to act in a certain way. Instead, this debt relates to being proper to oneself:

> Since the being most proper to humankind is being one's own possibility or potentiality, then and only for this reason (that is, insofar as humankind's most proper being — being potential — is in a certain sense lacking, insofar as it can not-be, it is therefore devoid of foundation and humankind is not always already in possession of it), humans have and feel a debt. Humans, in their potentiality to be and to not-be, are, in other words, always already in debt; they always already have a bad conscience without having to commit any blameworthy act. (Agamben 1993, pp.43–44)

One is rendered improper because debt places one in a position that is 'humankind's most proper being'. Instead of Kantian ethics, the ethics that Agamben proposes starts from the contention that there is nothing to 'enact or realise' (Agamben 1993, p.43). Living according to this *ethos* disrupts operativeness. Such a life is 'a being that is *its* mode of being' (Agamben 1993, p.29). For Agamben, ethics must adhere to this *ethos*.

VII. Use, Cenoby and Form-of-life

Agamben's work on 'inoperativity' and 'use' sheds light on the *common* nature of the duty of *munus*. Agamben seeks a purely *destituent* life, one which is completely free from the control of *dispositifs* (Agamben 2016, p.268). Where a life is destitute, it exists with other destitute lives in common. It is not a subject produced by the operation of *dispositifs*. Like Esposito's lives-in-common, this destitute life (form-of-life) is only generated by its manner of being, and is thus impossible to

reduce to a subject (Agamben 2016, p.224). This forms the basis for Agamben's modal ontology. Agamben makes it clear that the mode expresses not 'what' but 'how' being is (Agamben 2016, p.164). Form-of-life, like the impersonal, is a third form of life. In a sense, Agamben is arguing that existence precedes essence:

> Only if I am [...] delivered to a possibility and a power, only if living and intending and apprehending themselves are at stake each time in what I live and intend and apprehend [...] only then can a form of life become, in its own factness and thingness, *form-of-life*, in which it is never possible to isolate something like naked life. (Agamben 2000, p.9)[7]

This is not Agamben proposing a hypostatic ontology. A hypostatic ontology sees existence or beings as an outcome or residue of the activity of Being or essence. It involves the division of Being. This is the origin of every ontological difference; Western philosophy interrogates being with the division that traverses it (namely essence and existence) (Agamben 2016, p.115). Hypostasis as a term appears around the second or third century CE in Stoic ontology, referring to the passage from being to existence. Being exhausts itself and disappears, leaving in its place the residual pure effectiveness of hypostasis, bare existence as such (Agamben 2016, pp.135–36). Being is distinct from existence, but existence is something that being produces and moreover necessarily belongs to it. There is no other foundation of existence than an operation, an emanation, or an effectuation of being. Existence is thus held in a relation with a negative ground (Agamben 2016, p.137).

In Neoplatonism, existence (a hypostasis) becomes a performance of the essence. This doctrine finds itself reproduced in trinitarian theology, the one God who produces not three realities but three realisations of Himself. The three hypostases refer to one sole substance (Agamben 2016, pp.141–42). Today there is a priority of existence, with a divine substance manifesting itself in an individuated existence through an *oikonomia*. Singular existence must be achieved or effectuated (Agamben 2016, p.142). Yet in the modern era, God is dead, so if we retain this hypostatic ontology (which Agamben claims that we do), all that is left is existence as a residue of something that was never there (Agamben 2016, p.143).

In contrast to hypostatic ontology, modal ontology can only be understood as a 'middle voice' or a medial ontology. Singular existence — the mode — is neither a substance nor a precise fact but an infinite series of modal oscillations, by means of which substance always constitutes and expresses itself (Agamben 2016, p.172). This form-of-life is a monad, singular, but it always already communicates with other monads, and represents them in itself. It is a life which is inseparable from

[7] The isolation referred to is Schmitt's sovereign decision. Naked life here is coterminous with bare life.

its form, but also separable from every thing and every context (Agamben 2016, pp.232–33).

Every body is affected by its form-of-life as by a clinamen. This clinamen is a leaning, an attraction, a taste. The ethical subject is that subject which constitutes-itself in contact with this clinamen and focuses on *how* it lives its life (Agamben 2016, p.231). Living a life as a form *is* an ethical existence. It involves ways of envisaging an absolutely immanent life on the threshold of its political and ethical intensification (Agamben 1998, p.5). Agamben desires 'to bring the political out of its concealment and, at the same time, return thought to its practical calling' (Agamben 2016, p.232). Crucially for my exposition here, Agamben makes clear that form-of-life does exist, but not in the places where we may first look. It is 'hidden in the present, not in the tendencies that appear progressive but in the most insignificant and contemptible' (Agamben 2016, p.227). Form-of-life can only be seen in 'unedifying places' (Agamben 2017, p.227).

This perhaps explains why Agamben develops the idea of 'use' through Aristotle's writings on the slave. The slave, like the priest, is an animate instrument. The slave is the being whose work is the use of the body (Agamben 2016, pp.4–6). The master mediated their own relation with nature through their relation with another human being — the slave. This paradigm shows that the individual constitutes themselves as an ethical subject of their relationship with nature solely because this relationship is mediated by the relationship with other human beings (Agamben 2016, pp.14–15).

Yet the slave (through its use of the body) represents a sphere of human action, caught by the law but capable of being disentangled, that we have yet to come to terms with (and one which Agamben compares to our enslavement by technology today) (Agamben 2016, pp.66–79). This use is unconnected to an end; 'use' is connected to Aristotelian 'habit' (which was in turn linked by Agamben to *munus* and office). Habit is use-of-oneself. This can be connected to the *munus* Agamben referred to in *Opus Dei* but did not connect with Esposito. For Agamben, professionals (those with a vocation), like every human being, are not transcendent title holders of a capacity to act or to make. They are living beings that, in use, and only in the use of their body parts as of the world that surrounds them, have self-experience and constitute themselves as using (themselves and the world) (Agamben 2016, pp.61–63).

Habit as *ethos* was rendered inaccessible by the mediaeval theories of virtue. These theories interpret the virtue of habit as action and will, not use. Habit consists of obligation and duty, a question of what one must do. For this reason, a common use needs us to jettison the Kantian, and therefore also Christian, ethics of duty (as these Christian ethics of religious duty endlessly repeat the division of life which occurs through the immunitary/biopolitical paradigm). Use is an inoperative praxis, in that it can show us what a human body can do and opens it to a new use. What is common (such as common use) is inappropriable (and thus irreducible to a relation). Again, showing affinity with Esposito (an unspoken affinity at that),

Agamben contends that the biopolitical substance of each individual is their relation with the inappropriable. This can (and has been) violently appropriated by others as a property, for example the juridical capture of the slave (which can lead to totalitarianism).

Alongside the slave, Agamben leans on the figure of the monk to further illustrate his conception of form-of-life. If we are to find a genuinely ontological *ethos* or way of being, it is necessary to sever the connection between ethics and actions to focus on the relationship between ethos and *habitus*. Agamben uses the figures of the priest and the monk to demonstrate the difference between these two configurations. The priest is a mere instrument of the operative and effective ontology that dominates Western economic theology, while the monk presents an alternative *ethos* qua form of life that is almost ontological, inoperative, and ineffectual (Bird 2016, p.140).

Cenobitic communities meticulously regulated every aspect of the monks' lives through monastic rules which were developed by the Church (Agamben 2013b, p.47). These monastic rules were norms but aimed not to impose obligations and rather to declare and show to the monks the obligations they had agreed to when they made their monastic vows upon entering the monastery (Agamben 2013b, p.34). Despite their flight from the world, the cenobites gave rise 'to a model of total communitarian life' (Agamben 2013b, p.9).

Cenoby derives from *koinobion*, which is a life lived in common (*koinos bios*) (Agamben 2013b, p.6). This common life is defined, in Acts, as a life without 'private ownership of any possessions' because 'everything they owned was held in common' (Agamben 2013b, p.10). One of the decisive features of cenobitic monasticism is the notion of 'communal habitation'. The cenobites view habit as a 'way of life' (Agamben 2013b, p.13). How they dress is intricately linked to how they are supposed to conduct themselves. This link between dress and conduct reveals the 'interior way of being', such that the attention paid to the 'care of the body' is turned toward the *morum formula,* 'example of a way of life' (Agamben 2013b, p.14). 'To inhabit together' monks had 'to share' a *habitus*, which was more than a style of dress or a place. The cenobites 'attempt to make habit and form-of-life coincide in an absolute and total *habitus'* (Agamben 2013b, p.16).

Compared to this regulated monastic existence, St Francis of Assisi and the Franciscan order attempted to integrate these monastic rules into a form of life itself, so that rule and life would become indistinguishable (Agamben 2013b, p.xi). Francis's direction was that the monks should live not according to the 'form of the Roman Church', the law, but the 'form of the Holy Gospel' (Agamben 2013b, p.97). Agamben sees the Franciscan 'cenobitic project' as shifting the 'ethical problem from the relation between norm and action to that of form of life' (Agamben 2013b, p.72). In their *habitus*, life and form become so intertwined that their form of life can no longer be read as a rule or a code of norms and precepts (Agamben 2013b, p.99); rather, life and rule 'enter into a zone of indifference'

(Agamben 2013b, p.71). The Franciscan legacy leaves us with the 'undeferrable task' of

> how to think a form-of-life, a human life entirely removed from the grasp of the law and a use of bodies and of the world that would never be substantiated into an appropriation [...] [t]o think life as that which is never given as property, but only as common use. (Agamben 2013b, p.xiii)

A life which makes itself the very form and living according to that form is an entirely different relation than 'applying a form (or norm) to life' (Agamben 2013b, p.99). The ideal monk is someone whose being is what it is, whose actions are simply ends in themselves, and thus his actions are judged by the moral and physical qualities he possesses (*opus operans*) (Bird 2016, p.144). Service to God and the life led by the Franciscan monk are one and the same.

Agamben demonstrates that this form of life is not configured in a contrarian manner. It is not configured in opposition to the model of the *officium*, as would be the case with an anticlerical model, because it is a form of life that is 'radically extraneous to law and liturgy' (Agamben 2013b, p.121). To oppose the Church would be to enter its terrain and its terms. This would take the form of an antagonistic movement that would seek to vindicate itself and establish a new and 'true Church'. Oppositional power merely challenges the *dispositif* by establishing a new one, which challenges nothing because it is a constituent form of power. The Franciscans represent a destituent form of power. If their form of life is to remain pure, it must be formulated as completely indifferent (whatever, *qualunque*, *quodlibet*) to the liturgical *officium* (Bird 2016, p.145).

The Franciscans sought to *'realise a human life and practice absolutely outside the determination of the law'* (Agamben 2013b, p.110). They should have concentrated on the relationship between use and *habitus*. Since *habitus* was conceived as a nonoppositional form of life, use itself 'could have been configured as a *tertium* with respect to law and life, potential and act', and thus it could have been used to define 'the monks' vital practice itself, their form-of-life' (Agamben 2013b, pp.140–41). Use could be conceived as 'that which establishes this renunciation as a form and as a mode of life' (Agamben 2013b, p.142). The Franciscan doctrine of use is a model where use is 'translated into an ethos and a form of life' (Agamben 2013b, p.144). In this sense, the community to come will be akin to a life lived through its mode or manner of being, like the common use of Franciscanism (Agamben 2016, p.228). It is in this monastic life, whereby we live not through our identities or relations but in contact with other forms-of-life, living a life of contemplative use, that we deactivate the *dispositifs* that constantly divide and separate life, and being expresses itself in the singular body (Agamben 2016, p.233).

How, then, would Agamben see this singular life as being preserved? I think that Agamben's form-of-life is a much more ephemeral figure than Esposito's impersonal, precisely because Agamben is trying to think outside of *dispositifs* and systems which create the subject, rather than trying to work towards their alteration. Esposito makes this point in his work, whilst never referring to Agamben's ideas disrespectfully (Esposito 2012a, p.250). Agamben's project is strictly associated with the paradigm that should be overcome. Esposito states that:

> All of the categories [including Agamben's] that have been employed on various occasions to arrive at the connection between politics and theology [...] turn out to have political-theological origins themselves. By this I mean that they presuppose what they should explain, because without some sort of enchantment there could be no disenchantment, and without something sacred there would be nothing to desecrate. (Esposito 2015, pp.1–2)

Esposito compares Agamben's stance to something that constitutes the internal 'critical counterpoint' within the regime, but 'ends up affirming what it should differentiate itself from' (Esposito 2012a, p.225). Form-of-life is a promise — and it may be no more than that.

VIII. COVID-19

This essay has sought to interrogate the writings of Giorgio Agamben and Roberto Esposito on community and the third person. Both Esposito and Agamben present us with forms of radical politics. Both seek to create forms of political emancipation, both sketch out a form of the third person, and both lean on the concept of the *munus* to do so. Esposito's positive form of biopolitics stands in opposition to Agamben's attempt to deactivate biopolitics and found a life as common use and form. Esposito reads the *munus* as creating an excess through which lives exist in common, opening community to a new common use. Agamben sees the *munus* as an office which ultimately, and inevitably, breaks the ethical connection between the subject and their actions. This *munus* is an exclusionary apparatus to which a third (form-of-life) offers an alternative *ethos* and a common way of life. In certain comments on the pandemic, we can see how both Esposito and Agamben consider governmental responses to the virus to present challenges to their forms of political emancipation, and in their responses, we can see illustrated key points of difference in their thought.

Esposito makes clear that we must live with the virus for the moment, at least until a vaccine is distributed. He affirms that 'without institutions we would not have been able to withstand this pandemic'. With that said, he is critical of social distancing and lockdown policies. Social distancing is paradoxical as distancing

cannot be social and always reduces communal forms of life. Lockdowns are risky immunitary *dispositifs* that also desocialise, as well as impinging upon individual freedom (Esposito 2020). Esposito goes on:

> In my opinion, as with immunity, it is a matter of measure, of finding the right balance, in the sense that all human and social bodies need a certain degree of immunisation, but should be cautious of extremes. There is not one individual or social body that does not have an immune system. It would die without protection and a certain degree of immunisation. The immunitary system is necessary for survival, but when it crosses a certain threshold, it starts destroying the body it aims to defend. That threshold is crossed exactly when social distancing demands a total rupture of social bonds. (Esposito 2020)

The emphasis on finding the right balance is crucial here. Esposito's aim is an affirmative biopolitics, which the pandemic and responses to the pandemic have delayed. The relationship between immunity and community is not to be deactivated, or transcended, but changed. For Esposito, an affirmative biopolitics means:

> heavy investments in public health facilities, building hospitals, making medicine affordable or giving medications free of charge, maintaining comfortable living conditions for the population, and protecting doctors and nurses who have died during the epidemic [...] pharmaceutical companies should decrease the price of medication [...] A lot of lives would be saved if prices went down. This fight against the pharmaceutical industries is crucial. [...] From my point of view, affirmative biopolitics also means, for instance, de-privatising the water supply, reclaiming and protecting forests, and also combatting the inequalities I just mentioned. (Esposito 2020)

Once the pandemic has passed, the struggle for an affirmative biopolitics can be resumed, with the fostering of social relationships at its heart (Esposito 2020).

In contrast, Agamben's response to the pandemic illustrates the need not to change the biopolitical world in which we live but to deactivate it entirely. The epidemic has been invented (from very little) to impose sovereign power over the populace. He has accused the media and authorities of spreading a state of panic, using the virus to govern through a state of exception: 'it is almost as if with terrorism exhausted as a cause for exceptional measures, the invention of an epidemic offered the ideal pretext for scaling them up beyond any limitation' (Agamben 2020a).

Social distancing 'will become the model for politics that awaits us', and 'there have been more serious epidemics in the past, but no one ever thought of

declaring a state of emergency like today, one that forbids us even to move' (Agamben 2020c). Lockdowns and social distancing are examples of governing through a 'health terror' (Agamben 2020b). Lukas van den Berge has argued that Agamben provides a critical voice which can prevent us from accepting emergency measures, biopolitical practice and business as usual policies (van den Berge 2020, pp.5–6). This can explain Agamben's initial reaction to the virus's spread:

> Faced with the frenetic, irrational and entirely unfounded emergency measures adopted against an alleged epidemic of coronavirus, we should begin from the declaration issued by the National Research Council (CNR), which states not only that 'there is no SARS-CoV2 epidemic in Italy', but also that the infection, according to the epidemiological data available as of today and based on tens of thousands of cases, causes mild/moderate symptoms (a sort of influenza) in 80–90% of cases, benign outcome in the large majority of cases. It has been estimated that only 4% of patients require intensive therapy. (Agamben 2020a)

What is to be done? Agamben's examples of form-of-life, like the Franciscans, offer a passivity in the face of oppression, not resistance in the sense ordinarily understood. This monasticism, focusing as it does on the life of the monk, is difficult to reconcile with Agamben's other writings on *munus* and the liturgical office. It is unclear how the cenobitic ideal of the monk's form-of-life can be reconciled with liturgy. Liturgy as *officium* acts independently of the subject who officiates it, governing one's own life and those of others. *Munus* as *officium* becomes a duty and an apparatus of control, yet form-of-life is a mode of living whereby we live our lives as a use and an *ethos*. This is a fine, yet vital, distinction made by Agamben, but it is clear from a passage that Agamben cites from Ernst Bloch that the world he is seeking to bring about requires only a slight shift in thinking:

> The Hassidim tell a story about the world to come that says everything there will be just as it is here. Just as our room is now, so it will be in the world to come; where our baby sleeps now, there too it will sleep in the other world. And the clothes we wear in this world, those too we will wear there. Everything will be as it is now, just a little different. (Agamben 1993, p.43)

This means that it is in this world, in the present, that we must uncover the potentialities for the new world, a supplementary world that exists already (Salzani 2012, p.227). Yet Agamben's response to the pandemic has not given any insight as to how this small difference can be brought about. Esposito has criticised Agamben's philosophy as 'very indeterminate' (Esposito and Nancy 2010, p.84).

Likewise, Antonio Negri has characterised it as a 'utopian escape' (quoted in Salzani 2012, p.228). It is true that Agamben does not prescribe what practically must be done (Bird 2018, p.61). What is missing from these analyses is an attempt to concretise the coming community. The publication of *The Use of Bodies* in 2016 marked the 'abandonment' of the *Homo Sacer* study. It is therefore left to others to continue this work and to seek to locate the little difference in the present which marks the path to a form-of-life. Whether this can be done is a question for a future study.

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The Machine in Esposito and Agamben

Michael Lewis

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.

[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

[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

[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

[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]

[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,

[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.

[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

[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

[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

[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

[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 *'argia'* 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]

[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

[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

[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

[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_XYWq_x82&index=3&ab_channel=EuropeanGraduateSchoolVideoLectures [accessed 30th October 2021].

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The Ontological Reality of Evil in the Philosophy of Luigi Pareyson

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Abstract
In this article, I focus on Pareyson's conception of evil, which he understands in terms of concrete ontological reality, rather than regarding it as a sheer moral issue. After outlining Pareyson's existential hermeneutics, which revolves around the concept of person and her constitutive relation with transcendent Being, I also show how Pareyson's discourse on evil is strictly related to his conception of freedom and transcendence. In particular, he defines freedom as 'beginning and choice', that is God's originary choice of Being over nothingness, rather than as the theoretical foundation of Being itself. Moreover, the idea of transcendence is a constant presence in Pareyson's reflection, from the early to the mature period, and therefore even his interpretation of the questions of evil and freedom is to be considered within the theoretical framework set by his notion of transcendence. In conclusion, I demonstrate that, according to Pareyson, not only are evil and freedom inscribed in God's transcendence, but they cannot properly be grasped and understood independently of their deeply religious implications.

1. Introduction

With good reason, Luigi Pareyson should be considered one of the fathers of 20th-century philosophical hermeneutics, as well as one of the main contributors to the development of existentialism in post-WWII Europe.[1] It is worth noting that Pareyson developed his hermeneutic theory between the late 1940s and the early 1950s, thus preceding the philosophies of Gadamer and Ricoeur: indeed, Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode* was published in 1960, while the early works on hermeneutics by Ricoeur were published in the late 1950s.[2] This clearly shows the importance of Pareyson for 20th-century philosophical hermeneutics, and possibly some of the influence he might have had on the other two fundamental thinkers of that current of thought. In this respect, Gadamer himself praised Pareyson's philosophical writings for their innovation and significance, demonstrating that the audience reached by Pareyson's thought was not limited to an Italian readership.[3]

The main goal of Pareyson's philosophy is to go beyond the old-fashioned rational metaphysics, which he regards as an ephemeral way of philosophising. Indeed, the kernel of his thought is that philosophical speculation cannot prescind

[1] See Bubbio, 'Introduction' to EIF, 1.
[2] See Tomatis, *Pareyson*, 47.
[3] See Gadamer, *Hermeneutik I*, 66n110 and 124n219, and Gadamer, *Hermeneutik II*, 433.

from human existence, which in turn has to be understood in terms of the concrete situation of each living person. Accordingly, Pareyson firmly rejects rational metaphysics and all forms of Hegelian idealism and neo-idealism, since they fail to address the fundamental issues of the philosophy of his time, such as the one concerning the paradoxical nature of human existence. That is to say, philosophy as a concrete reflection on the essence of personhood, it cannot be grounded on the theoretical axioms of traditional Western metaphysics; instead, it must rely on the features of actual human existence, giving due weight to religious experience and leaving aside abstract formalisms.

However, despite Pareyson's growing fame in the Anglophone world,[4] there are still few contributions on his discourse on the nature of evil — which is one of the crucial elements of his late philosophy. For this reason, with this article I aim to fill in the gap in the Anglophone literature, by focusing specifically on Pareyson's speculation on evil. In doing so, I intend to highlight how Pareyson defines evil in terms of ontological reality, and not as a moral principle. Moreover, I show how Pareyson's conception of evil has its roots in his early existential hermeneutics, and resolves itself into a religious hermeneutics in which a central role is played by the notions of freedom and transcendence.

More specifically, I begin by outlining Pareyson's existential hermeneutics, which revolves around the concept of person and her constitutive relation with transcendent Being. Subsequently, I analyse in detail Pareyson's discourse on evil, showing that he attributes a proper ontological reality to evil itself, rather than defining it in merely moral terms. In this sense, Pareyson argues, evil is present in God as an eternally suppressed possibility, but is actualised by the free choices of the human being. In conclusion, I highlight how Pareyson's conception of evil is intertwined with a definition of transcendence and freedom as 'beginning and choice', that is God's originary choice of Being over Nothingness, rather than as the theoretical foundation of Being itself.

Additionally, my focus on Pareyson's philosophy will be sustained by a small selection of material from the archives of the Centro Studi Filosofico-religiosi 'L. Pareyson' in Turin, including Pareyson's personal notes and unpublished manuscripts. To the best of my knowledge, this material has never been released to the public before.

2. The Concept of Person and the Ontological Relation with Being

In the early phase of his thought, Pareyson defines existentialism as the dissolution of Hegelian metaphysical rationalism, borrowing from Kierkegaard and Jaspers the idea that 'existence is not only *ex-sistentia*, being outside, protrusion, emergence,

[4] Among the various contributions, see Benso and Schroeder (eds.), *Thinking the Inexhaustible*, but also Carravetta, 'Introduction to the Hermeneutics of Luigi Pareyson', and Valgenti, 'The Primacy of Interpretation in Luigi Pareyson's Hermeneutics of Common Sense'.

but also *in-sistentia*, being inside, presence, intimacy'.[5] Accordingly, Pareyson claims that existentialism must be characterised by three fundamental features: 'the revaluation of the singular, ontologicity, and the concept of situation'.[6] This means that concrete existence is to be understood as the proper object of philosophy, and therefore that philosophy has to focus on the living person, rather than on any sort of metaphysical and idealistic abstraction.

'To explain the advent of Existentialism', Pareyson writes, 'it is not sufficient to reduce it to the filiation, derivation or deformation of a philosophical movement, to the mere revival of an author, or to the mere rebellion against a trend or a theory. [...] The most precise perspective and the most complete interpretation of Existentialism is therefore the one that places it amongst the liveliest inclinations of contemporary thought, and sees in it the most vigorous manifestation and the boldest expression of the *personalistic exigency*, which seems to constitute the substratum of the most contemporary philosophical speculation'.[7] Thus, existentialism must be personalistic, and this means that it cannot be built without taking into account and assuming as its proper ground the existence of the singular living person.

However, the person carries in herself a paradoxical (but essential) element, since she is the coincidence of self-relation and hetero-relation (i.e. relation to the other): in this sense, existence is both *ex-sistentia* and *in-sistentia*. This means that existence is not to be intended as a closed system, that is, exclusively from an intimist point of view, since this would lead to a limited understanding of it. Conversely, a fundamental aspect of existence is the act of opening towards Being, that is, an opening towards transcendence and towards the 'other-than-self' *(altro-da-sé).*

In this sense, Pareyson argues, the opening towards transcendence implies the possibility of religious experience, or, better, it is the religious experience as such, since it establishes a direct and concrete relation with the authentic (and therefore transcendent) Being. Put simply, once existentialism has been defined as a philosophy of the singular living person, and therefore a philosophy of the finite, the finite itself is conceived as a relation both with the self *and* with the other-than-self. However, the finite cannot be understood as pure negativity, since this would lead to nihilism; rather, it has to be grasped in its positive reality. As Pareyson himself claims, the finite is 'insufficient but not negative, positive but not sufficient';[8] hence, although Being cannot be reduced to it, the finite still participates in the authenticity of Being itself through the opening towards transcendence. In other words, existence is the experience of the insufficiency of the finite – but also of the positivity of Being and transcendence.

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[5] SE, 16.
[6] SE, 14.
[7] EIF, 37–38; SE, 12.
[8] EP, 12.

This paradoxical coincidence of self- and hetero-relation is not a mere attribute, but an essential feature of the human being. According to Pareyson,

> on the one hand, Being is irrelative, namely unobjectifiable, and can neither be reduced to the relation nor resolved into it, nor can it be established as cause or external principle of the relation, yet it is *present* in the relation, since precisely because of its unobjectifiability it alone can *build* the relation that can be formed with it; on the other hand, human being is *in* relation with Being since human being is constitutively this relation itself: the human being does not *have*, but is a relation with Being.[9]

This argument, Pareyson believes, implies both the coincidence of self- and hetero-relation and the inseparability of existence and transcendence. The human being, indeed, *is* the ontological relation with the Being that transcends humankind itself; therefore,

> there is, between humankind and Being, an original solidarity, an initial complicity, which manifests itself, on the one hand, in the constitutive ontologicity of humankind and, on the other hand, in the inseparability of existence and transcendence; in this lies the fundamental concept of the unobjectifiability of Being.[10]

Consequently, Pareyson theorises an ontological intentionality of the human being, which goes hand in hand with the irrelativity (*irrelatività*) and unobjectifiability (*inoggettivabilità*) of Being. That is to say, while 'ontological intentionality' refers to that relational dimension in which the self calls into question something other-than-self, the irrelativity of Being means that it is to be understood as that which establishes the relation, but then withdraws itself from it. So, Being is unobjectifiable because it cannot be the *object* of the aforementioned relation, but only its *subject*, namely its foundation, which ceases to be the foundation since it withdraws itself from the relation. Being, Pareyson argues, is present in the relation because it establishes the relation itself, but it is also *beyond* the relation, from which its transcendence and unobjectifiability derive. Instead, the human being is essentially constituted by this relation with Being.

Pareyson rejects negative ontology, that is, a theory of Being according to which Being itself is ineffable and therefore grasped in its coincidence with nothingness. Conversely, he theorises an ontology of the inexhaustible, which means that, although we cannot possess Being as the object of our knowledge, Being itself can still be said and grasped in its transcendence and irreducibility to

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[9] EP, 14.
[10] EP, 15.

finite beings. Moreover, an ontology of the inexhaustible cannot but be a hermeneutics of the inexhaustible, since to exist means to interpret, namely to singularly incarnate Being and to personally possess truth. This is why the originary relation with Being also implies the equally originary solidarity of human beings and truth.

Pareyson considers the hermeneutic relation with Being as a free one, meaning that it originates from freedom; that is, since it implies fidelity to Being, it cannot but be the result of a free choice, because a genuine fidelity can only be freely embraced, and thus it cannot be imposed. Similarly, Being is originally free, since it chooses to be through a free act of self-affirmation. In this sense, Pareyson maintains, Being has its own will, which makes it a person, namely God: however, Pareyson is not referring to the God of the philosophers, that is, the rational outcome of a purely intellectual speculation; instead, he means the God of religious experience, that is, a personal and concrete God who embodies the abyss of freedom rather than coinciding with the necessary Being. Therefore, being the source of freedom conceived of in absolute terms, God is that original positivity from which everything springs, including good and evil. However, evil subsists only as the originally rejected option, which cannot be actualised by God: in this sense, God is not a metaphysical good 'in itself', but the good *freely chosen* over evil.

In conclusion, it must be added that Pareyson's discourse on good and evil is structurally analogous to his hermeneutics of Being. That is, Pareyson argues that a genuine theodicy cannot ignore the reality of evil, to which he attributes a primordial and positive ontological core, rejecting any form of thought that aims to belittle or deny its effectiveness. Then, as evil keeps subsisting as a constant threat for every single human being, an endless struggle between good and evil, which is a fundamental characteristic of the concreteness of human existence, takes place. Once again, Pareyson's hermeneutic and existentialist turn aims at re-evaluating the concreteness of human life intended as an actual situation taking place here and now. That is, this kind of situation can be understood only hermeneutically: in other words, not only does Pareyson consider evil as a persistent ontological threat (in its concrete occurrence), but he also indissolubly and hermeneutically relates it to the material situation of actual human existence. This means that good and evil are not objectifiable, because every single experience is hermeneutically different from all of the others and has to be considered in its peculiarity and singularity.

3. 'A Temerarious Discourse': Pareyson on Evil and Freedom

One of the key issues in Pareyson's late philosophical activity is evil, which he reflects on largely in his *Ontologia della libertà*. Pareyson takes as his point of departure the belief that Western philosophy has not been able to do much to properly understand and answer the question concerning evil; in the 1986 essay 'Philosophy and the Problem of Evil' (*La Filosofia e il Problema del Male*), Pareyson underlines the insufficiency of philosophical solutions to the issue of evil

over the centuries, since they do not grasp the reality and effectiveness of evil itself. In this sense, Pareyson adds, Kant's theory of radical evil can be considered as the first successful criticism of theodicy and of any other account aimed either at reducing evil to a lack of good or at denying the reality of evil itself. Schelling's discourse on evil is also very highly regarded by Pareyson,[11] together with 'authentic existentialism' (i.e. his personalistic existentialism, as I defined it in the previous section), since they point the way ahead and open up 'enlightening perspectives' on the issue of evil.[12]

The most common mistake in philosophy, according to Pareyson, is to ascribe evil exclusively to the ethical dimension: such an approach cannot but result in a limited understanding of the issue. That is, Pareyson claims that evil cannot be understood only in ethical terms, as a moral and axiological disvalue, because by so doing the vital core of evil would be disregarded. Therefore, in order to get to the root of the question, our understanding cannot be confined to the attempt to find a solution to a mere moral dilemma, but rather we have to consider the ontological extent of evil. Put differently, evil cannot be understood merely through a rational and philosophical analysis, since 'the issue of evil has its roots in the dark depths of human nature and in the secret meander of the relationship between the human being and transcendence'.[13] The question of evil, Pareyson believes, is directly and deeply related to suffering, which demonstrates that evil does not concern 'the realisation of a virtue, but rather the very negativity that inheres in the human condition'.[14] Accordingly, 'the very negativity' of evil and suffering transcends rational comprehension, from which follows the insufficiency of philosophical speculation alone.

That being the case, Pareyson thinks that it is obviously not possible to encompass the very core of evil within the rational and objectivising categories of philosophical analysis: indeed, that would yield a blatant misunderstanding and denial of evil, since its transcendent and ontological features are not graspable by mere objectivity. Therefore, reason needs to recognise its own limits, which in turn need to be overcome and transcended in order to grasp 'pure negativity'; otherwise, an exclusively rational and philosophical approach would result in a theodicy, namely in a misleading account of evil unable to acknowledge its effectiveness. Indeed, 'objectivising thought would rationalise evil, looking either for its place in the universe or for its purpose in human life: it will see in (evil) a simple deprivation of Being and a pure lack, or will make it a factor of progress and rather an efficacious contribution to the advancement of good'.[15]

Pareyson, then, argues that once reason recognises its limits and its inability to have the final word about evil, it has to retreat and leave room for a different

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[11] On this point, see Ciancio, 'Pareyson e l'ultimo Schelling'.
[12] See OL, 151–56.
[13] OL, 152.
[14] Ibid.
[15] OL, 155.

kind of speculation, that is, religious experience. Indeed, only through religious experience does it become possible to fully grasp evil in all its anguishing effectiveness. By shifting the core of the problem of evil from rationality to religious experience, Pareyson means to stress, once again, the finiteness of human reason, rather than to embrace irrationalism or fideism. Put differently, Pareyson aims at developing an existential hermeneutics, which is characterised by 'concepts but not objectivising ones, ideas and thoughts but existential ones, discourses and reasonings that are not demonstrative but rather interpretative, knowledge not achieved by the extension of demonstrations but acquired through direct experience'.[16]

Through this argument, Pareyson also intends to reinstate the philosophical value and the truth-value of myth, which he considers as revelatory and directly related to the original and transcendent dimension of truth. In this sense, Pareyson considers it indispensable to resort to religion and myth in order to properly grasp evil and God in their concrete nature and to avoid the pitfall of abstract metaphysics and rational theodicy. Accordingly, Pareyson builds his discourse on evil on that which he calls 'the God of religion', rather than on 'the God of the philosophers': by the latter, he refers to 'a God that is reduced to a mere metaphysical principle, or that, as existing reality, has to be somehow related to Being';[17] by the former, instead, he means the personified and living God of religious experience, the God to whom we can directly relate through faith and prayers. Put simply, the latter is an abstract conceptualisation of God, while the former is the concrete and living God, who carries in Godself the abyssal nature of freedom, as well as the burden of the vestige of evil (even if it is eternally overcome).

As Pareyson himself explains, 'evil is not absence of Being, deprivation of good, lack of reality, but is reality, and more precisely negative reality in its positivity. It results from a positive act of negation: [...] from a negating force, that does not limit itself to a negative and privative act, but that, positively instituting a negativity, is a negating and destructive act'.[18] This means that evil is to be understood not as a decrease or a disappearance of good, but rather as a deliberate act of ontological opposition to good, that is, as 'a real and positive negation (of good) in the sense of a deliberate infraction and inobservance'.[19] These words clearly show Pareyson's rejection of any positive and rational theodicy, whose final aim is to deny the effectiveness of evil and understand it as a mere lack or deprivation of good without a proper ontological reality.

Evil, then, is an act of opposition and rebellion aimed at annihilating good, Being and freedom, which is to say that it is negativity trying to overwhelm positivity. In other words, evil is nothing but omni-destruction turning into self-destruction, since it is aimed at destroying originary freedom but ends up destroying only one's

[16] OL, 165.
[17] OL, 85.
[18] OL, 167–68.
[19] OL, 168.

own individual freedom. As Pareyson puts it, 'freedom is free also not to be free, and it is still through an act of freedom that it denies itself as freedom, becoming then potency of destruction, in the double sense of omni-destruction and self-destruction. From which derives the ambiguity of both freedom and Evil: on the one hand, the freedom that aims at destroying Being ends up destroying itself instead [...] and on the other hand, freedom's self-destruction is still an act of freedom, and then self-affirmation'.[20]

In fact, evil is freedom unsuccessfully turning against itself, that is, it is that free and deliberate act through which we operate in opposition to originary freedom by denying our individual freedom. However, such an act of opposition, despite being ontologically rooted in our will, cannot but fail and must reinstate the transcendent and ambiguous nature of freedom. Accordingly, evil cannot but miss its main target, namely the transcendent core of freedom, leaving the originary positivity unharmed; conversely, the only thing that evil can actually do is to destroy individual freedom, the latter being the only target within its reach. Put simply, the will of omni-destruction perpetrated by evil can only be frustrated and fall back on individual freedom, since evil itself has been originally and incontrovertibly defeated by God and can only occur through humankind's behaviour without affecting the originary positivity.

In this sense, Pareyson argues that 'the reality of evil and negating force presupposes the priority of the positive',[21] meaning that, in order to be characterised as a negating force, evil needs a prior positive force to oppose and by which to be negated. Therefore, it can be deduced that, as already mentioned, originary positivity is equivalent to the primal and irreversible victory of the good, which has left evil subsisting as a mere latent counterpart with no possibility of full actualisation. Hence, evil can actualise itself only through humankind's actions, for which reason it appears as a constant threat to human will and conduct and keeps itself alive by opposing and negating originary positivity, despite the perennial impossibility of subverting the positivity itself and of taking its place as the ruling core of Being.

And conversely, 'if on the one hand, real evil understood as active negation supposes a prior positivity, on the other hand, positivity is not conceivable otherwise than as the overcoming of negativity, as victory over negation'.[22] Positivity and negativity, then, are deeply interrelated and mutually imply one another, in accordance with the inner structure of freedom, as Pareyson himself points out: 'freedom is itself dialectic, because it is always both positive and negative, both positive choice in the presence of the possibility of the negative choice, and negative choice in the presence of the possibility of the positive choice'.[23] Consequently, Pareyson notes that the ontological interrelation between positivity and negativity

[20] Ibid.
[21] OL, 170.
[22] OL, 173.
[23] OL, 173–74.

cannot be grasped by a sterile and abstract dialectics of necessity, according to which the two terms are logically interdependent. Rather, he believes that through a dialectics of freedom it is possible to reach a better understanding of the vital core of reality, that is, a temporal succession of unpredictable acts and non-deducible facts.

Accordingly, Pareyson argues, the language of freedom is similar to that of religious myth, so much so that 'philosophical reflection cannot but assume the character of the hermeneutics of religious consciousness'.[24] Indeed, an ontology of freedom and religious hermeneutics are interwoven in Pareyson's discourse, which is aimed at disclosing the mutual relation of opposites, such as good and evil, Being and nothingness, or positivity and negativity. In this respect, the originary positivity is the victory of Being over nothingness and of good over evil, but still it carries in itself a shadow of negativity, of nothingness and of evil, even though it is eternally defeated. This is also why 'at the core of reality there is contrast, conflict, contradiction. Ontology is not to be separated from meontology. Being and nothingness, good and evil, are always somehow associated and are inseparable'.[25]

This does not mean that even God has to face the alternatives between Being and nothingness, and good and evil, as the human being does. God, indeed, is originary positivity, meaning that God has eternally chosen Being and good at the expense of nothingness and evil. That is, God is also freedom, and therefore God fully represents the ambiguous core of freedom, carrying in Godself the vestige of unchosen possibilities, that is, evil and nothingness. Thus, God 'is not the good, but the *chosen good*, namely the good placed before evil, affirmed through the negation and rejection of evil',[26] from which it follows that evil keeps subsisting in God only as eternally negated and rejected and as the shadow cast by the light of good.

That being the case, Pareyson comes to the conclusion (bearing Schelling's philosophy in mind) that the origin and the ontological source of evil is to be found in God. That is, since the reality of evil cannot be denied (otherwise one would fall back into rational theodicy or abstract metaphysics), it also has to be accepted that its source and origin coincide with the source and origin of its ontological counterpart, that is, the good. Therefore, in God we find the origin of evil in the terms in which evil itself is nothing but (and cannot be anything other than) the originally rejected option, namely a possibility that has been discarded in the very moment in which it has been provided. Put simply, in the very primordial and originary act of freedom through which God chooses and reveals Godself, nothingness and evil are posed only in order to be negated and irreversibly overcome by Being and good.

However, Pareyson specifies, we must not confuse the origin of evil with its cause: that is, arguing that God is the origin of evil does not mean that God is also

[24] OL, 174.
[25] OL, 175–76.
[26] OL, 178.

the cause of evil. Pareyson is also well aware that such an understanding represents a 'temerarious discourse' (as he himself defines it in 1988[27]), which could lead to a slippery slope. In order to avoid that, he reaffirms that 'the expression "evil in God" does not mean that God encounters and finds evil in Godself, as forming part of God's own reality';[28] rather, evil is immediately defeated by the very existence of God, since 'the act through which God originates Godself is the same as that through which nothingness is vanquished and evil is defeated'.[29] Thus, it is incorrect to conclude that God is also the cause of evil, because God cannot in any way be its perpetrator, such an option being ruled out as soon as it is posed.

Nevertheless, maintaining that evil is in God is extremely disconcerting and maybe counterintuitive, whence the aforementioned 'temerity' of such a discourse: how is it possible that evil is originated by God, that is, by the creator of the universe and the source of Good? Similarly it is possible to assert that nothingness also is in God, even if it takes the form of an eternally unchosen possibility. Nevertheless, Pareyson believes that such an account is not related to nihilism, but rather is a philosophical statement of religious experience: as he writes, 'in philosophy understood as hermeneutics of religious experience, [...] every statement has at the same time a philosophical and a religious nature'.[30] Put simply, hermeneutic philosophy and religious experience cannot but cooperate to enlighten the very essence of God and freedom, which inevitably brings us to the acknowledgement of the ontological consistency of evil and nothingness, in the terms explained above.

Once again, despite its being thorny and 'temerarious', Pareyson firmly dissociates his discourse from nihilism, relating it instead to a strongly hermeneutic and religious account of evil and God. In other words, the claim that evil and nothingness are in God does not annul God's Being and goodness, but rather reinforces them. Indeed, evil and nothingness are in God as negative principles, namely as those terms that are essentially and primordially negated by God and against which good and Being are eternally affirmed. On these grounds, Pareyson argues that 'the divinity implies a negation of the negation',[31] which has to be understood not in logical but in ontological terms. That is, by negating any ontological primacy of evil and nothingness, God negates anything that can be outside Godself, and in turn does nothing but absolutely reaffirm originary positivity, as well as God's transcendence. As Pareyson puts it, 'the negation of the negation is [...] the acknowledgement of God's ontological fullness, which then excludes every metaphysical nihilism'.[32]

Pareyson's goal, it is worth repeating, is to argue that the presence of evil in God implies that God is not the perpetrator of evil, but contains it as suppressed

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[27] See Pareyson, 'Un 'discorso temerario': il male in Dio', in OL, 235ff.
[28] OL, 243.
[29] OL, 244.
[30] OL, 236.
[31] Ibid.
[32] OL, 237.

possibility, which in turn makes God coincident not with the good, but with the will for good. This is also why evil cannot be defined as a metaphysical moral principle, but has to be understood in ontological terms. More specifically, 'evil is to be distinguished as either possible [evil] or real [evil]: in God evil is present as possible, and there it is found by the human being, who realises it in history'.[33] The true perpetrator of evil, then, is the human being, who freely and deliberately actualises and enacts that which otherwise would remain a mere and unrealised possibility. Indeed, humankind feels the possibility of evil, which in turn manifests itself as a threat to and a temptation for human freedom.

The human being 'is the only *perpetrator* of evil, but cannot be its *inventor*. [Human] creativity and its potency are limited, and suffice at most to *discover* evil as a possibility to be realised, and to effectively *realise it*'.[34] In other words, as soon as the human being feels the possibility of evil, it also feels an irresistible impulse to turn such a possibility into a real act: this, for Pareyson, is the only possible way in which evil can become real. Furthermore, he also situates his position firmly in the hermeneutic and religious sphere; that is to say, Pareyson understands the realisation of evil in humankind as sin, not in the moralistic sense of the term, but rather as an intentional transgression of and deviance from God's ontological statute and God's will for good.

In Pareyson's account, God is not defined as foundation (*fondamento*), but as freedom and abyss; and 'it is precisely the fact of being not foundation but freedom which ensures that God can be the origin of evil without being its perpetrator'.[35] Here, the main feature of Pareyson's discourse clearly emerges, a discourse which is at the same time hermeneutic and religious. That is, in the light of all the above, it must be acknowledged that evil cannot be grasped outside a deeply religious understanding of God, since the God we are presented with is not abstractly identified with pure rationality, but is involved in the 'human tragedy',[36] as Pareyson himself calls it, and it suffers from that. It is God, indeed, who gives freedom to humankind, implicitly accepting the possibility of its misuse and abuse.

Accordingly, God takes on Godself the burden of the realisation of evil perpetrated by humankind, which alone remains responsible for its actualisation; this also implies that God takes upon Godself evil both as actual and as realised and no longer as a suppressed possibility, along with the suffering generated by the sinful behaviour of humankind, in order to comply with God's redeeming nature. That is, Pareyson here intends to stress the paradoxicality of God's assumption of sin and suffering, since this would clash with God's perfection and transcendence; however, such a paradoxicality is consistent with the fact that the redeemer must

[33] OL, 184.
[34] Ibid.
[35] OL, 183.
[36] See OL, 220ff.

identify himself with the sinners in order to understand their suffering and redeem them.[37]

In conclusion, Pareyson's discourse is very much hermeneutic, since the claim that the realisation of evil is nothing but a deliberate and willing act perpetrated by humankind, as opposed to the ontological nature of God, can be understood as a false and misleading interpretation of one's freedom. That is, God is also aware that humankind could misuse its freedom, succumbing to the temptation to do evil rather than good. Such an attitude is the reverse of freedom, that is, a singular and particular freedom that opposes absolute and transcendent freedom, which in turn is made possible only by a misleading interpretation of freedom itself. That is to say, the realisation of evil in the human being also coincides with the attempt on the part of freedom to annihilate itself, which does not consider the impossibility of realising evil in God and the subsequent absurdity of its demand.

'Evil in God is an idea that yields incomprehensible and scandalous results in the horizon of a philosophy of Being, and that solely in the perspective of a philosophy of freedom can show itself as immune to misunderstandings and misinterpretations and then reveal its true meaning'.[38] In other words, Pareyson argues that the key concept for understanding the nature and modalities of the presence of evil in God is freedom, rather than necessity, since it is due to the ambiguity of freedom that evil subsists both in God as suppressed possibility and in humankind as a concrete and viable alternative. Accordingly, it is worth providing some additional remarks and clarifications regarding Pareyson's understanding of freedom, in order to highlight once again the great relevance of that conception in Pareyson's philosophy.

In accordance with what has already been said about it, Pareyson further emphasises that 'freedom is first beginning and pure commencement'.[39] The latter observation is obviously aimed at reinforcing and further clarifying the constitutive ambiguity of freedom: that is, freedom has to be considered as the unity of originary and derived freedom, namely of divine and human freedom. Simply put, Pareyson defines freedom as beginning and choice. Indeed, 'freedom originates from itself: the beginning of freedom is freedom itself',[40] from which it follows that freedom cannot be determined and generated by anything but freedom itself. In other words, freedom has to be understood as first and pure beginning, since it initially posits itself and does not require anything else to exist. Freedom arises and commences only from itself, and it is also preceded solely by itself. Accordingly, 'at the highest level, God and freedom coincide in their pure self-originating, in their

[37] On this particular point, it is worth mentioning that Pareyson is deeply influenced by Dostoevsky, to whom he devotes some of his late works, the most important of which is *Dostoevskij: filosofia, romanzo ed esperienza religiosa.*

[38] OL, 254.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

self-origination from themselves. And this is originary freedom, that is to say divine freedom: neither God as Being fitted with freedom nor as supremely free Being, but rather God as freedom Godself, as full, originary and absolute freedom'.[41]

Moreover, arguing that freedom is preceded by nothing but itself, according to Pareyson, is equivalent to arguing that freedom begins and emerges from nothingness, from which he derives the expression 'nothingness of freedom'. That is,

> the expression 'nothingness of freedom' refers to its initial position: [namely] to its deriving from nothing, to its sudden [act of] generating itself [...]. But the expression is meaningful, since it relates freedom to the negativity of a non-Being. To designate freedom as beginning it can be said both that prior to freedom there is nothing but freedom and that prior to freedom there is only nothingness.[42]

The latter passage, despite its complexity, is emblematic of Pareyson's conception of freedom, since it explains his fundamental understanding according to which the self-generation of freedom inevitably implies the alternative of nothingness. Put simply, freedom emerges from nothingness, in the sense that, 'as beginning, freedom has a past of non-Being, but a past that has never been present'[43] and occurs only as an impossible alternative. Such a conception, finally, clearly recalls the mutual implication of good and evil, along with that of ontology and meontology.

Further, such a beginning and emergence from nothingness cannot be defined as necessary, but is a choice, Pareyson believes. 'The beginning intended as such is already a choice, in the sense that freedom could not begin, namely it could not emerge from non-Being, and it could cease, namely return to non-Being'.[44] Consequently, freedom is such only as opposed to nothingness, and good is such only as opposed to evil. This does not mean that freedom concretely aims at annihilating itself and at being replaced by nothingness, but rather that nothingness is that unavoidable alternative in place of which freedom emerges and generates itself. Therefore, beginning and choice are not two separate moments of freedom, but they co-occur and mutually imply one another: the moment freedom emerges, it has already chosen itself, relegating nothingness to the role of unrealisable alternative. The analogy with the discourse on good and evil is extremely evident here: just as evil occurs only as definitively suppressed and overcome by God, nothingness is to be understood only as the meontological counterpart of freedom, which can never become actual and replace Being and freedom itself.

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[41] OL, 255.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] OL, 256.

Finally, a few words must be added concerning the way in which freedom occurs in humankind: indeed, even though in the human case freedom is not absolute but is derived from God, we also experience it as simultaneously beginning and choice. However, the main difference lies in the fact that the human being is actually capable of misusing it and of perpetrating evil, which remains a mere and eternally overcome possibility in God. The reasons for this derive from the fact that the origin of evil does not coincide with its cause: indeed, the former is in God, but the latter is in humankind. Furthermore, human misbehaviour and misuse of freedom also derives from a misleading personal interpretation of freedom itself, according to which one tends to act against the transcendent nature of freedom and Being, with the aim of destroying them.

4. Transcendence, Freedom, and Necessity

From the previous section, it clearly emerges that the framework of Pareyson's discourse on evil and freedom is strictly related to the concept of transcendence, which is a constant presence in his writings. However, it is not easy to provide a single unequivocal definition of what Pareyson means by the term 'transcendence'; therefore, I shall clarify the meaning and role of transcendence in Pareyson's philosophy, with a particular focus on its relations with freedom and necessity.

The notion of transcendence occupied Pareyson's thoughts from the time of his early studies on Jaspers; indeed, in his notes we can read that 'transcendence is the trans-ontic relation, and therefore the trans-objective relation, of *Dasein* with Being'.[45] Pareyson derives this definition from the idea that 'as *Dasein*, I am related to the world, [but] as existence I am related to transcendence'.[46] Moreover, another definition of transcendence can be found in one of Pareyson's last writings, where he states that, 'in the end, the *philosophical* affirmation of transcendence has no other meaning than the acknowledgement that the human being is not everything, so much so that she always has to do with something that does not depend on her, but rather resists her'.[47] These statements have to be understood as the two extremes of Pareyson's reflection, but they are neither in contrast nor in contradiction with one another; rather, they are two points that delimit the philosophical domain in which Pareyson positions transcendence. That is, the role and meaning that transcendence assumes in Pareyson's philosophy always pertain to the relation between Being itself and human beings in their finitude.

Accordingly, in his 1985 essay 'Religious Experience and Philosophy' (*L'Esperienza Religiosa e la Filosofia*),[48] Pareyson claims that 'the fundamental experience of the human being is an experience of transcendence: she knows she

[45] Pareyson, *Notes on Jaspers* (1937–40).
[46] Ibid.
[47] OL, 90.
[48] Pareyson, 'Filosofia ed esperienza religiosa', *Annuario filosofico* 1 (1985): 7–52, now in OL, 85–149.

didn't make herself, everywhere she clashes with irreducible transcendences, and she even happens to transcend herself'.[49] Moreover, he argues that the experience of transcendence is deeply and essentially religious, since transcendence itself has to do primarily with God — intended not as the God of the philosophers but as the God of religion. Indeed, Pareyson writes that 'not only am I ready to renounce the God of the philosophers, [... but] I am ready to avoid in my writings the name "God", because it seems to me that, in philosophical discourse, it is better, if anything, to talk of transcendence'.[50] In other words, Pareyson understands transcendence as the primal and fundamental ontological condition of God.

If the experience of transcendence is our fundamental experience, as Pareyson believes, then we must somehow face it in our lives; that is, transcendence has to reveal itself in an accessible and understandable way for humankind. But how does this happen? How can we actually experience transcendence? To answer these questions, Pareyson identifies four examples of transcendence: nature, moral law, history, and the unconscious. These manifestations 'are so clearly independent of [the human being] that their relation with her deserves the name of alterity. [They] do not reduce themselves to the experience of the human being, but firmly demand an acknowledgement and offer themselves only to an experience of transcendence'.[51] That is, these occurrences exceed humankind's finiteness and impose on it constantly in a way that exceeds their rational control; put simply, their transcendence consists in their alterity to the human being.

The transcendence of nature, Pareyson claims, is given by its being unfathomable and mysterious, as well as its appearing alternately — but simultaneously — as friendly and as hostile to humankind. Not only does nature elude human control and understanding, but it also manifests itself as irremediably ambiguous and twofold, constantly showing its greatness and superiority over us. That is, nature is always beyond human rationality and experience, and therefore irreducible to such finite categories. Conversely, the human being constantly feels its finiteness and its inadequacy towards nature, which makes it able to actually experience transcendence in the sense explained above.

Similarly, the moral law is transcendent because it is 'irreducible to human activity, precisely because of its capacity to regulate and rule it'.[52] That is, the human being feels impelled to follow the norms established by the moral law, which in turn precede our understanding but still push us to behave in a certain way. In other words, we feel the imperative of the moral law as stronger than and independent of our will, so much so that we are fundamentally unable to change or influence it, and we can only unconditionally obey it. This is due to the fact that the origin and source of the moral law itself is inaccessible for us, that is, it transcends every human capacity and possibility, from which it derives its strength and inflexibility: precisely

[49] OL, 90.
[50] OL, 89.
[51] OL, 90.
[52] OL, 91.

because the moral law is transcendent and superior to our will, we must follow it. Indeed, by perceiving its transcendence, we experience the moral law as eternal and immutable, and then as the higher moral authority that cannot be questioned or doubted.

The transcendence of history, moreover, results from the transcendence of both the future and the past. Regarding the former, Pareyson argues that it 'is irreducible for the sole reason that it cannot be but the object of hope and waiting, and never (the object) of wisdom and knowledge',[53] and therefore it is unpredictable, that is, ulterior and elusive. For its part, the past is also transcendent, because of its being fundamentally immemorable, from which follows its anguished ambiguity. Moreover, the 'ancipital' nature of past and future is also due to the fact that 'the future and the past are the places of two (transcendent and unavoidable) events [...]; birth on the one hand and death on the other hand, both enigmatic and fatal, the former for its irrevocability and the latter for its inevitability'.[54] Then history, in its being both oriented to the future and shaped by the past, transcends every human activity, which cannot completely manage either of the two temporal dimensions.

Regarding this question, in 1981 Pareyson notes that the sense of history is not within history, but outside it; it exceeds history itself. However, he is also aware that such an argument derives from a choice and cannot be empirically demonstrated;[55] nevertheless, this choice is legitimated by the irreducibly transcendent nature of the future and of the past. Indeed, it is precisely because both the future and the past are transcendent and surpass human rational control that the sense of history cannot be found within history, but must exceed and be beyond history itself. Otherwise, history would be nothing more than the sum of all human actions, reducing itself to a mere causal process and to a sheer work of pure chance.

Finally, Pareyson also believes that the transcendence of the past is strictly connected with the ambiguous nature of memory, since it can alternatively lead us to oblivion or to remembrance. Thus, the transcendence of memory depends on the fact that we have no real and definite control over the things we remember and the things we forget; as Pareyson puts it, 'memory is transcendent because its availability is not subordinated to the will of the human being',[56] meaning that memory preserves its independence from human will and consciousness and appears to be unfathomable and uncontrollable.

Concluding on this point, Pareyson also finds a parallel between memory and the unconscious, defining the latter as 'no less the antagonist than the precursor

[53] Ibid.
[54] OL, 92.
[55] See Pareyson, 'Schellingian Meditation' (1980–81). This is an unpublished note by Pareyson, with the title 'Meditazione Schellinghiana'.
[56] OL, 93.

of consciousness'.[57] Indeed, the unconscious is both the grounding and the fundamental condition of consciousness, and a constant threat to the centrality of consciousness itself. Also, its transcendence lies in the fact that the unconscious contains all those original and unperceived sensations of which we are not aware, besides being an 'abyssal place of obscure potencies, of occult presences, of cosmic instincts'.[58] Put simply, Pareyson justifies the transcendence of the unconscious by stating that it includes all those inexplicable drives and forces that overcome our consciousness and our rationality and of which we are terrified.

'These are all realities that elude every human being's attempt to dispose of them as she wants, because [they] either require obedience and respect or instil concern and angst'.[59] In other words, Pareyson ultimately aims at defining the transcendence of these concepts by claiming, as already mentioned, that the human being cannot be sufficient to grasp and explain the reality of Being, but rather there must be a reality that exceeds and overcomes human possibilities, and to which human beings have to be subjugated. This is nothing but the abovementioned 'trans-ontic and trans-objective' relation to Being: the transcendent reality of Being is essentially independent of humankind, and therefore it has to be ascribed to a different ontological level. Such a reality is also beyond every possible human experience, being the grounding condition of a divine and 'superhuman' Being; accordingly, the only way in which human beings can relate to transcendence is by acknowledging its inescapable alterity and superiority, which is manifested through the feelings of awe and torment and through the clear fact that reality is neither completed nor fully explained by the mere existence of humankind.

Pareyson firmly maintains that 'the human being transcends herself, and she is even in herself the symbol of transcendence';[60] that is, nature, morality, history and the unconscious not only are independent of human beings, but are above and dominate them. 'Then, it needs to be acknowledged that the human being is by nature transcendent to herself: not only is she not everything, but it cannot even be said that she coincides with herself'.[61] Indeed, the main structures that characterise the reality in which we are thrown, according to Pareyson, are neither graspable nor may they be controlled by us; and this in turn results in a fundamental inability to access that Being with which we are originarily and indissolubly related.

The human being *is* (rather than *has*) an 'ontological relation, in the sense that her being consists indeed, totally and without remainder, in being a relation with Being itself; which means that her very being is dislocated and implies a constitutive discard, a structural offset, which make her always be beyond herself'.[62] This is a fundamental point of Pareyson's philosophy, and it does not come from

[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.
[60] OL, 96.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.

nowhere, but characterises his reflection from the time of his early writings. Indeed, Pareyson constantly reflects on the idea that the human being is essentially related to something that transcends herself and that pushes the human being beyond herself, as befits her fundamental ontological structure.

As early as 1940, Pareyson wrote that,

> I am 'thrown' to live in a situation [...]: that is, I have a very definite position in the universe, a specific place in the world. In a word: a situation, or better, *my* situation. I cannot regard my situation as one among many others, any of which I could have been given at random. My situation is my concreteness, my configuration, or, to use Marcel's word, my 'incarnation': without it, I, as a single person, would not exist. The bonds that connect me to my situation are very tight, and above all, they are essential to me: they are not links of 'features', but of 'essence'.[63]

Consequently,

> incarnation cannot be a reduction of the singular to fact, because it is a *choice:* I do not reduce myself to my situation, but I choose it. Choice, through which I assume my situation, acts so that I do not identify myself with it. On the other hand, participation cannot be the annulment of the singular in Being, because Being is transcendent: the *transcendence* of Being prevents me from drowning in it and ensures that it is not reduced to me.[64]

The latter passage is not only the kernel of Pareyson's early conception of existence and transcendence, but also the ground for his late speculation on these issues. Put simply, he claims that I, as a finite human being, can neither be identified with my situation, nor raise myself to the ontological level of Being itself. It is precisely in this sense that, in my limited condition of human being, I am related both to the here-and-now (i.e., to the concrete and actual world) and to the irreducible transcendence of Being. Accordingly, I always transcend myself, since my being exceeds my situation in the world, but at the same time I have to acknowledge that my being does not equal Being itself, which in turn proves that reality as a whole does not end with myself, intended as a mere human being, but rather is characterised by elements that irremediably transcend and are independent of my intrinsic finitude.

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[63] EIF, 42; SE, 16. I am referring to Pareyson's essay 'Genesi e significato dell'esistenzialismo', *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana* 5 (1940), then included in SE, 11–18. Finally, the essay has been translated and included in EIF, 35–44.

[64] EIF, 44; SE, 18.

Additionally, it is also clear that transcendence plays an essential role in Pareyson's definition of freedom. That is, the fundamental duplicity and ambiguity of freedom are nothing but a testament to its transcendence; moreover, the same applies to its being absolute beginning. Indeed, all these features unquestionably put the very root and origin of freedom out of our reach, that is, they make human beings unable to control and have at their disposal the originary occurrence of freedom. Consequently, it could be argued that for Pareyson the abyss of freedom is the abyss of transcendence, since the primordial self-origination of freedom and its emergence from nothingness, that is also the initial choice of Being over non-Being, is inexorably beyond all human capacities and possibilities, meaning that it does not depend in any way on human will, but rather makes its exercise possible.

It is precisely in this sense that God and freedom coincide in their absolute and transcendent self-originating. In other words, the coincidence of God and freedom lies precisely in their transcendence, which also explains why God cannot but be the highest and supreme expression of freedom, and why freedom cannot but be the essential and fundamental feature of God. Accordingly, Pareyson claims that, in philosophical speculation, God, that is, the God of religion and not the God of the philosophers, can be identified with the term 'transcendence', which perfectly grasps and explains the real and vital essence of God Godself. Put simply, transcendence does not reduce God to a merely intellectual notion, but rather exalts freedom as the beating heart of God Godself.

As Pareyson writes in his personal notes, God is to be understood as 'absolute freedom in its concrete exercise';[65] in turn, God's arbitrariness is 'one of the more decisive affirmations of divine transcendence',[66] which also strengthens the centrality of the choice. That is, by choosing freedom, God also chooses to allow human beings to participate in the exercise of freedom, from which is the originary coincidence of divine and human freedom. Therefore, despite the human being being culpable of misusing freedom and perpetrating evil, this affects neither the transcendent nature of freedom nor the mutual source of divine and human freedom. Freedom, in other words, always preserves its transcendent core, although human beings continuously misuse it: indeed, we have already seen that to perpetrate evil is to turn freedom against itself, to aim at its own self-annihilation. However, we have also seen how such attempts are inevitably doomed to fail, given the impossibility of humankind to effectively undermine the very essence of freedom.

It is due to the transcendent nature of freedom that it is not possible for us to annul it through the perpetration of evil; that is, God's originary choice appears as definitive and irrevocable to us, meaning that we can only acknowledge and accept it, without any power to change or withdraw it. Put simply, such a choice has an ontological value that transcends us and is not at our disposal; hence, under

[65] See Pareyson, *Notes on Freedom and Transcendence in God* (c. 1988).
[66] Ibid.

these circumstances, freedom is eternally preserved by its divine and transcendent nature. Moreover, being free for the human being implies both to choose and to be chosen, meaning that we can freely choose and act because we have been chosen by God in the first place, that is, we can exercise freedom because God's originary choice established that we participate in God's freedom without being entitled to dispose of it. As Pareyson puts it, 'choosing, then, is a being chosen, but such a being chosen is still freedom, namely divine freedom'.[67]

That being the case, a contraposition could emerge between freedom and destiny, that is, between freedom and necessity. Indeed, at first glance it might seem that the only way to conciliate choosing and being chosen, namely our freedom and the transcendence of freedom itself, is to defer to the concept of necessity. However, Pareyson claims, in this case human beings would be prey to a predetermined fate and to an inexorable necessity, in fact frustrating their freedom. Moreover, such an understanding is vitiated by an excessive philosophical conceptualisation, which rigidly counterposes choosing and being chosen and intends them as human freedom and the necessity of fate, in fact making it impossible to conciliate them.

However, such a contraposition can be resolved through a religious understanding of God and of divine arbitrariness. Thus, being chosen 'is not truly fate or destiny, because it does not fall within the range of blind and inexorable necessity, but rather within the range of God's freedom, of originary and absolute freedom, of God's arbitrariness'.[68] This passage, I believe, shows very clearly both the fundamentality of freedom within Pareyson's philosophy, and his rejection of necessity as a primal ontological modality. In this sense, I have already explained how Pareyson conceives of reality as a pure expression of freedom, which in turn overcomes both mere contingency and rigid necessity, from which it follows that reality has its *raison d'être* exclusively in freedom. In addition, this makes reality gratuitous, ungrounded and solely dependent on freedom; accordingly, it is suspended over an abyss, which is nothing but the abyss of freedom and transcendence.

5. Conclusion

It should now be clear that transcendence plays a crucial role in this phase of Pareyson's thought. Indeed, his aim is to use transcendence both to legitimate the divine nature and source of freedom, and to delegitimate necessity as a binding ontological category. Indeed, Pareyson maintains that freedom is inherently transcendent, meaning that it is essentially beyond our control, emphasising once again that human beings are not able to exhaust reality but have to face several aspects of it that are beyond their disposal. At the same time, necessity has to be

[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.

put aside due to the aforementioned transcendence of freedom, which allows us properly to understand the true nature of God and reality. Indeed, if God and reality were determined by necessity, we would be in a situation where there would be no room for freedom, even in God's will, which would be predetermined by something else.

Hence, in order to preserve freedom and overcome necessity, the concept of transcendence becomes indispensable for Pareyson: that is, he understands transcendence as that ontological condition which corresponds to the divine principle and then lies not only beyond any possible human experience, but beyond our finite being itself. Accordingly, for Pareyson the term 'transcendence' can successfully replace the term 'God' in philosophical discourse, since it better grasps the religious nature of God Godself and avoids any misleading conception, such as the merely conceptual God of the philosophers.

It should also be clear that such a discourse is the consequence of Pareyson's conception of evil, according to which God posits evil itself as the eternally rejected and unrealisable option through an originary and unfathomable act of freedom. However, evil keeps recurring as an actual possibility of choice for human beings, who are therefore solely responsible for its concrete realisation. For this reason, a proper understanding of the real nature of evil, Pareyson believes, implies understanding it in its ontological occurrence, and not as a merely theoretical and moral possibility. In other words, the ontological reality of evil cannot be postulated without simultaneously theorising the transcendent and abyssal nature of freedom and God's original choice of good over evil, namely the choice of Being over nothingness. This also shows how Pareyson's existential hermeneutics necessarily resolves itself into a hermeneutics of religious transcendence, since God's freedom and Being can only be conceived as that transcendence towards which we are constitutively open.

As Vattimo points out, 'that which opens [Pareyson's] philosophy to religious experience is not the impossibility of theoretically embracing the totality of Being and its infinity, but rather the abyssal "novelty" of the free act'.[69] Accordingly, Pareyson maintains that the transcendence of God's freedom and Being is such that it cannot be threatened by the occurrence of evil as it is perpetrated by human beings. In other words, since evil is nothing but freedom unsuccessfully turning against itself, it follows that God's originary and free choice of good over evil, and of Being over nothingness, can never be jeopardised by the vain backlash of that eternally rejected possibility that is evil itself.

Borrowing Bubbio's words again, 'the dialectical thought of this dynamic of evil and freedom resolves itself in what could be regarded as the core of Pareyson's philosophical speculation. Namely, the conjecture that to affirm the existence of God means to affirm that the world makes sense, and that evil will end'.[70] Put

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[69] Vattimo, 'Pareyson, ritorno al "pensiero tragico"', 10.

[70] Bubbio, 'Introduction' to EIF, 23.

differently, 'this dynamic can be regarded as a dialectic: not a triadic, but a dual dialectic for the contradiction remains open and the only synthesis possible is a paradoxical reconciliation through suffering. That is to say, this dynamic of evil is a dialectical thought whose centre is in a dialectic of freedom, not of necessity'.[71] Therefore, Pareyson postulates the optimistic conclusion (of a deeply religious nature), according to which evil and suffering will be ended through redemption, and God's goodness will triumph through freedom, and not through necessity or contingency.

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Norberto Bobbio and Benedetto Croce

Franco Manni

1. My acquaintance with the two philosophers

In my contacts with Bobbio, which took place over a span of twenty years, Benedetto Croce played a major part.[1] We often talked about Croce when I visited Bobbio in his home on Sacchi Street in Turin, and we would both say in unison 'it's amazing!' ('it' being his activity as a philosopher, scholar, cultural and editorial promoter, and his importance in Italian political history). When I mentioned that I was contemplating writing a book on Croce (which eventually never happened), he advised me both regarding content and editorial tactics, and above all was amazed and pleased that someone like me, born in 1959,[2] was a devoted admirer and a passionate scholar of Croce.

Among the professors and intellectuals whom I have personally met, Bobbio was the first who was not only a great connoisseur of Croce's work but also an admirer of his intellectual and moral personality.

During secondary school (the Italian 'liceo classico' type) I studied philosophy for three years, each year with a different teacher, but no one discussed Croce. However, at my maternal grandfather's home there were some old editions of some of Croce's works (with the publishing house Laterza). When I was eighteen, I found there a copy of Croce's 'Aesthetics' and I brought it with me to the city of Terni, where I had been called for the then-obligatory three-day medical visit for military draft. It was love at first sight: the logical precision, the clarity of presentation, the beauty of the language and the persuasiveness of the theoretical theses, almost always accompanied by examples drawn both from life and from a vast and varied set of cultural references, won me over. I had never read anything of the kind in secondary-school manuals or in the collections of passages by philosophers that had been suggested to me, nor in the books on philosophy and human sciences that, from time to time, I bought during my adolescence, guided by the most popular intellectual trends of the time (in the second half of the 1970s structuralists were in vogue, and I remember buying — at a newsagent! —*Tristes tropiques* and *Structural Anthropology* by Claude Levi-Strauss).

When I attended philosophy for a year at the Catholic University of Milan, I would always go to the lectures by Sofia Vanni Rovighi (these were her last years as professor emerita). She was a true master of unsurpassed rigour, alien to any

Originally published in Ivan Pozzoni (ed.), *Benedetto Croce. Teoria e Orizzonti*. Milan: Limina Mentis, 2010, pp. 229–79.

verbal prestidigitation, and an expert in scholastic and neo-scholastic philosophy; she was also imbued with that philosophical 'historical method' which, a few years later, I understood to be a direct legacy of Croce's teachings in Italy. But she was very much affected by the apologetic context of early twentieth-century Catholic schools; as a result, when she quoted Croce, she did so only in the *pars destruens* sections of her arguments. At least she had not forgotten him.

The following year I entered the Scuola Normale in Pisa, where among the teachers were Nicola Badaloni, Remo Bodei, Gianfranco Contini, Furio Diaz, Giovanni Nencioni and, most importantly, Eugenio Garin. None of them spoke about Croce, and Garin, although indirectly, argued rather against the 'philosophy of the four words' (as Gentile mockingly called Croce's philosophy), as he did against any philosophy that wanted to be 'theory' and not — as Garin would have liked — textual philology and cultural chronicle.[3] Only years later, reading Garin's books, did I recognise in him a great connoisseur of Croce, at least with regard to Croce's role as an organiser of culture, although not concerning Croce's theoretical contributions. In Pisa at the time — it was 1979 — Marxism was already no longer fashionable, while well-regarded topics included: Nietzsche and the Presocratics, discussed by Giorgio Colli (who had recently died) and by Severino (who was becoming fashionable); Chomsky and his generative-transformational grammar; Wittgenstein, studied by Aldo Gargani; and, although less so, Popper, examined by Marcello Pera.

When studying at the Scuola Normale each year I had to choose a topic for my 'interview', an oral presentation of a year-long research project. The first year, I chose Book Delta of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, but for the second-year project I immersed myself in Croce's work and in Italian culture of the early twentieth century. I presented my research to them[4], but it left them all cold or, in any case, silent. Thinking about it today, after so many years, I would interpret that silence as probably due to hostility rather than mere indifference.

Everything changed when I decided to write my degree thesis on Piero Gobetti[5]. Having chosen as supervisor and co-supervisor two professors from the university's history department — Franco Sbarberi and Claudio Pavone[6] — I came into contact with a completely different environment.[7] I visited for my research the Piero Gobetti Study Centre in Turin, where I met its director Carla Gobetti and its president Norberto Bobbio, with both of whom I had then been in contact for many years. In Turin, Croce was remembered — at least at that time — much more fondly than in Pisa, which rather preferred Gentile. This state of affairs came into being for various reasons: because of Piero Gobetti's admiration for Croce, because Croce often came there in person, because of Croce's friendship with Ada Gobetti, and due to the presence of an intellectual like Bobbio, alien to cultural fashions, and venerating historical memory in general and that of 'masters and companions' in particular.[8]

Vanni Rovighi loved philosophy but she didn't love Croce; Garin loved neither; only in Bobbio had I finally found someone who loved both Croce and

philosophy.[9]

2. Bobbio's relation with Croce

'Croce was the voice of his time: to be on his side was synonymous with being in the flow of history. Accepting Croce's thought gave one confidence, infused trust, opened up new vistas for research.'
Norberto Bobbio

In 1978, Bobbio wrote an article where he celebrated 'his little Crocean anniversary', that is, his first intellectual encounter with Croce's writings. In 1927 Leone Ginzburg had given him Croce's *Nuovi Saggi di Estetica*, and in 1928 Bobbio bought himself *Storia d'Italia* and then, gradually, he acquired all, or nearly all, of Croce's works.

> In these fifty years I have never stopped reading and re-reading. In this sense I am right, I believe, to speak of a personal anniversary. I read and re-read Croce on the most diverse occasions. For example, to draw inspiration: a few years ago, having to write an introduction to the essays of a philosopher of my generation killed by the Germans, I re-read the beautiful pages dedicated by Croce to Poerio, 'a family of patriots'. Two years ago, I revised Vico's monograph for a course of lectures and I felt again, upon rereading it, the same sense of surprise and intellectual excitement that I had felt the first time. Recently, having got involved in a dispute about optimism and pessimism, I asked for help from a page of Croce's *Frammenti di Etica*. A lesson that lasted fifty years.

Croce the master teacher, then.[10]

Bobbio, when he was barely twenty years old, sometime in the 1930s, once met Croce in person at the Villa Germano in Sordevolo, and — overawed — he did not exchange a single word.[11] Bobbio writes about another occasion, during the same period, but this time in Turin: 'I have never forgotten the short stretch of road I travelled alongside him when he left the National Library'. Croce asked him what he was studying and Bobbio replied 'Husserl', but Croce did not seem interested.[12]

Bobbio had 'never forgotten' that moment because at that moment he was talking face to face with his hero:

> I belong to a generation that, at least at the University of Turin, naturally admired Croce. We were Croceans (and I am purposefully saying Croceans and not idealists) with the same confidence and with the same candour with which the generation

> of our fathers had been positivist. It is only now, after so many years, that I can clearly make out the multiple components of our Croceanism. [...] I would distinguish a general component, that is Croceanism intended as an attitude to life, and a specific component, that is Croceanism as a research methodology. Each of us, on his own account and almost always in conflict with his professors, had embraced these components.[13]

Apart from Naples, Turin was then the most 'Crocean' city in Italy.[14] Bobbio recounted this fact in concrete terms in his three books *Maestri e compagni*, *Italia civile*, and *Italia Fedele;*[15] these are precise and engaging portraits of intellectuals and political militants from the first half of the twentieth century, all of whom, in one way or another, had been among Bobbio's admired teachers and friends. In these essays there are direct references, or at least ideal comparisons, with Benedetto Croce. For example, here is a moving portrayal that Bobbio cites from Leone Ginzburg:

> The initiation to Croce offered an unquestionable criterion for distinguishing [...] the enlightened from the ones groping in the dark, the modern spirits from the outdated ones, the ones freed from all sorts of dogmatic slumbers, from those who were still enveloped in the cobwebs of religious conformity, positivism, scientism, over-reliance on philological methods and so on. More than a doctrine [...] Croceanism was a method, in the sense of being a Royal Road to true knowledge [...]. Croce's authority was undisputed: armed with his concepts we felt superior to our own masters, who they had not accepted them or had disdainfully rejected them.[16]

We can find scattered, admiring references to Croce in many of Bobbio's other writings. On some occasions the references were more extended, for example in *Profilo ideologico del Novecento italiano* and the already-mentioned *Italia civile*. Bobbio was grateful to Croce for many reasons, including protection from the 'roughness and superficiality of naturalistic positivism' and from the 'irrationalism of existentialist philosophy', as he wrote in his obituary:

> Between one extreme and the other, Croce's thought was a model of wisdom, of mental and moral equilibrium, of invincible coherence, which does not imply immobility. A philosophy of the world and for the world, but without complacencies or worldly weaknesses; on the contrary, a philosophy inspired by rigour, by an attitude to life which could well be called religious, and for this

> reason a philosophy that moulds and educates, that arouses lofty intellectual vocations, that inspires moral and civil virtues.[17]

Croce was 'enviously admired' by Bobbio specifically for his philosophical contributions.[18] We can see an aspect, although certainly not the most relevant, of this 'envy' in the admiration for Croce's literary prolificacy; reviewing Fausto Nicolini's work on Croce's bibliography, he wrote:

> as a bibliographer's hunting ground, Croce's work is, first and foremost, immense. Croce had the rare good fortune of being, just like Thomas Mann, precocious and long-lived. His first published work is an edition of the *Stanze per la giostra* by Poliziano, published in Naples in 1883 (he was then 17 years old); his last writings belong to the year of his death, which occurred at the age of 86, in 1952. Between the first and the last publications no less than seventy years have passed! In addition to being exceptionally extended in time, his activity as a writer was also incessant due to his strict dedication to work [...] and extremely fruitful due to his prodigious speed of conception and execution [...]. When the detailed bibliography of his writings is released, compiled by the Italian Institute for Historical Studies, let us hope that it will enable us to follow Croce's work year by year. I foresee that we will be amazed.[19]

Bobbio wrote these lines in 1960. There is something of a paradox in reading one of Bobbio's writings from 1983 in which he reviews the bibliography of his own writings[20] and is 'dismayed' to see that more than one thousand cards have been prepared by the bibliographer. And, since then, Bobbio would go on and live 20 more years! His first published work was in 1934, and his last in 2003; he too, like Croce, had a seventy-year-long publishing activity! And, like Croce, he too was endowed with a dedication to work that is out of the ordinary. The two men shared even more points in common. There were both made senators for life, Croce for the Kingdom of Italy and Bobbio for the Italian Republic. And, finally, Bobbio was the 'Watchman for Israel'[21] of Italian culture and society in the second half of the twentieth century, while Croce was the 'lay pope' of Italian culture and society in the first half of the same century.[22]

The two scholars had some common intellectual masters, like Kant and Marx, but they mostly had different ones. Croce had Vico, Hegel, Herbart, De Sanctis, Ranke, Labriola, Mach, Avenarius; Bobbio had Hobbes, Locke, Cattaneo, Weber, Salvemini, Einaudi, Kelsen, Pareto. To a large extent Croce and Bobbio also dealt with different disciplines: Croce with aesthetics and art criticism, Bobbio with philosophy of law and political science. Croce was a systematic philosopher (similarly to Hegel), while Bobbio was not (similarly to

Cattaneo). And the two men — because of the 43 years of age which separated them — had to face intellectual and political problems of a very different nature, in the different conditions of the Italian society in which they lived.

Yet, as it transpires in the best of the many portraits of Croce that Bobbio left us,[23] which in my opinion is also one of the very best of such portraits among the myriad writings by scholars of Croce, Bobbio had for Croce a boundless admiration. Although dissenting from many of his individual doctrines and from many historiographical interpretations, two aspects of Croce's thought were fully shared by Bobbio. The first is his 'figure of the Philosopher', that is the model of how it was necessary in the twentieth century to live and communicate the mentality and role of those involved in philosophy. The second point is constituted by Croce's unsurpassed anti-fascist moral and cultural teachings, addressed to two generations of Italians during the twenty years of fascist rule.

Later on, we shall describe Bobbio's encounter with some of Croce's philosophical ideas in detail.

3. Sensibilities

> 'Croce liked to repeat that good philosophy did not arise from reading books on philosophy, but from the passionate and rigorous exercise of any spiritual activity'.
> Norberto Bobbio, 1962

Bobbio observed:

> the image of a Croce withdrawn into himself and into his work is false, as has been said several times. There are many testimonies as to his geniality, the depth of his affections, his generosity towards friends, his benevolence towards young people who turned to him for guidance.[24]

We must not confuse different planes and hierarchies in life:

> Croce never makes excuses or finds pretexts, although he could do so; his attitude is governed by the rule that one should not get lost in matters that are distractions from one's work (and his main duty is, above all, reading, writing, studying). On the contrary, he carries out any task as soon as possible, and almost always this leads to a rapid execution.[25]

I experienced the same behaviour in my relations with Bobbio: he immediately picked up the phone when I called, and immediately answered my letters, although I was a nobody on the public scene, because I was 'a friend', even

though he, like Croce, was very busy with work and had for it the same dedication.

One of the reasons that drew Croce closer to Ada Gobetti was the consciousness of her suffering after the death of her husband Piero, as Bobbio recalls:

> When we saw her for the first time – Croce told her many years later – she seemed to me like a wounded beast hiding in its burrow in order not to be seen by its fellow creatures. Then we saw her, little by little, relax and blossom again: it was a joy for everyone.[26]

I clearly remember that on my first meeting with Bobbio, having observed and weighed me up with his humane sensitivity – he could have used the same expression ('wounded beast'). Either because that is what I actually was, or because, for many years, when we met he, first of all, would ask me how I was, if I was feeling sad, if I had friends and was no longer alone, if my practical and working difficulties were still ongoing or had been overcome.

Bobbio also reports another aspect of Croce's affectivity: 'Croce replies to Ada: "Your letter, as you can image, was of great comfort to me, because I am tied to old objects of affection and it is from these that I draw life's sweetness and the strength to endure everything else"'.[27]

That is, friendship is a mutual exchange and nourishment (even if – as Aristotle had already noted in his treatise on friendship – different things are being exchanged), and the sweetness in it helps to sustain one's mission.

For his part, Bobbio intensely admired the idea and practice of friendship:

> Leone Ginzburg had a cult of friendship. The sanity of his nature was shown also in the fact that rigour was not an end in itself, it had nothing to do with moralistic pedantry, with meticulous observance of personal duties, but was aimed at perfecting oneself, it was a path to the improvement of relations with others.
>
> His usual scrupulousness [...] could lead one to believe that he followed an ethic of perfection; but, when in contact with other people, especially with his circle of friends, it was clear that he had in mind a broader ideal [...] an ethic of communion.
>
> He loved conversation, company, the world [...] the things which were most interesting to him were living people, with their virtues, faces, oddities [...] with friends he was very amiable [...]
>
> When we met, or when we visited him at his home, his heart would open. A friend was always welcome, a guest sent by the gods [...]. How many hours of our life we have spent together – hours that had an effect on our destiny, hours that cannot be erased from memory, intense hours, full of resolutions for the

future and of present affections, hours that were enjoyed minute by minute [...]

In our talks we were creating and destroying the world, we disrupted beliefs, received wisdoms, prejudices, we rummaged through the most hidden recesses of the soul, laid them bare, turned them upside down until the bottom was visible [...]

Leone helped me, he lent me a hand when I was hesitant, he encouraged me when I was disheartened; above all, he gave me the support of his indomitable strength accompanied by his captivating sweetness [...] He put me at peace with myself, with others, with the things I did not understand [...]

To friends he gave all of himself, but he was, on the other hand, very demanding. Woe betide he who did not visit for too long or did not call him [...] friendship was a sacred fire, which had to be fed day by day so that it would not go out. Above all it represented, like love and perhaps more than love, the perfect example of a disinterested human relationship, devoid of any selfish motive and dominated only by the desire to be together with no other purpose than to enjoy the mutual benefits deriving from the exchange of the gifts of intelligence and of the heart [...]

The virtue *par excellence* that Leone practised and demanded and that marked my friendly relations with him, was sincerity [...] Among the lessons we learned in those years, the one concerning absolute sincerity as the foundation of moral life was, for me, the most constructive [...] Two fundamental rules: 1) friends must not have secrets; 2) each, in order not to have secrets before others, must not have secrets before himself [...] The first rule required the exercise of frankness; the second of inner clarity. The observance of both implied an open war to all forms of simulation and dissimulation, a relentless hunt for hypocrisy (toward other people) and for comfortable pretexts (with respect to oneself [...] I gradually realised that sometimes in front of Leone I felt ashamed of actions of which I had never been ashamed when I was alone with myself [...] what would Leone have said? What would Leone have done?[28]

These intense pages particularly remind me of an episode that took place long before I could read them. I was experiencing a period of painful sentimental crisis; it was during the Christmas holidays of 1997, and doctor De Masi (my esteemed psychoanalyst) was on holiday. I was and felt alone... and I had the idea and the desire to go to Bobbio, to tell him about my pain and to confide to him for the first time some delicate aspects of my private life. He told me to go to see him immediately. We spent a long winter afternoon in Via Sacchi, with me sitting

on an armchair that was too low and Bobbio above me sitting on a chair, bent over me as if to hear me better. After three or four hours the large room became semi-dark and then fully dark, but we did not want to move or look or read anything but just talk... Valeria, his wife, tactful and sensitive, didn't enter the room, not even to turn on the light... A month later I received a letter from him:

> How are you? I haven't heard from you. I often think about you and your vicissitudes. Yesterday I had a visit from a scholar who was a great admirer of Croce, the same Croce whom you have always considered a teacher, and I thought about what he would have told you if you had met him. I realise that I have not been able to give you the slightest help. Yet, I continue to trust your resoluteness in facing the difficulties of life, a resoluteness you have given me proof of in your honesty, in your friendship and in the value you give to friendship. Consider these few lines as nothing more than a proof of friendship.[29]

Bobbio attributed happiness, if it can be had at all, to friendship, as he wrote to me in another letter:

> I have never had any disposition to happiness, despite the virtues of the body and of the soul that you attribute to me. In reality I have always had a body full of defects, which have made me suffer, so much so that I am amazed at having reached this age, battered but not yet completely decrepit. I'm not talking about virtues of the soul, because I have always been and continue to be dissatisfied with myself. I found happiness in friendship and, above anything else, in my wife's love, not in myself but outside of me.[30]

Bobbio was similar to Croce in other respects; for example, in the humility and detachment with which he held the many honours he received (I remember his ironic response when he was made senator for life[31]). Another point in common with Croce was the inclination towards 'depressive' moments rather than 'manic' ones: Bobbio recalled Croce's notebooks from the times of Second World War, in which the philosopher noted the black and slothful mood he had had for a few days (and nights);[32] this was because: '"The only way not to suffer", Croce writes, "would be to become just as stupid as the world has become"'.[33]

Of himself Bobbio said he had a pessimistic character, characterised by distrust in the world, fear of others, perplexity towards life,[34] and that Croce's worldview helped him to resist the most radical pessimism propagated by existentialism, the pessimism of the will.[35] The situation was similar for Bobbio's intellectual style: a 'supreme problem' of philosophy does not exist; every good

study must be circumscribed, as he recognises in his splendid portrait of Croce in the essay 'Civil Italy'.[36] Bobbio had greater appreciation for analytic distinctions than he did for syntheses:

> Those who, like me, value current analytic philosophy [...] find comfort in so much of Croce's work, who never tired of preaching, even to the philosopher, the virtue of acumen and discernment, which is the virtue of knowing how to distinguish [...]. And please do not give me the usual litany that there is no analysis without synthesis, nor synthesis without analysis. Croce too knew it and repeated it often. Still, there are philosophers who are convinced that they have made a discovery when they have found a new distinction; there are others, on the contrary, who believe they will go down in history for having succeeded in reducing a distinction to unity. Croce undoubtedly belonged to the first of these two ranks.[37]

Croce's and Bobbio's sensitivities to the problem of religion were partly similar but also partly different:

> To an ethic of restlessness, of insecurity, of anguish when confronted with the elusiveness of the world, Croce's teachings contrasted a morality of virile detachment from possessions when it came to big things, and of courageous resolve when it came to small things (which were the ones that counted) [...]. Croce once spoke of 'painful serenity', comparing life to a 'tragedy in which, through shame and pain, good and truth are laboriously created'. It was an ethic that proposed as an ideal of happiness not the accomplished bliss of heavenly or earthly paradise, but more simply peace of mind, peace with oneself, the satisfaction of having fulfilled one's duty and having overcome all challenges with dignity and humility.[38]

Bobbio, for his part, recognised himself in the *Contributo alla critica di me stesso (Contribution to Criticisms of Myself)* by Croce. At a certain point he found himself outside of traditional religion,[39] without any drama and almost without realising it. He multiplied his criticisms of certain aspects of both the Catholic Church and its doctrine.[40] However, unlike Croce, he found in philosophy no substitute for traditional religion:

> The religious sense of life consists for me in stopping in front of mystery. Mystery for me is an ineliminable residue, the limit of our reason. For Croce mystery was a shadow destined to be eliminated little by little. We read: 'mystery, logically understood, is not

> impenetrable and insoluble to thought, but rather penetrable and dissoluble by definition, being continuously penetrated and resolved'.[41]

Croce and Bobbio, on the other hand, had different attitudes to 'the praise of meekness', as Bobbio once wrote to me:

> While being, as you know, an admirer of Croce, the only aspect of his work that I have never been able to accept is the harshness, the tendentiousness, the temperamentality of his criticisms. I have participated in many philosophical and political debates, I have had many opponents, but I have always tried to maintain a calm style, discussing the pros and cons with historical and rational arguments, but not with personal attacks. I praised meekness, which is something Croce would not have liked.[42]

And once he scolded me:

> I don't know the feeling of hatred and I can't quite understand what you feel when you say you hate this and that. Regarding Hitler, Mussolini and similar people, and today regarding Berlusconi and the new fascists, I felt, if anything, indignation, not hatred. I don't throw insults, I try to understand [...] these feelings of yours seem all the stranger to me, as you claim to be a man of faith. One of Jesus' fundamental precepts, indeed the precept that characterised Christian morality is love towards one's enemy. To me faith and reason not only do not seem the same thing, but they appear to me to be one the opposite of the other: I believe because it is absurd.[43]

4. The Italian liberal tradition in Croce and Bobbio

From the end of the Giolitti era onwards, Italians have demonstrated very little sympathy for liberalism during the entire 'long century', as testified by fascism, social communism and Berlusconism. While it is true that, during the almost sixty years of the so-called 'first Italian republic', it was the liberal institutions which prevailed, this happened simply because the Second World War was won by the Anglo-Saxon liberal powers and because Italy was – in the post-war geopolitical partition, which Italy did not decide on – in the 'western' part. But culture and customs, even in that period, were not – at least for the most part – liberal, neither in popular consciousness nor in that of the 'intellectuals'. Italians were democrats, communists, socialists, catholic-socialists, supporters of the 1968

protest movement, neo-Marxists, neo-fascists, populists, or plainly indifferent, but not liberals.

Benedetto Croce in the first half and Norberto Bobbio in the second of this 'long century' were, by far, the intellectuals who were most purely, coherently, faithfully, passionately and effectively devoted to the study, interpretation and preaching of liberal ideals.

Starting with Croce's death, a certain type of anti-Croce propaganda of various origins (Marxist, Catholic, neo-positivist, neo-fascist) was born and grew stronger.[44] In this type of propaganda, anything goes, even interpreting Bobbio's chapter on Croce and liberalism in his 1955 book *Politica e cultura* as a disavowal of Croce's liberalism,[45] while Bobbio, precisely in that text, affirms that:

> [Croce was] [t]he moral conscience of Italian anti-fascism [...]. One should read in 'Soliloquio di un vecchio filosofo', which dates from 1942, the trepidation regarding the freedom of the past and the hope of renewal: neither inert pessimism nor excessively candid optimism. Inspired by this dominant idea, he took a position, time and time again, against the contamination that non-philosophers, pedantic professors, pseudo-politicians and politicians made of this idea with empirical and practical concepts. His defence of liberalism, which he continued tirelessly until his very last days, constituted the defence of the ideal of freedom which is identified with moral conscience. And it was conducted above all in three directions: against Marxism, against democracy, against liberalism. [...] I immediately say that, despite the many doubts that I believe I must raise concerning Benedetto Croce's theory of liberalism, I have no intention at all of diminishing the liberal function that his thought and personality had in the years of fascist dominance. There are some who, out of hatred for liberalism or hatred for Croce, would like to disregard the merits and practical value of the anti-fascist position of the author of *Storia d'Europa*. Anyone who participated in the anxieties and hopes of those years, and I mean of course intellectuals, cannot forget that the highroad to convert the uncertain to anti-fascism was to have them read and discuss Croce's books; most young intellectuals reached anti-fascism through Croce, and those who had already arrived at that position, or had always been there, took comfort in knowing that Croce, the highest and most illustrious representative of Italian culture, had not bowed to dictatorship. Any criticism of Croce's attitude during fascism is resentful and malevolent polemic. As such it does not deserve discussion.[46]

Instead, there have been many comments, and for a long time (to this day), by historians, political scientists and philosophers, claiming that Bobbio denied Croce a place in the tradition of liberal thought, so much so that Bobbio many years later wrote: 'I gladly make amends if I have given the impression of ousting Croce from the history of liberal thought'.[47]

In fact, for Bobbio:

> the persistence and vitality of the culture that I called liberal (to distinguish it from the Marxist and Catholic ones) during the years of the regime are also to be connected to the teachings of Croce, who never as in those years had risen so high and penetrated so deeply into people's minds [...]. The initiation to Croce was also, at least for the young, non-communist intellectuals who would later join 'Giustizia e Libertà' and liberal socialism movements and would later run the Partito d'Azione, the main road of anti-fascism.[48]

Croce's influence was acting not only on non-communist intellectuals: most of the scholars of the communist Antonio Gramsci have never remarked, at least not in their publications, and perhaps not even privately, that Croce is the most frequent proper name in his *Prison Notebooks*, more so than Marx, Lenin, Engels, Hegel, Sorel, Einaudi etc.[49]

Croce[50] for many decades and with persuasive force showed the public (first of all the Italian public, and secondly the European and the international one) the theoretical and practical errors of Marxism, communism, racism, nationalism, fascism, decadentism, positivism, and Catholic fundamentalism. Towards the end of his life – when Italy was split in two: the Kingdom, liberated by the Allies, and the Nazi-Fascist Republic of Salò – he also played a direct and central political role; for some months he was the most influential Italian politician, more so than De Gasperi, more than Togliatti, more than Badoglio, more than the Lieutenant of the Kingdom, more than the King.[51]

But Croce died in 1952, having been marginalised and rendered supposedly obsolete by a steadily increasing mass of 'surpassers'. At first Croce was fought against, then simply forgotten. Paradoxically, the best studies of Croce of the last twenty years are, in my opinion, those of a non-Italian American: David D. Roberts.[52]

Nevertheless, Croce did have an heir, at least in the fields of politics and ethics: namely Norberto Bobbio.[53] Bobbio has written many books and many articles, often for specialists, but his first influential as well as his most successful book, aimed at a cultured but non-specialist readership, was precisely *Politica e Cultura* in 1955. The very date of the book marks a desire to resume the discourse of the now-dead Neapolitan philosopher. The content, in addition to the two chapters explicitly named after Croce, takes up the themes of liberalism

and the non-subservience of culture to party politics, which were characteristic of Croce. And it takes them up not from the penultimate moment, that is, from the one in which Croce argued above all against fascism, but from the ultimate, that is, from the moment at which Croce argued above all against communism. This book by Bobbio is a splendid rallying cry for liberalism against the Italian communists who then opposed it.

Croce and Bobbio's opposition to illiberal conceptions of all kinds, unmasking them in all their sometimes pseudo-subtle and pseudo-moral forms, and their insensitivity to intellectual fashions, political winds, the 'forces of Destiny' and the 'ineluctable urgencies of History' led them to oppose both communist Marxism and the fascist ideology,[54] and this in a country like Italy where the typical attitude of many intellectuals throughout the twentieth century was to oscillate between opposing extremisms, remaining in any case illiberal at all times. It thus happened that, for years, both philosophers were attacked by that type of left and that type of right.[55]

We, Bobbio and I, had come into contact — at different moments in history — with theoretical Marxism and with the multiform movement of political socialism; we had both criticised them, but we had both grasped the good aspects of the theory and political practice of Marxism. Croce reproached Einaudi for not seeing that liberalism could very well chime with a socialist type of economic policy, and, when he found himself president of the Italian Liberal Party, after a meeting with the socialist Giuseppe Saragat he wrote:

> [Saragat and his friends] want to maintain in socialism its character and its history, which is essentially liberal [...]. An alliance or some form of agreement are possible with the socialists, as we accept many socialist concepts concerning reforms and we are ready to discuss and allow ourselves to be persuaded about others.[56]

Bobbio, a former supporter of the Action Party, had, over the decades, studied and supported liberal-socialist ideals. If we look at the classics of liberal thought, then Croce and Bobbio were akin to Mill, Keynes and Popper[57] rather than the liberalism of Locke and Tocqueville: that is, they were in favour of state intervention in the economy, with a view to improving the conditions of the most disadvantaged social classes.

The two philosophers' opinions when it came to democracy, on the other hand, were partly different. Croce was very distrustful of it, while Bobbio had much more confidence. But they also had some common views: both saw a theoretical error, fraught with negative practical consequences, in so-called 'egalitarianism'. Croce wrote in *Storia d'Europa:*

> liberalism had accomplished its detachment from democratism, which, in its extreme form of Jacobinism, by furiously and blindly

> pursuing its abstractions, had not only destroyed some living and physiological tissues of the social body, but, by exchanging the people for a part of the people, the least civilised part, and a demonstration for the disorganised, shouting and impulsive crowd, and exercising tyranny in the name of the People, had passed into the opposite of its assumption, and, in place of equality and freedom, had opened the way equally to servitude and dictatorship.[58]

And Bobbio, in one of his last interviews, said:

> Egalitarianism is a philosophical conception that leads to a fantasy world, to the emptying of individuality, as it transpires in classical egalitarian utopians such those of Bacon, Campanella and others. This level and this depersonalisation are then the suitable terrain for the birth of political totalitarianism. [...] It is necessary to distinguish egalitarianism from equality. Egalitarianism is an organicist philosophical conception and it is also an attempt pursued in states where communism has come to power; a conception and an attempt that do not approve of the independence and peculiarities of the individual within society. [...] [T]he search for equality, at least since communism has come to power, has been carried out in a perverse way, as a forced levelling down [...]. Equalisation is instead a tendency and a movement towards the reduction of the economic differences between individuals and social groups.[59]

Liberal Socialism? Social Democracy? These are terms that, paradoxically, displeased both a certain left and a certain right, as Bobbio observed in 1981:

> In recent years we have read I don't know how many pages, all increasingly controversial and increasingly documented, on the crisis of this capitalist state in disguise which is the welfare state, on the hypocritical integration into which the labour movement in the great machine of the state and of multinational companies have led. Now we are reading other pages, no less learned and documented, on the crisis of this socialist state, also in disguise, which under the pretext of social justice is destroying individual freedom and reduces the individual to an infant guided from cradle to grave by the hand of a guardian who is no less prompt than he is suffocating. A paradoxical, almost grotesque situation.[60]

This situation certainly appeared grotesque to Bobbio, who at first had not supported that 'lefty' criticism and later did not support that other 'rightist'

criticism. He had seen the same thing happen to Croce as would later happen to himself: first attacked at length and mocked by the fascists, and then, after the fall of fascism, 'meanly' or 'ungenerously' described by the Marxists as a 'precursor of fascism', 'reactionary', and 'pro-fascist'.

Most of the chapters that make up the book, *Politics and Culture* were written by Bobbio between 1951 and 1954. These are the years of McCarthyism and, at the same time, they are also the last years of Stalinism. If this was the atmosphere for the ideals of liberalism within the two victorious superpowers of Second World War – the war waged by them against Hitler in the name of freedom – we can understand the militant urgency felt by Bobbio at the time in arguing with those intellectuals and Italian politicians who attacked liberalism. These assailants of liberalism were the Communists, and specifically the Italian Communists, as they were before the death of Stalin and the denunciations made by Nikita Khrushchev at the XXth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

Bobbio, reminiscing in 1993 about the early 1950s and reminding the reader that he, despite his clear and substantial criticism of their ideas, had nevertheless accepted public dialogue with them, wrote:

> the policy of dialogue had a strong rationale given the situation of our country, where the strongest communist party in the West had emerged, and that outlawing this party, as had happened in other countries, would have put the country into a state of permanent civil war. [...] Despite everything that has been said recently about the potential civil war that would undermine the foundations of our republic, dialogue was not just a pacifying tactic used by the mediating intellectuals. Most parties officially defined their stance towards the Communist Party with the word 'confrontation'. Dialogue and confrontation have characterised the history of our republic. But neither dialogue nor confrontation were ever inspired by the idea of operating a philosophical synthesis between the two 'isms', liberalism and communism, which are philosophically incompatible. They were, much more simply, two political strategies for a practical compromise.[61]

On the other hand, while there has been only one kind of fascism and one kind of Nazism, of communism there have been two: the tyrannical and genocidal kind that existed in the USSR, China, Cambodia, and the one found in Italy, France, Holland, Spain, England, the USA and Germany. And Bobbio – who certainly never spoke with Stalin, Beria, Mao or Pol Pot – recognised that he had good personal relations with some Italian Communists:

> I have engaged in controversy with the Communists, but controversies with people with whom it was possible to have a dialogue. With some communists moreover, such as Napolitano, Aldo Tortorella, Gian Carlo Pajetta and Pietro Ingrao, I also had relationships of mutual respect and real friendship.[62]

Benedetto Croce had found himself in a similar situation. He never participated in the fascist government, even though he was asked to, but repeatedly sat in governments which involved the Communists after the war. At a meeting of the council of ministers, Croce publicly reminded Togliatti of his esteem and expressed regret for the communist Gramsci, his affection for the communist Giorgio Amendola, and how he had helped – while fascism was in full flow – a Neapolitan communist leader to publish a book by Antonio Labriola.[63] On 30th April 1945, Croce wrote:

> I had received from Rome expressions of astonishment and objections to the appointment of Bianchi Bandinelli, a communist, as general director of Fine Arts [Bianchi Bandinelli was an intellectual against whom, years later, Bobbio started a polemic], which I supported with minister Arangio Ruiz, who said he shared my favourable judgement. But I replied that even if the Communist Party and other parties exclude capable and suitable men from administrative posts because they are liberals, we must include them, even if they are Communists.[64]

Moreover, communism for Bobbio had pointed out some real and important problems:

> communism was an 'upside-down utopia', because it was a utopia of liberation that had turned into its opposite, that is, into the constriction and oppression of human beings [...]. Historical communism has failed, there is no arguing with that. But the problems remain, the very same problems that the communist utopia pointed out and believed to be soluble. This is the reason why it is foolish to rejoice in its defeat, rub one's hands with glee and say: 'We always said so!' Oh, you poor deluded soul, do you really believe that the end of historical communism (I insist on the 'historical') has put an end to the need and thirst for justice? [...] I affirm, repeating myself, that I have never been a communist, but also that I have never been anti-communist, in the sense in which anti-communism is understood today. And I say that the struggles for greater social equality against such dramatic injustices in the

world — struggles engaged in not only by Communists, but also by them — are sacrosanct.[65]

5. The mission of the erudite and the religion of freedom

'Croce was an animator, an awakener and an educator.
But he never rested on an achieved solution and never let his listeners rest.
And he gave an (inimitable) example of indefatigable industriousness, supported by a constant critical spirit'.
Norberto Bobbio, 1966

'Croce was our master in moral and political life.
We owe it to him if we saved our souls'.
Norberto Bobbio, 1998

Among the many past and present examples, in Italian society, of intellectuals who aspire to political positions or, at least, roles, and of politicians who, in turn, yearn to write books on various aspects of knowledge, Croce and Bobbio stand out for bucking the trend. Those who know Croce (but how many do know him in today's Italy?) know perfectly well how much he shunned politics, both in terms of holding a political office and of acting as a party ideologue; for those who do not know him I recommend reading the many and lucid examples recorded in his *Taccuini di Guerra*, written between 1943 and 1945, when Croce was in fact the most important politician in Italy, but — although stoically fulfilling his duties — he felt oppressed by this activity, and sought relief in his studies; this was the same sentiment, but heightened, that he had felt previously when he served as minister during the last of Giolitti's governments. He felt that such experiences should be completed as soon as possible, compatibly with the circumstances and with one's own sense of duty.

Coming to Bobbio, anyone of a certain age and who has personally observed him as a public figure, knows that he, who had begun his militant writings with *Politica e Cultura*, a book entirely dedicated to the critique of the confusions between politics and culture, during all the previous and all the subsequent decades had refused both to give 'cultural' support to the various political tendencies that developed (whether they were fascist, communist, linked to the 1968 protest movement, to Craxi or to Berlusconi) and he had also rejected all the political posts proposed to him, most notably the Presidency of the Republic.

Such behaviour was the exact opposite of that of many other 'intellectuals', who embraced the role of 'organic intellectuals' and accepted very willingly, or even sought, any political position, not infrequently switching their (fleeting) loyalties to any one of the tendencies listed above; and they did this in a temporal

succession which is not at all accidental, but always consistent with the 'wind of power' of the day (at least in this respect they were very consistent).

Personal weaknesses? Certainly! But also, at least in part, a result of theoretical confusions, those found in Marxism, Leninism and, for example, Gentile's fascism, which explicitly dictated that 'now philosophers must not limit themselves to interpreting the world: they must change it'.

For Bobbio, on the contrary, the true theory on the subject is that of Croce:

> there was a constant idea in Croce's thoughts and concerns: men of culture (and in particular philosophers) have a responsibility and a political function, as men of culture (or as philosophers) [...] they cannot escape the specific political responsibilities that derive precisely from their being men of culture, and from the awareness that culture has a function of criticism, control, vivification and creation of values, which is, in the short or long term, a political function, and it is necessary and effective above all in times of crisis and renewal [...]. [T]he problem of the politics of culture was the one he felt most deeply, with all the conscience of someone who was firstly a learned man and only secondly a practical man or a politician, but who at the same time had a very acute sense of civic responsibility, felt by any scholar who is not arid, and of the enlightening function of philosophy, when it is not academicism or verbalism or virtuosity of abstract ideas.[66]

The man of culture deeply feels the problem of the common good and serves it as a soldier, doing his job as best he can. Bobbio recalls that Croce during Fascism:

> has not resigned himself to leaving the political scene, even if there would be a way to avoid suffering: 'to become stupid, together with the world that has become stupid'. He complains about the difficulties imposed by censorship but he comments, 'we live in noble times, in an environment of heroism'. On November 28th 1938 (when between nine and ten at night, anti-Jewish fury broke out in Germany, the 'Night of Broken Glass') he wrote: 'I fight with the sadness that oppresses me, yet I desperately insist on my studies'.[67]

This idea was passed on to some people, for example to Piero Gobetti, whom Bobbio ascribes to that generation influenced by Croce that, 'overwhelmed by the crisis of the liberal state, found in Croce the teacher of freedom'.

> In one of his last writings, after having defined Croce as 'the most perfect European specimen of our culture', someone who attempts to redeem the future of civilisation from the present of barbarism, he [Gobetti] concludes: 'the man of books and of science will therefore try to keep at bay the darkness of the new Middle Ages while continuing to work as if it were in a civilised world'. In that 'as if' we find the sense of the now inevitable catastrophe and, at the same time, the conviction that the philosopher's task is to keep the lamp lit in the thickening darkness. As Gobetti understood once again with infallible precision, this was Croce's lesson for the generation that was educated in the 1930s and 1940s [...] reading the stories of Italy and Europe, accepting as a theory, as a rule of action and as a prediction, the idea that history is the history of freedom.[68]

The persecution during the twenty years of fascist rule, especially in the 1930s, the years of the alliance with Hitler and of the terrible 'religious war' of Nazi-Fascism aimed at conquering the souls and bodies of citizens, gave Croce a new lease of life after an already long career as an intellectual, and allowed him to give the best of himself (a parallel with Winston Churchill comes to mind, who after an already long political career had yet to live his 'finest hour'). Bobbio observes:

> between 1925 and 1940 a second, richer and more luxuriant season blossomed for the long reign of Benedetto Croce, who was the moral conscience of Italian anti-fascism, not so much as a restorer of idealism (which had already died, giving way to absolute historicism), but as a philosopher of freedom.[69]

It is this 'Croce the opponent' (to use the title of one of the last, prophetic articles by Piero Gobetti, taken up by Bobbio in his *Profilo ideologico del Novecento italiano*) who writes *Storia d'Italia*, pronounces a speech against the Lateran Treaty, writes *Storia d'Europa* and *History as the Story of Liberty*, and in a thousand writings in the magazine *La Critica* teased the various racist, nationalist, totalitarian, irrationalist cultural insertions that the regime and its willing servants tried to inject into Italian minds. Croce 'saves the souls' of those who listen to his proclamation of the Religion of Liberty.[70]

Things, in the history of the world, went as we know, and Bobbio, when many years later he reviewed a book by an author who had written 'I, as a student, did not side with Croce or Gentile', felt the need to specify:

> I cannot say the same [...] it was precisely through Croce's teachings, not as a 'pure philosopher' but as a historian, a man of letters and a moralist, that I finally began to understand better the connection between philosophical thought and reality, to realise that it was not true that fascism was right because it was defended by Gentile, but,

> on the contrary, that Gentile was wrong because he defended fascism [...]. Which of the two philosophers, the defender of the ethical state or the historian of the religion of freedom, has won, I don't think there can be any doubt.[71]

Bobbio's decades-long battles against Zhdanov's Marxism, decadent existentialism, the party-dominated political intrigues of the First Republic and Berlusconi's authoritarian populism were certainly not so dramatic. However, it seems appropriate to report what Luca Addante wrote in the obituary he wrote when Bobbio died:

> Italian culture loses, with the passing of Norberto Bobbio, its most authoritative voice. Wanting to identify the most important Italian intellectual of the first half of the twentieth century, we could hardly deny this role to Benedetto Croce. By carrying out a similar operation with respect to the second half of the century, the one that has just passed, it would be equally difficult for us to find a personality of a stature comparable to that of the Turin intellectual [...]. In fact, both were first and foremost 'clerics who have not betrayed me', to use the words with which Bobbio himself wanted to unite Croce with other intellectuals on whom he focuses his attention in the beautiful *Italia Civile*. And of a civilised Italy, light years away from the actual, small-minded Italy (fascist and then republican) in which they lived and worked, Croce and Bobbio were apostles, at the same time listened to and betrayed. Listened to, since their influence on Italian culture was enormous; betrayed, because despite their influence, small-minded Italy continued to remain so.[72]

6. The function of philosophy

'Even today, after a lot of water has gone under the bridges of philosophy, there are few philosophical writings to which I am willing to ascribe the stimulating function of Croce's pages'.
Norberto Bobbio, 1964

Recounting his first encounter with Croce's philosophy, Bobbio summarises it as follows:

> Croce's doctrine was first of all about methodology. In historical research, a clear distinction should be made between history and news; at the centre of research there should be the 'historical problem'; no prescriptive or prophetic or even predictive philosophy of history, no moralistic or pragmatic history, history as

> a search for the universal in the individual [...]; in literary criticism, rejection of literary genres, art as an autonomous category of the spirit, not to be confused on the one hand with philosophy, on the other with ethics, and intended as a universal concept, too often mixed up with empirical concepts mistaken for pure concepts.[73]

In 1927 Bobbio was given the *Breviario di estetica* as a present, by Leone Ginzburg, and from his first enthusiastic phase as an 'integral disciple' he later continued to read Croce and meditate on him throughout his life, until his last years. He therefore had all the time to form his own specific point of view: Bobbio's Croce is not that of 'neo-idealism' but that of 'absolute historicism':

> Croce himself, shortly before the outbreak of the [first world] war, having completed, at the end of the construction of his system, the conjunction of philosophy with history, preferred to speak, to indicate his philosophy, of 'historicism' or even of 'absolute historicism', until, in a 1943 memo, while reflecting on the confusions to which the idealistic conception of philosophy had lent itself, he observed that the time had come for philosophy to dismiss the word 'idealism', having been born ambiguous or having become so, and which philosophy has used in ways whose effects have not always been good.[74]

Bobbio produced a synthesis of Croce's 'historicism' which is masterly in its clarity and depth[75] and, as a good teacher, he indicated a short reference text: 'if among Croce's writings I had to indicate the one in which I saw the fruitful part of his philosophical teaching expressed with the greatest conciseness and completeness, I would point to the essay "Filosofia e metodologia"'.[76]

As a young man he had observed that:

> for those who wished to devote themselves to philosophical studies, Gentile's work seemed to permit one to ascend a step higher in the ascent towards philosophical perfection. Only later, expanding the horizon of my studies beyond Italian philosophy and beginning to deal with specific research in the field of the theory of law, it did not take long to be convinced that the philosophy of the pure act was a skilful but specious and sterile verbal game from which a jurist would not have received great illumination when he laboriously comes to discover that, according to current idealism, jurisprudence must be defined as 'willed will'.[77]

Bobbio recalls the theoretical separation (the political and personal one will come ten years later) between Croce and Gentile in 1913–14:

> Croce's article 'Intorno all'idealismo attuale' [...] creates a hitherto latent contrast between the two different ways of conceiving the essence, function and historical significance of philosophy [...]. If in the early years it might have seemed that the elder of the two men had attended philosophy lessons given by the younger, now Croce [...] openly declares his dissatisfaction — which is the natural reaction of those who believe that philosophy should arise from particular studies in different fields of knowledge and not only from itself — with regard to the *'purus philosophus'*.[78]

Ah, how many pure philosophers there were then, how many there are still today! And to both the academic world and to the populace 'they seem to be a step higher in the ascent towards philosophical perfection'. Once I spoke to Bobbio, perplexed by an interview in Brescia with Emanuele Severino, in which he had told me that 'he considered Giovanni Gentile the only true Italian philosopher of the twentieth century'. When Bobbio read an essay on Emanuele Severino that I had published in *Quaderni Piacentini*, in which I had made use of that interview,[79] among other things, he wrote to me:

> Although I have friendly relations with Severino, who is a nice person, I have never managed to take his philosophy seriously, because at the level of abstraction that characterises 'the being cannot not be etc.' I can't find a place for the problems that interest me and that stimulate me to reflect on myself, on the world around me, on the history of which I too am a tiny fragment. The derivation from Gentile through Bontadini is convincing and well developed. Every year I spend a few days in the company of Bontadini, here in Cervinia, where he too, like me, often comes, and a good part of our conversations are dedicated to Severino, his favourite and still deeply loved pupil, despite his apostasy. I found in your beautiful essay many arguments that I always present, in vain, to Bontadini, who also criticises Severino, but always remaining at the same level of abstraction, from which I am unable to make him descend. A beautiful example of a dialogue among the deaf [...]. Among the most apt and pleasant pages of your essay are those in which you write about repetitiveness through variation, and then you examine some stylistic styles with appropriate examples, and you conclude by talking about 'narcissism'.[80]

And then: 'Severino is considered the only Italian philosopher worth talking about [...] in any case the discussion about Severino, about his philosophy, his person, is not particularly interesting to me either'.[81]

History has a habit of repeating itself, it would seem, although with respect to Croce's disputes with Gentile many decades earlier there are some differences; the first difference is Bobbio's non-polemical style, and the second lies in the different nature of today's society (complex, fragmented and dispersed) and of its cultural and media subsystems. As a result, no actual philosophical controversy occurred between the 'concrete' Bobbio and the 'abstract' Severino.

Bobbio, in his *Profilo ideologico* and in many other texts, repeated that the main philosophical enemies of Croce were two: positivism and irrationalism. Although Bobbio did not feel very close to the omnipresent severe critic of positivism[82] of the first decade of the century, and whose anti-intellectualism was a point in common with the irrationalists,[83] similarly to Croce he despised the rhetoric of the magazines, *Hermes, La Voce, Leonardo* and even more so ('incredible out-of-date stale rubbish', 'stench of mould') the magazines *Il selvaggio* and *La vita nova*.[84] Moreover, Bobbio attacked existentialism as a 'philosophy of decadence' in the 1940s, and clearly wrote that Nietzsche, the master of irrationalism, was also the master of fascism.[85]

In his later years, well aware of the all-Italian 'Heidegger renaissance', Bobbio wrote: 'an existentialist, Heideggerian interpretation of Hobbes has recently come out. We might say: confusing the prince of light with the prince of darkness'.[86]

When I was thinking of writing that book on Croce, Bobbio noted the difficulty in publishing it: even the publishing house Laterza, for whom Croce had been a consultant for forty years, was no longer publishing Croce's works.

> because they say that no one buys them anymore. I say this with regret, because I have always been a great admirer of Croce, and still am. He was the only true teacher for a generation who managed to make the 'long journey' through fascism without becoming infected. However, more than the anti-positivist dispute, the anti-irrationalist one would seem to me of greater interest (today it is the philosophy of Nietzsche and Heidegger that is dominant and rampant).[87]

In fact, at the time I did not see any irrationalistic danger. On the other hand, I took the various structuralisms, neo-positivisms and analytic philosophies much more seriously, and I found in Croce the antidote to their methodological reductionism. Only later, and more and more as time goes by, did I feel the problem of irrationalism, but not the one of Nietzsche or Heidegger;[88] such an irrationalism was, in my opinion, quite harmless, because it took place only inside an 'enclosed garden', that is inside the academic ivory tower, rendering the discussion unknown to almost everyone. I felt much more strongly the problem of the irrationalism that pervades the common sense of ordinary people, in the form of the various genetic mutations of romanticism: decadentism,

existentialism, the 'Beat generation', the ideology of the 1968 protest movement, the 'New age' phenomenon. Such manifestations of irrationalism certainly did not derive from pristine academics, but rather from mass culture itself, left to itself (and this is a sin — of omission — on the part of academic culture!) and prey to the cynicism of media tycoons, of consumerism, and of the slogans of a new type of politician, racist and populist.[89]

Bobbio felt he had to defend Croce from the absurd accusation of irrationalism:

> we saw with surprise a historian of culture like Lukács considering Croce among the representatives and the architects of the destruction of reason, beginning with Nietzsche and ending with Hitler. Now, our generation did not have to wait for Lukács's book to know that there had been a wave of irrationalism in Europe at the beginning of the century, because we had learned it, several years earlier, from Croce, and we have not forgotten his admirable pages on irrationalism, in his *Storia d'Italia*, and on those — no less outstanding and truthful — in *Storia d'Europa*. For those who have only read Lukács' falsifications, it will be good to quote at least the passage in which Croce speaks of the 'geniuses' of Florentine magazines [...].[90]

I note, however, that Croce did not limit himself to scolding Papini and other personalities from Giolitti's times, but, starting from the 1930s,[91] he went back to the roots of all subsequent neo-romanticisms, that is to the historical Romanticism of the nineteenth century. Croce had seen irrationalism nearly win over not only the pens of writers, but also the minds of the masses and the policies of governments: there is a 'theoretical romanticism' — that is, idealism — which continues and advances 'modern philosophy', and there is a 'moral romanticism' which is 'pathology' and 'moral morbidity'.[92]

For both Croce and Bobbio, the challenge was to create a secular ethics that could overcome the constraints of various traditions — starting with the Catholic one — without falling prey of the subversive, charismatic nature of irrationalism. For Croce and Bobbio, not being a traditionalist does not imply despising traditions: in fact, they often venerated them a great deal, as a result of their love for continuity in the history of ideas, in institutions and in people's memories.

Croce had formulated a proposal for a secular and non-traditionalist ethics in many writings, among which in *Frammenti di etica* and in several celebrated chapters of his *Storia d'Europa*. Decades later Bobbio expressed a similar attitude, declaring himself to be a 'non-believer' in relation to religion, 'progressive' in politics and 'neo-positivist', while opposing in the private sphere the 'sexual revolution'[93] and abortion[94] and, in the public sphere, extremist

Maoism and the utopias promulgated by the 1968 protesters.[95] The ethics of the 'religion of freedom' of both scholars are pluralistic, open to reform, anti-authoritarian, rationalist. Such ethics is no less resolute, uncompromising and courageous than the traditional, Catholic one, at least for those who adopt it personally and intimately. And although Bobbio's ethics, unlike the Catholic one, was certainly not dogmatic, it equally certainly was not 'relativistic' (and in this respect was similar to Catholic ethics)![96]

7. The marginalisation of Croce and Italian culture after the Second World War

> 'None of my students from the 1940s to the 1980s has devoted himself or herself to Croce'.
> Norberto Bobbio, 1998

In 1939 Croce wrote what Gennaro Sasso called 'without doubt the most demanding and most painful meditation' present in his diaries, the purest 'fragment of ethics', one of the most agitated, troubled and dramatic fragments that he had ever written:

> and I do not care to speak about the sorrow or, even worse than sorrow, about the bitterness and contempt that have swollen my breast towards the many people who have betrayed me and have turned against me, or have moved away from me, or who, every day, without knowing either me or my books, hurl insults at me. What really oppresses me is the general condition of the souls in Italy and outside of Italy; the falsehoods, the wickedness and the stupidity in which we are immersed and almost submerged; the atrocious crimes to which we are the impotent bystanders [...]. How different my old age is from the one I had imagined and longed for, now that I have reached it! I was dreaming of putting an end, or almost, to my personal scientific and literary works, and of living among young people, working with them, directing them, sharing the fruits of my experiences with them, and, we could say, teaching them the secrets of the trade... instead, I had to shore up with my shoulders a crumbling edifice, which is something that could give me some reason for satisfaction or pride, if I were not overwhelmed by the sad thought that, when I am no longer here, no one will take my place, and the ruin of Italian culture will be complete.[97]

And when Croce died in 1952, Bobbio wrote with some pessimism in his obituary:

> There is no greater praise, and none is more deserved, than saying that Croce's work can be pointed out to future generations as a symbol of Italy in the first half of the century, that is to say, of civilised Italy. Alongside civilised Italy there was, and there still is, a barbaric Italy. But precisely for this reason Croce's teachings must not be forgotten.[98]

And what happened to Italian culture after his death? Croce's teachings were forgotten! Did this forgetfulness help to give rise to a 'barbaric Italy'? Or, in other words and in a more limited context, did the 'complete ruin of Italian culture' feared by Croce actually happen? In 1966 Bobbio tried to answer, without optimism or pessimism. Just as Giolitti had managed to tame both Catholics and socialists, Croce had done so both with traditional metaphysics and with positivism; but the moment of synthesis did not last long and when the First World War broke out both fascism and irrationalism grew in strength; when the fascist regime ended, it became clear that Marxism was more alive than ever, positivism had become neo-positivism, and irrationalism had been philosophically sanctioned by existentialism:

> if we compare the age of idealism, that is the first 15 years of the 20th century, with our age, that is the first 15 years of the second half of the same century, a difference is obvious: the former was more creative, the latter more positive [...]. Theirs was an age of philosophical awakening; ours, of scientific awakening. For this reason, that panorama is as varied as ours is monotonous. But they were falling without realising it towards one of the most tragic periods in European history; we have it behind us.[99]

In 1981, Bobbio seemed to express cautious optimism about Italian philosophical culture:

> Viano rightly insisted on the openness and favourable disposition of Italian philosophy towards foreign philosophies, considering this attitude a distinctive feature of our philosophy after the crisis of idealism and a sign of the effort to abolish the 'cultural closure' caused by Croce's hegemony [...] one cannot fail to recognise that a rapidly growing process of de-provincialisation has taken place [...]. Especially in the generations younger than mine, a more mature awareness has formed, namely the awareness of the different levels on which the philosophical debate moved on the world stage.[100]

But Bobbio – who in this case played the diplomatic role of summarising the contributions at a conference of university professors such as Verra, Viano,

Vattimo, Paolo Rossi and others, and who therefore was led to reflect the optimism of the speakers with respect to 'the favourable disposition towards foreign philosophies', as well as their forgetfulness of Croce. Even if on that occasion he expressed this evaluation, it was not his only one. In 1989, he wrote to me: 'I am sending you an excerpt from my speech for the centenary of the publishing house Laterza, where concerning the provincialism of Croce I support the opposite thesis to the one I had argued for in the conclusion of the Capri conference'.[101]

Anyway, as we have already seen in various texts already cited in this essay, Bobbio had boundless admiration for Croce, and when he happened to comment on specific intellectuals, the alleged 'de-provincialisation' of Italian culture crumbled before his eyes. On one occasion, after recounting the beneficial effects exercised by Croce's teaching on various generations of Italian intellectuals, the last of which, perhaps, was his own, he wrote:

> But today? It happened to me recently to present a piece of work by a historian of a much younger generation [...] in the introduction the author writes that he took inspiration from four great thinkers: Marx, Tocqueville, Weber and Schumpeter. I said in commenting on this statement that if I had to indicate my authors, I could not help but quote Croce [...]. It has often happened to me to compare my generation to that of our children, who had no masters. Did they not have them, or did they not want them? They burned them (in effigy) and vilified them (not only in effigy). But were they real masters? I doubt it: they last two or three years, and then they are forgotten. [...] I only know from my experience that relying on a compass allows us to navigate the great sea of history with greater safety and saves us from the temptation of turning back each time.[102]

Already at the Capri conference, despite the 'diplomatic' line to be taken, Bobbio observed that Italian philosophy is difficult to follow, precisely because of its 'openness' to foreign philosophies, which makes it necessary to keep up to date on all fronts (Anglo-Saxon, French, German). And, there is also another cause:

> in addition to the vastness of the area, one should also take into account the speed with which the various 'isms' are born and die. There is an ever-increasing number of them, and they last shorter and shorter periods of time. It becomes more and more difficult to chase them all and very often, when you have managed to catch one, in your hand you hold a corpse.[103]

And he effectively listed in detail: sociological functionalism, Althusser, the Frankfurt School, Rawls and neo-contractualism, Niklas Luhmann. In his *Profilo ideologico del Novecento italiano*, Bobbio underlined, in addition to rapid changes, also a certain exchange of roles:

> during the last few years we have witnessed again an exchange of fathers between the extreme right and the extreme left: there is a new right that refers to Gramsci and to his theory of hegemony, and there is a new left that rediscovers Nietzsche, Heidegger and Carl Schmitt. It is no coincidence that there is a convergence between the two radicalisms [...] a common intolerance for the 'mediocrity' of democracy, for the inconclusiveness of parliamentary debates, for the non-heroic virtues of a good citizen and for the unexciting actions of good governments.[104]

One could said: these are the usual mechanisms of social fashions, and specifically of the academic subsystem; since the majority of people are not capable of original thought, they lack the necessary courage for an authentic non-conformism, and are attracted to that kind of narcissism that considers automatically superior anything that is widely admired. One could continue by saying that, in such a frame of mind, the easier way to be convinced that one has advanced in the knowledge of the world and in self-development is to join the temporary bundle of novelty that is in fashion.

Such an analysis is correct, although there remains the problem of explaining using historical analysis the specific reasons why such mechanisms are, in a particular historical moment, favoured or hindered, why they prevail or die out, etc.

I have become convinced that the academic subsystem of society — setting aside the specifically Italian pathologies on account of which no Italian university is listed among the top 150 in the world, although the Italian cultural tradition is certainly not, I dare say, to be rated lower than the 150th in the world! — is that it cannot, and must not, be self-referential (on pain of suffering from the mechanisms depicted above), but it must be open to wider society and at the service of society, rather than making use of society for its own goals.

Croce was not a university professor, and indeed he did not even graduate; Bobbio, on the other hand, was a professor, but already as boy he had learned some important lessons from the gathering around Augusto Monti that he attended at the Rattazzi café in Turin. These meetings were fundamental experiences in his life, and, more than just a meeting of friends, had a philosophical and even conspiratorial character:

> [the lesson] consisted, at least for me, in making me feel first-hand the gap between academic culture, which is forged at school, and

> militant culture, which is formed among classmates and teachers who have come down from their desks, around living problems whose solution requires also personal commitment, and in taking precautions, all of us, against the disease of haughtiness.[105]

8. The attempts to deny Bobbio's admiration for Croce and contemporary Italy

> 'Croce was, personally, an example of intellectual freedom, of wisdom, of dignity, of industriousness and of rigour in his studies; he united in himself all the qualities of the educator, which other educators or teachers only partially possessed'.
> Norberto Bobbio, 1964

In 1989 Bobbio explained which part of Croce's work he preferred:

> Croce was a great moralist, as well as a great historian and the great man of letters and a philosopher, as everybody knows (although they don't always acknowledge it). This was, above all else, 'my' Croce. And if it took my whole life to convince myself of it, better late than never. [...] When I said he was a moralist I intended this word in its strong meaning, he was one of those people who possess the inner conviction that, ultimately, it is moral forces that guide history; and Croce drew the conclusion that it is the highest office of every man, no matter whether learned or not, to do his share to make them prevail.[106]

Bobbio then quoted a passage from Croce on how to strengthen one's love of freedom:

> and, without expecting or waiting for absurdities, that is, that politicians change their nature, [it is necessary to] oppose to it a non-political force, which can never be radically suppressed, because it is continuously born again inside one's breast, and with which good governance must always reckon.[107]

This is where the octogenarian Bobbio feels in perfect harmony with his teacher Croce: in this radical anti-Machiavellianism, for which politics cannot be independent of morality nor, even more so, distance itself from it. How far we are not only from the 'everything is political' slogan of the 1968 protest movement, but from the whole, unchanging, pro-Machiavellian tradition of Italian intellectuals, which, looking back, ascends from Togliatti to Gramsci and Marx and Hegel for what concerns the political left, and from Malaparte and Malapartism to Preziosi, Evola, the other fascist intellectuals, the Florentine magazines, and to D'Annunzio, for the right.

Instead, Croce and Bobbio were scholars of Hegel and Marx and were also admirers of theirs (Croce of Hegel, Bobbio of Marx), but they were not admirers of their Machiavellianism. Concerning the relationship between ethics and politics they embodied a rather different tradition, an anti-Machiavellian one which I would call Plutarchian, and which includes both right-wingers, such as Croce, De Sanctis and Manzoni, as well as left-wingers, such as Bobbio, Salvemini and Mazzini.[108]

Bobbio and Croce were directly connected by one primary point, namely, by their common views on moral forces in history, on the religion of freedom as well as in other areas. Furthermore, their close connection is underlined by one basic fact, namely, that Bobbio, especially in his later years, explicitly recognised the supremacy of Benedetto Croce over all his various teachers, and admitted that Croce was the most influential of them all. This fact is not recognised today by almost anyone. Not by the right, which is hostile to Bobbio now that he is dead and it was hostile to him when he was alive, and which certainly does not want to connect him to Croce, because Croce is to be considered, at least potentially (as long as you don't talk about it and don't really analyse him!), a 'proper' author, a moderate liberal like De Gasperi etc.[109] But the deep connection of Bobbio to Croce is not acknowledged by the left either, for reasons that mirror those just mentioned. To begin with, Croce is still, out of inert and ingrained habit, considered a right-wing author, a bit like Clint Eastwood is considered a right-wing director, when in reality the messages of the two are now much more radical and progressive than those of the so-called Italian left. But there are also deeper philosophical reasons: concepts such as historicism, Plutarchism, anti-egalitarianism and the religion of freedom are foreign to the intellectuals forged by the 1968 protest movement, who are neo-positivists, pro-Machiavellian, egalitarian and non-religious.

In fact, in the two most important anthologies of Bobbio's writings, namely those edited by Revelli[110] and by Bovero,[111] texts on Croce find very little space. Another glaring omission is found in the book edited by Revelli and others entitled *Bobbio e il suo mondo*.[112] This book, rich in photographic documentation, traces in detail all the phases of Bobbio's personal and intellectual life, but it makes no reference to Croce, not even a single word nor a small photograph (despite the fact that, every year and for decades, Croce used to regularly come to Piedmont and Turin from Naples!) Such a *'damnatio memoriae'* is, I believe, in part unconscious, a sort of Freudian slip of memory, even if in this case it concerns culture and ideology rather than psycho-sexuality.

So, according to these memories, or rather non-memories, Croce was not part of 'Bobbio and his world'. Nevertheless, Bobbio's son Andrea, on the day of his father's civil funeral in Rivalta Bormida, read out the words his father had written in 1995, when the Municipality of Rivalta gave him honorary citizenship; and in them the only philosopher mentioned is precisely Croce:

> I've never taken myself too seriously. We must look at ourselves with detachment and irony. Benedetto Croce, a master of our generation, used to say, very wisely, that one must have love for things, not for oneself, and that the more one loves things, the more one is able to become detached from oneself.[113]

Explicit acknowledgments of the relationship between Bobbio and Croce appear to be very thin on the ground. I do not want to conform with this omission and, as I also did in my writings from 1983 and 2004, I wanted to present both the intellectual relations of Bobbio with Croce, and also underline the similar role that the two scholars played in the political and cultural life of their times, that of 'Watchmen for Israel'.

Having said that, however, I also want to stress a difference, a quantitative one, in the greatness of the two men. Bobbio would never have placed himself at the same level as Croce, and in fact he never did. On the contrary: '[Croce's] vision of the history of this century is one of the most complex and profound. By comparison, Husserl's seems less new to me, Jaspers' more ambiguous, Heidegger's more inhumane'.[114] And also: 'Gone are the great men, those who represented with their genius a whole age; although one looks at Croce's wisdom with regret, at the immoderate vitality of D'Annunzio with distrust'.[115] And again: 'to a good knowledge of Croce's work, future scholars should add an attitude of free criticism, avoiding being intimidated by a greatness that has no comparisons in the Italian culture of this century, and avoiding controversy out of prejudice'.[116]

In this 'greatness that has no comparison', Bobbio agrees with Gramsci on Croce's 'cultural hegemony'. This hegemony is testified to, for example, by the letters exchanged by Croce with Eduard Bernstein, Georges Sorel, Thomas Mann, Albert Einstein and R. G. Collingwood, and by being identified by Roosevelt and Churchill as the main interlocutor of Italian anti-fascism. A hegemony that, in his time, Bobbio certainly did not have.

Anyway, with his capabilities (and they were not small indeed!), Bobbio was also a guardian of freedom in Italy. In 1968 he wrote the 'Profilo ideologico del Novecento italiano' for the *Storia della letteratura italiana* published by Garzanti, and in 1970 he was asked by the publishing house Einaudi to publish this essay as a book in its own right, together with everything that, for reasons of length, he could not publish in the *Storia*. On this occasion Bobbio also thought of adding a chapter that would narrate the history of Italian intellectuals up to 1968 and which would be entitled 'La libertà inutile'. But Einaudi did not publish the volume until 1986 (Bobbio mentioned that one of the reasons for that enormous delay was this additional chapter!). In fact, in 1969 Bobbio had explained in 'Resistenza', the magazine of the former Italian partisans of 'Giustizia e libertà', the reasons why he wanted to write that chapter (if we remember the ultra-marxist sympathies of the publisher Einaudi in those years, such a boycott does not seem surprising after all):

> today we know that freedom can be used for good and for evil. It can be used not to educate but to corrupt, not to increase one's wealth but to squander it, not to make people wiser and nobler, but to make them more ignorant and vulgar. Freedom can also be wasted. It can be wasted to the point of making it appear useless, unnecessary, even harmful. And by dint of wasting it, one day (near? distant?) we will lose it. They will take it away from us. We still don't know who: whether those we have let thrive on the right or those who are growing impetuously on the left. However, we have the suspicion, fuelled by an uninterrupted, harsh lesson lasting half a century, that the difference will not be very great.[117]

Many years later Bobbio commented on the passage above in an afterword to a new edition of his *Profilo ideologico del Novecento italiano:*

> My prediction did not come true. I have made amends for this mistake several times. But what happened was that, after trying to hold back right-wing extremism, we had suddenly and belatedly discovered left-wing extremism.

But he concluded the afterword with these words:

> I would no longer say [as I wrote in 1969] that freedom has been useless. One can be free by conviction or by habituation. I don't know how many Italians are genuine, convinced lovers of freedom. Maybe such are few. But there are many who, having breathed it for many years, can no longer live without it, even if they are not aware of it. [...] Italians, for reasons that most of them ignore and do not care about, find themselves living in a society in which they are 'forced' by things greater than themselves to 'be free'. I hope I'm not wrong a second time.[118]

Those 'things greater than themselves' in 1986 were yet to come: the fall of the Berlin wall, the Italian political corruption scandal Tangentopoli and the subsequent end of the parties of the so-called Italian First Republic, The Capaci bombing by the mafia, the rapid rise of the Northern League and Forza Italia political parties, the influxes of immigration in Italy, the attack on the Twin Towers, the war in Iraq, the eight years of George Bush Junior's government in the USA. But they would come soon. And Bobbio happened to live long enough to see them all, or almost all. And he was combative enough to conclude his direct political statement by denouncing the acute risk of a loss of freedom in Italy and of giving way to new forms of authoritarianism.

Was Bobbio wrong a second time in 1986, after the first time in 1968? Those who are sincere liberals and live with anguish and trepidation the terrible events that, at the time of writing, are taking place in Italian institutions, politics and society, are strongly tempted, much to their regret, to answer 'yes'.

The core of Bobbio's interpretation of Croce is, in his opinion and mine, faith in the religion of freedom, in that non-political, moral force with which politics 'must always reckon'. This faith ensures that, if we do not forget Croce, the master, then Bobbio's contributions, including his final ones, will not sound too pessimistic.

To be more explicit and perhaps clearer: if within the various cultural components that inspired Bobbio's intellectual personality, and within his abundant and multifaceted work, the influence of Croce is highlighted (and not minimised, omitted, or even hidden), then the last lines of Bobbio's afterword can be read in a different way, a way which does not contradict the first but supplements it. Which way is that? To the reader of Croce, and to his critical and empathic spirit, the answer!

* * *

Notes

[1] My contacts with Bobbio began in 1982, when Franco Sbarberi, my supervisor for my M.A. thesis on Gobetti, put me in contact with Bobbio, who was then the president of the Centro Studi Piero Gobetti. I was in contact with him until 2002; that year, his wife Valeria died and from then on Bobbio was assisted in his home by a caregiver. He became more and more depressed, reduced the circle of his interpersonal contacts and did not want me to visit him again. After that, I called him one last time and he wrote to me one last, short letter. Bobbio died in January 2004.

[2] Many years ago I wrote: 'I present the hypothesis that the authors who, even in this decade, have dealt on various occasions with Croce, today are, almost always, over fifty years old. People in their forties, thirties, and twenties have never known Croce's system, and therefore have not meditated on it, either to make use of it or to reject it. They may, if anything and certainly not frequently, have read a little something out of scholastic or professional obligation, but they could not or did not want to meet the philosopher's spirit. And therefore, they did not deal with his thought even in particular problems' ('Rassegna critica degli studi crociani negli Anni Ottanta con annessa bibliografia' in *Studi Critici* 1–2, October 1992, p. 189).

[3] It was he who had chosen me in the competition for admission to the Scuola Normale, but my affection for him was soon exhausted. When, years later, I told Bobbio how much Garin's philologism had disappointed my youthful desire for philosophy, he wrote to me: 'I have the impression that you are too severe [...] Croce has remained a constant point of reference for him too, as it has been for our entire generation' (letter to the author, Turin 25/11/1989). After so many years, however, I have not changed my mind: I am grateful to Garin for having transmitted to me the ideal of completeness and precision in historical

research, but I never liked his disinterest in philosophical ideas; in whose absence, according to Croce, it was not even possible to make history but only bare and dull chronicles.

[4] Which I later published: 'B. Croce e la controversia sullo psicologismo', *Pedagogia e vita*, serie 48, Oct. –Nov. 1986, pp. 55–72); 'B. Croce discusso dai Neoscolastici' (*Studium*, 3/1987, pp. 397–409); 'La filosofia della storia e B. Croce', *Studium*,1/1989, pp. 57–67)

[5] Then published as a book: *Laicità e religione in Piero Gobetti* (with an introduction by Norberto Bobbio, Milan: Franco Angeli, 1986).

[6] I then had as chairman for the discussion, Giorgio Candeloro.

[7] 'I personally appreciate historians, people who know their profession, unlike philosophers, who often show they do not know or do not have one' (Bobbio, 'Benedetto Croce' (1962), *Italia civile. Ritratti e testimonianze*, Firenze: Passigli Editori, 1986, p. 73)

[8] See, by Bobbio: 'Una rara amicizia', preface to Tranfaglia-Venturi-Guidetti Serra et al. *Ada Prospero Marchesini Gobetti*, in *Mezzosecolo* n. 7, Annali 1987–1989, Milano: Franco Angeli, 1990, pp. 3–8; and, also by Bobbio, 'Crocianesimo a Torino', in Norberto Bobbio, *Trent'anni di storia della cultura a Torino: 1920–1950*, Torino: Cassa di Risparmio, 1977, pp. 34–39. Bobbio thought that, among all his many writings, 'the only ones I would like to have survived' were *Italia Civile* (1964) and *Maestri e Compagni* (1984), books containing collections of contributions that Bobbio made to the memory and work of intellectuals he had known (For a bibliography: *De senectute e altri scritti autobiografici*, Einaudi, Turin, 1996, p. 91.

[9] My teacher, Sofia Vanni Rovighi, had said: 'I have a very high esteem for Garin as a historian of philosophy, even if I don't agree with his views [...] another philosopher who has all my admiration is Norberto Bobbio, who is not a historian of philosophy, but a philosopher. Norberto Bobbio is, in my humble opinion, a man of great genius, of serious preparation, and with whom [...] we have certain things on which we get along. He doesn't know, because I know him but he doesn't know me, or something like that' (Jan Władyslaw Woś, 'Un colloquio con Sofia Vanni Rovighi', in Marco Paolinelli (ed.), *Ricordo di Sofia Vanni Rovighi nel centenario della nascita*, Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2009, pp. 52–53.)

[10] 'Un maestro di questo secolo', in: Paolo Battistuzzi (ed.), *Benedetto Croce: una verifica*, Roma: L'Opinione Editore,1978, pp. 31–32

[11] 'Fra Croce e Gobetti', in: Norberto Bobbio, *Franco Antonicelli: ricordi e testimonianze*, Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1992, pp. 73–79

[12] Croce maestro di vita morale, in Paolo Bonetti (ed.), *Per conoscere Croce*, Napoli: Edizioni scientifiche Italiane, 1998, p. 35

[13] *Italia civile*, op. cit., p. 70.

[14] Ibidem.

[15] These are the titles of three books from 1984, 1964, 1986, which collect writings dating back much earlier.

[16] *Maestri e compagni*, Florence: Passigli Editori, 1984, pp. 169–170.

[17] 'Benedetto Croce', in *Occidente. Rassegna bimestrale di studi politici*, 8 (nn. 3–4, May–August 1952), p. 289–290.

[18] *Autobiografia intellettuale*, op. cit., p. 140.

[19] 'Un invito a Croce', in *Rivista di filosofia* 52, (n. 3, July 1961), p. 354–360

[20] Carlo Violi, *Norberto Bobbio: 50 anni di studi. Bibliografia degli scritti 1934–1983*, Milano: Franco Angeli, 1984. The quoted words by Bobbio are found in the preface he wrote for this book, and are then reprinted in *Autobiografia intellettuale*, op. cit., pp. 81–93.

[21] I used this expression in describing Bobbio's work, that can be called long-lasting in 'watching over' and 'presiding over' problems, debates, tragedies, cultural and political trends

present in the Italian life of his time (cf. Franco Manni, 'I presupposti filosofici nell'opera di Norberto Bobbio', *Studium*, 3/1989, (pp. 315–339), p. 316.

[22]Famous expression used by Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks*.

[23]*Italia civile*, op. cit., pp. 69–93.

[24] 'Una rara amicizia', op. cit.

[25] Ibidem.

[26] Ibidem.

[27] Ibidem.

[28] *Maestri e compagni*, op. cit., pp. 174–178.

[29] Turin, 31/1/1998

[30] Turin, 15/9/2000

[31] '[A]s for the laticlave [senator's badge], as they used pompously to say, it does not suit me, and I will wear (and bear) it very badly': letter to the author, Cervinia 17 August 1984.

[32] Croce, *Taccuini di guerra*, Milano: Adelphi, 2004, pp. 33, 49, 99, 165. Once Bobbio wrote to me (Turin, 25/11/1989): 'I have very low morale. I think of the beautiful pages of Croce, 'Solitudine di un vecchio filosofo' [I think he meant 'Soliloquio di un vecchio filosofo', in B. Croce, *Discorsi di varia filosofia*, vol. I]. But what is solitude today?'

[33] Ref. [12], p. 37.

[34] *Maestri e compagni*, op. cit., pp. 176, 294.

[35] *Italia civile*, op. cit., p. 78.

[36] I would have liked to write an overall study on Croce and was not attracted by his advice to write a specific study on the relationship between Augusto Del Noce and Croce: he wrote (Turin, 6/1/1997): 'Here I am perhaps more Crocean than you. Croce always invited young scholars to tackle well–defined problems'.

[37] *Italia civile*, op. cit., p. 86. I have tried to illustrate with a concrete example the *distingue frequenter* ('always distinguish') attitude in Bobbio's writing style, in my 'I presupposti filosofici nell'opera di Norberto Bobbio', *Studium*, 3/1989 (pp. 315–339), p. 317 and note 22 on p. 336.

[38] *Italia civile,* op. cit., pp. 74, 76.

[39] In a letter to the author (Breuil-Cervinia, 11/08/1991): 'I do not draw any comfort from religion. On the contrary, I seem to demean it by considering it a sort of care package'

[40] See the related quotations from his texts in the sections 'Religione ed etica laica e Secolarizzazione' in my 'I presupposti filosofici', op. cit., pp. 328–333.

[41] 'Croce maestro di vita morale', op. cit., p. 43.

[42] Letter to the author (Turin, 6/1/1997). I, on the other hand, liked Croce's style, and had written an essay on Croce's dispute with positivist psychologists Filippo Masci and Giuseppe Di Sarlo ('Benedetto Croce e la controversia sullo psicologismo', op. cit.).

[43] Letter to the author (Turin, 15/9/2000)

[44] Indeed, such slanderous propaganda had begun even earlier. Read the story narrated by Croce himself of the public slanders (along with the public and almost compulsory retractions) by Palmiro Togliatti, who accused him of being a 'collaborator' with the fascist regime in *Taccuini di Guerra*, op. cit., pp. 162–163, 258, 402–404. Concerning this episode and a certain Aldo Romano, see what Eugenio Di Rienzo writes in his 'Un dopoguerra storiografico...Due, tre cose che so di lui', in *Nuova storia contemporanea*, 4/2006, and now online on *Giornaledifilosofia.net*; see also the various studies by Giovanni Sedita.

[45] On the defence of the authenticity and originality of Croce's liberal theory, and also in response to Bobbio's criticisms, see Corrado Ocone, *Benedetto Croce. Il liberalismo come concezione della vita*, Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino, 2005, pp. 163–165.

[46] Norberto Bobbio, *Politica e cultura* (new edition edited by Franco Sbarberi), Turin: Einaudi, 2005, pp. 186, 192, 200, 202.

[47] 'Croce maestro di vita morale', op. cit., p. 40.

[48] Bobbio, 'Crocianesimo a Torin', op. cit.

[49] Croce 590 times, Marx 280 (even if, under the expression 'founder of the philosophy of praxis', many more), Lenin 32, Hegel 160, Engels 105, Sorel 125, Einaudi 61. On the influence of Croce's liberalism on Gramsci's political philosophy, I refer to my contribution 'Gramsci e il liberalismo', in Franco Sbarberi (ed.), *Teoria politica e società industriale*, Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1988, pp. 128–148.

[50] From this point until the end of the paragraph I quote with small changes some passages from my introduction to the new edition of Bobbio's book *Liberalismo e democrazia*, Milan: Simonelli Editore, 2004.

[51] This story has always been known to few, and by now very few. It is true that his *War Notebooks* 1943–1945 (*Taccuini di Guerra*, op. cit.) have been published relatively recently, and they show in great detail the following, amazing thing: that a scholar, unwillingly and only out of civic duty, found himself — with concrete results — at the centre of the political scene of a not-insignificant state, and — which is even more amazing especially in Italy — with absolute modesty and selflessness. However, these notebooks, at least until now, have practically been ignored by our cultural debate and have not entered into the shared 'canon' of our collective memory, neither for people of average culture nor for intellectuals.

[52] On Croce, by David D. Roberts: *Benedetto Croce and the Uses of Historicism*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987; and also, *Nothing But History: Reconstruction and Extremity After Metaphysics*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995.

[53] Bobbio, from Turin (1909–2004), had a long teaching career centred around university students, initially as a teacher of philosophy of law and then of the philosophy of politics. And he had an even longer indirect teaching role as a writer of books, essays for magazines, articles and interviews for newspapers. His works have been translated into 19 languages. A small group of admirers and friends, gravitating around the Centro Studi Piero Gobetti in Turin, created a unique initiative: using modern and sophisticated criteria, it has catalogued the approximately 1500 writings of Bobbio (5000 counting the various editions and translations) deposited at the Centre and has put this catalogue on the internet, making the majority of texts easily and freely available in digital format to a truly open community of scholars around the world.

[54] Just as Karl Popper also wrote the epigraph to his book written during the Second World War (*The Poverty of Historicism*): 'In memory of the countless men, women and children of all beliefs, nations and races that fell victim to the fascist and communist faith in the Inexorable Laws of Historic Destiny'.

[55] A writing by Bobbio that summarises with great clarity the theoretical terms of the relationship of his liberalism with fascism on the one hand and communism on the other is 'Augusto del Noce: fascismo, liberalismo, comunismo' (*Il Ponte* anno XLIX, n° 6, giugno 1993, now re-printed in the volume *Cinquant'anni non bastano. Scritti di Norberto Bobbio* in the journal *Il Ponte* 1946–1997, Fondazione Monte dei Paschi di Siena, – Florence: Il Ponte Editore, 2005, pp. 233–244.).

[56] B. Croce, *Taccuini*, op. cit., p. 350

[57] 'I believe that a competitive economy is more efficient than a planned economy, but I never believed that this was a decisive argument against central planning of the economy: if such planning could produce a freer and more humane society, or even just a fairer society rather than a competitive society, I would patronise it even if planning was less efficient than competition. In fact, it is my opinion that we should be prepared to pay a high price for freedom', Karl Popper, *Miseria dello storicismo*, Milan: Feltrinelli, 2013, p. 9 (*Poverty of Historicism*, Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2002). On this concordance between Croce and Bobbio on the compatibility between liberalism and socialism see: Tommaso Greco*, Norberto Bobbio. Un itinerario intellettuale tra filosofia e politica*, Rome: Donzelli, 2000, p. 128.

[58] Benedetto Croce, *Storia d'Europa* (1932), Laterza, Bari, 1981, p. 32

[59] 'Il filosofo e i comunisti' (interview with Norberto Bobbio by Franco Manni), *Diario*, 4th May 2001, p. 27. Cf. Bobbio*, Eguaglianza e libertà*, Turin: Einaudi, 2020, pp. 30–41

[60] Bobbio, *Il futuro della democrazia*, Turin: Einaudi, 1995, p. 129

[61] 'Augusto Del Noce: fascismo, comunismo, liberalismo', op. cit., p. 238.

[62] 'Il filosofo e i comunisti, interview by Franco Manni', op. cit., p. 26. When I submitted to him one of my (unpublished) writings on the desirable abandonment — by the current Italian self-styled 'communist' parties (or micro-parties) — of the antiliberal legacies of Marxism — Leninism (at least, if not the practical, the theoretical ones), he wrote to me (Turin, 16/8/2000): '[your writing] deserves to be widely known. I do not know what can be done to popularise it. I liked it very much: it is an extreme left project without the usual prejudices, including the need for violence, compulsory anti-Americanism, contempt for the liberal tradition of human rights. It is an honest and well-argued defence of historical communism. It does not claim to be current, well aware of the public spirit of today's Italians, attracted to Berlusconi. You do not make the mistake of the Action Party, which deluded itself into being a party like all the others and was mocked by the realists, who attributed to it the idea of wanting everything immediately. You speak correctly of a resistance party, as the Action Party was in the beginning during the last years of fascism. I share more or less everything you say. But after having had the bitter experience of the Action Party and its rapid failure, I now wonder what you think can be done in practice, to move from idea to action [...]. In my opinion Bertinotti's decision to bring down the Prodi government was disastrous. What can be done now, faced with the weakness of the DS [Democratici di Sinistra] and Berlusconi's alliance with the worst right, I don't know. I don't even try to make any predictions about how this bad story will end'.

[63] *Taccuini di guerra*, op. cit., p. 403

[64] Ibidem, p. 289

[65] 'Il filosofo e i comunisti, interview by Franco Manni', op. cit., pp. 26–27.

[66] 'Croce e la politica della cultura', in *Politica e cultura*, op. cit., pp. 78–79.

[67] 'Una rara amicizia', op. cit.

[68] 'Crocianesimo in Turin', op. cit. On the cultural, moral and strictly non–political character of Gobetti's 'liberal revolution' and of his antifascism, I would like to refer to the sections 'Libertà religiosa come religione della libertà', 'Rivoluzione liberale come riforma religiosa', and 'Metodi catartici IV: antifascismo senza eroi' in my book, *Laicità e religione in Piero Gobetti*, with a preface by Norberto Bobbio, Milan: Franco Angeli, 1986; and for the specifically philosophical relationship between Gobetti and Croce to the section 'Tra pragmatismo gentiliano e storicismo crociano' in my article, 'Gobetti e la filosofia', in *Piero Gobetti et la culture des années 20 (sous la direction de Michel Cassac),* Nice: Université de Nice Sophia Antipolis, 1999.

[69] 'Croce oppositore', in *Profilo ideologico del Novecento italiano,* Turin: Einaudi, 1986, p. 141.

[70] Another engaging, and more recent, account of this phase of Croce's life and work is in the chapter 'La religione della libertà' in Maurizio Viroli, *Come se Dio ci fosse. Religione e libertà nella storia d'Italia,* Turin: Einaudi, 2009, pp. 279–293.

[71] 'Ho scelto Croce', *Tuttolibri* year 15°, n. 570, Saturday 23 September 1989, p. 5.

[72] 'Il chierico che non tradì', in *Il Quotidiano della Basilicata,* 10/01/2004, p. 1

[73] 'Crocianesimo a Torino', op. cit.

[74] 'Il clima culturale e politico nell'età dell'idealismo italiano' in *Terzo programma: – Nel centenario della nascita di Benedetto Croce,* n. 2, RAI, Torino, 1966, pp. 7–14.

[75] *Italia civile,* op. cit., pp. 71–77

[76] Ibidem, p. 78. The essay indicated can be found in: *Croce, Teoria e storia della storiografia,* Milan: Adelphi, 2001, pp. 167–181.

[77] 'Ho scelto Croce', op. cit.

[78] Ibidem.

[79] Franco Manni, 'Emanuele Severino: medium e messaggio', *Quaderni piacentini,*12, nuova serie – 1984, pp. 145–165.

[80] Letter to the author (Cervinia, 17/08/1984)

[81] Letter to the author (Turin, 30/09/1984)

[82] Because Bobbio esteemed some (not all) positivists: see 'Croce oppositore', op. cit., p. 183, and preface to Emilio R. Papa (ed.), *Il positivismo nella cultura italiana,* Milan: Franco Angeli, 1985, pp. 11–14.

[83] *Profilo ideologico,* op. cit., p. 75.

[84] *Maestri e compagni,* op. cit., pp. 21, 27.

[85] Norberto Bobbio, *L'ideologia del fascismo,* Milano: Feltrinelli, 1975, p. 52.

[86] 'Riflessioni di un ottuagenario' (1989), *De senectute,* op. cit., p. 118.

[87] Letter to the author (Senate of the Republic, 4/9/1988). Sofia Vanni Rovighi, a few years earlier (1984), had expressed herself thus: 'which philosophy is repugnant to me? Nietzsche! In which I see the exaltation of vital values, of the values of human animality [...] not because vital values are not values, but if they are enhanced to the supreme degree and exalted in an absolute way, we arrive at the most terrible negation of the "humanity of man": "*die blonden Bestien*"', in 'Un colloquio', op. cit., p. 48.

[88] Heidegger gave precise testamentary instructions that his unpublished works should be published posthumously on a regular basis in order to keep people talking about him, Francesco Barone et al., *Metafisica. Il mondo nascosto,* Bari: Laterza, 1997, p. 45.

[89] In my own way, in fact, as a teacher and as a citizen and as a friend and as a man it is against this irrationalism that I have been fighting for years and I am fighting especially actively now; also and again — but less than before — I am fighting against a neo-positivist mentality. As a writer my main contribution to this struggle is *Lettera a un amico della Terra di Mezzo. Guida personale di etica filosofica sulle tracce di Aristotele, Freud e Croce passando per Tolkien* (con nota introduttiva di Norberto Bobbio), Milan: Simonelli, 2006 (translated into English as *A System of Ethics as a Letter to a Friend,* Seattle: Amazon DS Kindle Edition, 2013).

[90] 'Un invito a Croce', op. cit.

[91] Benedetto Croce, *Cultura e vita morale* (1931), *Conversazioni critiche serie terza* (1931), *Storia d'Europa nel secolo XIX* (1932), *La storia come pensiero e come azione* (1938), *Filosofia e storiografia* (1949), *Indagini sullo Hegel* (1952).

[92] I refer to this study of mine for such reflections of Croce: 'La critica di Benedetto Croce al sistema romantico', in *Humanitas*, 1/1990, pp. 33–58.

[93] 'Risposte a Domande sull'erotismo', *Nuovi Argomenti*, nn. 51–52, July 1961, pp. 13, 15–17.

[94] 'Laici e aborto', interview by Giulio Nascimbeni, *Corriere della Sera*, Friday 8th May 1981, p. 3.

[95] A dialogue with students was, at first, difficult: see 'Resistenza', n. 6 (June 1968), pp. 5–9; and the much harsher articles on 'Resistenza' from April and May 1969. Bobbio gives an account of these articles in the afterword to the volume edition (delayed by almost twenty years by the editor Einaudi!) of his *Profilo ideologico del Novecento italiano,* op. cit., pp. 179–183) which he had written in 1968.

[96] 'Pro e contro un'etica laica', in *Elogio della mitezza e altri scritti morali*, Milan: Linea d'Ombra,1994, pp. 167–185.

[97] *Taccuini IV*, 172–176 quoted in: Gennaro Sasso, *Per invigilare me stesso. I Taccuini di lavoro di Benedetto Croce*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1989, pp. 168–169. But five days later Croce wrote the following addition on the same page: 'what I have written is what I feel, but it is not all I feel, because I also feel the shame of complaining about my condition when I think of people whose suffering is much worse and could not follow their calling, that is their vocation in the world, or they saw it broken and suffocated. And then, from time to time, there comes the revival of the warlike spirit, and the feeling that we must fight and move forward, that there is always something good to do, and that this is the only meaning of human life'.

[98] 'Benedetto Croce', in *Occidente*, op. cit., ref. [17].

[99] 'Il clima culturale e politico nell'età dell'idealismo italiano', op. cit.

[100] 'Bilancio di un convegno', in: Bobbio-Rovvi-Tessitore-Viano et al., *La cultura filosofica italiana dal 1945 al 1980 (atti del convegno di Anacapri, giugno 1981)*, Naples: Guida Editori, 1982, pp. 331, 337–338.

[101] Letter to the author (Senate of the Republic, 27/5/1990).

[102] 'Un maestro di questo secolo', op. cit.

[103] Bobbio, 'Bilancio di un convegno', op. cit. pp. 334–335. I am reminded of what Gennaro Sasso writes on the 'laying off' of Croce (*To invigilate,* op. cit., p. 294): 'the increase of philosophical knowledge [...] did not lead to an expansion of cultural self-awareness, but, mostly, to the substitution of one philosophy for another, in a story in the course of which many philosophical faces appeared, disappeared, reappeared and then disappeared from our horizon (from Russell to Wittgenstein, Carnap, Husserl, Sartre, Merleau–Ponty, Nietzsche). This horizon was not in fact capable of retaining what it, from time to time, welcomed, and therefore appears, to those who observe it, overcrowded, yet, in the end, terribly empty. It will be the same for Martin Heidegger, who in recent years has been in vogue...'

[104] Bobbio, 'Bilancio di un convegno', op. cit.

[105] *Maestri e compagni*, op. cit., p. 181.

[106] Bobbio, 'Il nostro Croce', in Emanuele Ciliberto and Vasoli (eds.), *Filosofia e cultura: per Eugenio Garin*, Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1991, vol. 2, pp. 789–805.

[107] Ibidem.

[108] On these two pro-Machiavellian and anti-Machiavellian traditions which — in the Italian intellectuals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries — are present both in the right and

in the left, I refer to my study 'I presupposti filosofici ne *La vita italiana* di Preziosi' (in Luigi Parente (ed.), *Giovanni Preziosi e la cultura della razza,* Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino editore, 2005) and specifically the section 'Plutarco, Machiavelli, Mazzini'.

[109] Marcello Dell'Utri on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Croce's death reprinted a thousand copies (not for sale, and with an interesting preface by Enzo Bettiza) of *Quando l'Italia era tagliata in due*.

[110] *Etica e politica. Scritti di impegno civile*, Marco Revelli (ed.), Milan: Mondadori, 2009, pp. 1853.

[111] Bobbio, *Teoria generale della politica*, Michelangelo Bovero (ed.), Turin: Einaudi, 1999, pp. 683.

[112] Paola Agosti e Marco Revelli (eds.), Turin: Nino Aragno Editore, 2009, pp. 224.

[113] *Il corriere della sera*, 13th January 2004, p. 39.

[114] *Italia civile*, op. cit. p. 92.

[115] 'Il clima culturale', op. cit.

[116] 'Un invito a Croce', op. cit.

[117] 'Afterword', *Profilo ideologico*, op. cit., p. 179.

[118] Ibidem, p. 183.

The Current Significance of Carlo Sini's Notion of the Subject: A Contribution to the Debate between Postmodernism and New Realism

Roberto Redaelli

Abstract:

This paper aims to contribute to the current debate between New Realism and Postmodernism, by appealing to the philosophy of Carlo Sini and specifically to his notion of the subject. To this end, the paper pursues two main goals. Firstly, we expound the notion of the subject as developed in Carlo Sini's philosophy: in particular, we illustrate the form that the subject assumes in this philosopher's thought of practices, which is a sort of hermeneutical pragmatism. The second goal is to assess the significance of Sini's notion of the subject in the debate between New Realism and Postmodernism. More specifically, according to the thesis here argued, we can recognise, in the philosophy developed by Sini, a unique form of the relationship between the subject and reality, which neither reduces the latter to a mere product of the former, nor raises it to something absolute.

Contrary to the progress of the Postmodern condition — first recognised by J. F. Lyotard (1984) — the last century's philosophical scene saw the establishment of a new philosophical current shunning any kind of relativism and proposing a form of renovated realism (Ferraris 2001/2014; Gabriel 2013; Meillassoux 2009). This realism opposes the Nietzschean maxim, acknowledged by Postmodernism (Vattimo 2012), according to which there are no facts, but only interpretations, and contrary to that maxim it holds true that reality is 'unamendable' (see Ferraris 2015). A lively debate has thus been sparked off in the last decade over the status of reality and truth (see De Caro, Ferraris 2012). This paper wishes to contribute to the unfolding of such a debate, which indeed revives the classical question on the objective or subjective nature of truth and reality: it does so by appealing to the philosophy of Carlo Sini and specifically to his notion of the subject. To this end, the paper pursues two main goals. Firstly, we wish to expound the notion of the subject as developed in Carlo Sini's philosophy: in particular, we shall point out the unique form that the subject assumes in this philosopher's thought of practices: which is — essentially — a sort of hermeneutical pragmatism. The second goal is to assess the significance of Sini's notion of the subject in the current debate between New Realism and Postmodernism. More specifically, according to the thesis here argued, we can recognise, in the philosophy developed by Sini, a unique form of the relationship between the subject and reality which neither reduces the latter to a mere product of the former, nor raises it to something absolute and emancipated from the subjective sphere of experience. This mode of the relationship between

world and man can provide a new approach to the question of the nature of reality distinct from both Postmodernism and New Realism.

Before pursuing these two main goals, we should introduce the intellectual profile of Carlo Sini and the principal topics of his work.[1]

1. Introduction: Carlo Sini's Philosophy Between Hermeneutics and Semiotics

Carlo Sini is among the most influential living Italian philosophers. In his youth, studying in Milan, he was a pupil of Giovanni Emanuele Barié and Enzo Paci: the latter had been one of the major advocates of Husserl's phenomenology in Italy. Under Paci's supervision, in 1960, Sini completed his dissertation on the philosophy of Hegel.[2] He was Professor of the Philosophy of History at the University of L'Aquila and – after 1976 – Professor of Theoretical Philosophy at the State University of Milan.

In addition to studying Hegel and ancient philosophy, Sini devoted his research to Husserl. Although his early formation was within phenomenological philosophy, he went on to focus his studies on American Pragmatism, especially Pierce, Whitehead, and Mead, and later on Nietzsche, French structuralism, and Heidegger's philosophy. This research path overall led Sini to establish a connection between semiotics and hermeneutics and to propose a unique reflection on the notion of interpretation, intimately linked to the problem of the sign; this has led Sini to develop a hermeneutic pragmatism or – in other words – 'semiotical hermeneutics'.[3] Milestones along this philosophical path are works such as *Semiotica e Filosofia*, *Passare il segno: Semiotica, cosmologia, tecnica* (1981) *Kinesis: Saggi d'interpretazione* (1982) and *Images of Truth: From Sign to Symbol* (1993). Alongside this, Sini developed another research trajectory, which has gradually become the central focus of his thought: an interpretation of alphabetic writing as the origin of the logical reasoning which has formed the scientific mentality of Western civilisation. More precisely, in Sini's view, it is the linearisation of voice, as accomplished by writing, which allows the emergence of the ultra-sensible vision of logical meaning, namely the universe of logic. The translation of vocal emissions into a system of written signs establishes a sphere of general meaning which is freed from contingency. Through alphabetic writing, oral discourse is split into its basic elements, in other words it is formalised into *logos*.

In dealing with this topic, Sini began a fruitful and consistent dialogue with Jacques Derrida, albeit essentially disagreeing. The contention arises from the fact that Derrida's philosophy gives no consideration to what Sini calls 'the thought of practices'. In *Eracle al bivio* (2007) – which is, in effect, the second edition of

[1] A bio-bibliographical outline of Carlo Sini in the English language is provided by Silvia Benso's Introduction to the English translation of Sini's *Etica della scrittura* (2009).
[2] On the philosophical and human relationship between Sini and Paci see Sini (2015a).
[3] On the relationship between sign and hermeneutics in Sini's philosophy see Carrera (1998).

Semiotica e filosofia. Segno e linguaggio in Pierce, Nietzsche, Heidegger e Foucault (1978) — Sini reproaches Derrida for restricting philosophical inquiry to metaphysical practice. Indeed, according to Sini, 'Derrida thinks the origin, and the impossibility of the origin, once again *within* the metaphysical practice and its typical objects. For instance, he doesn't understand how fruitful Gianbattista Vico's extraordinary intuition of the "immense antiquity" of practices can be. Behind the empirical-transcendental difference, there is no arche-trace or anything similar. Behind it, there is a complexity of practices [...] — a problem of which Derrida hardly has any inkling' (Sini 2007: 220).

This thought of practices, which Sini criticises Derrida for not taking into account, is simply another means by which Sini expounds his hermeneutical pragmatism, whereby the idea of pragmatism is strictly connected with the notion of practices. The term 'practice' was used originally by the pragmatist philosopher Chauncey Wright, from whom Sini adopted the term; it constitutes a crucial turning point in Sini's philosophy and in his radical process of redefining the notion of the subject. Hence, before directly pursuing the paper's two main goals of analysing the notion of the subject in Sini's hermeneutical thinking and assessing its current significance, specifically in the debate between Postmodernism and New Realism, we should provide an outline of the philosopher's thought of practices, in which this notion takes shape.

2. The Thought of Practices

Carlo Sini develops his thought of practices by harmonising, with a unique approach, issues from both hermeneutics and American pragmatism. He establishes a dialogue between Nietzschean perspectivism and the Heideggerian hermeneutic circle, on one hand, and the infinite semiosis theorised by Peirce, on the other, arranging them into a sophisticated conceptual network whose ultimate outcome is the notion of practice.

Sini develops this notion throughout his philosophical career, transforming it into the axis of his philosophy. But, for Sini, philosophising is itself a practice, and consequently the thought of practices is also a practice. So, in approaching the notion of practice we should first tackle the question as to what, according to Sini, a practice is.

Sini provides an answer — albeit a paradoxical one — in *Gli abiti, le pratiche, i saperi* (1996): a practice is constituted by a complex, an intertwining of practices. Behind a practice there is a whole breadth of practices of life and knowledge. No practice can be isolated in itself; every practice is connected with a manifold set of others. In chapter seven of *Etica della scrittura*, Sini explains this intertwining of practices in relation to philosophising in these terms: 'Every life practice is a [form of] "wisdom" *sui generis*. At least, it is knowing how to do this and that (to stand,

walk, grasp, and so on); then, it is knowing how to say; and finally, it is knowing how to write, in all the senses of this expression' (Sini 2009: 104).

Walking, standing, grasping, are practices in which we have legs to walk and stand, hands to grasp and objects which we reach and grip. In these practices we know how to move our legs and how to grasp an object. In Wittgenstein's terms, we know the rules of the game and we are part of this game. In this regard, it is crucial to understand that, according to Sini, the practice establishes its own terms, its own rules of the game, to serve its purpose, the *telos*. Indeed, Sini claims that 'the general feature of doing is a relation, but not in the form of 'A does B', where A and B are already constituted as objects in themselves. Originally, doing is a relation that posits itself at its own extremes or posits its own terms' (Sini 2009: 104). At the origin there is a relation that establishes its own object and subject. For instance the practice of walking makes one a walker and walking has its own rules, which its subject must respect if they wish to 'walk'. At the same time, such rules are the result of a complex of practices: namely the practices of standing upright and balancing.

In this sense, a practice is empirical, 'since it contains elements of other practices that have already evolved' (Sini 2009: 107) and these other practices are coordinated by virtue of the practice. More precisely, in the practices, the elements are organised in view of the final cause, of which the things are signs, indications: i.e. the *telos* grounds a corresponding *ethos*. For this reason the practice is not only empirical, but also transcendental, because it is an opening of meanings, of possibilities that do not pre-exist and that emerge only through the practice itself. Shifted into new horizons, practices always acquire new meanings and senses. So every practice – we may say – is a figure, a sign, of the transcendental event of the world as an opening of meanings, and this event is always its interpretations (see Sini 2009: 108).

Now, this basic outline of the notion of practices raises the issue of the nature of the subject in the philosophy of Sini; in other words: who is the subject of practices?

3. The Subject to Practices and the Subject of Practices

In Sini's philosophy, the subject is not the metaphysical subject, nor is it the transcendental model of subjectivity, but rather it is a peculiar subject that takes on a twofold figure, a twofold nature: it is subject *to* the practices and it is the subject *of* the practices. That is to say, the subject is shaped by the knowledge of and living of practices within which it is engaged and of which – in a way – it is the 'actor'. In the figure of the subject *to* the practices, Sini argues, specifically in relation to philosophising, that 'we *are* [...] the practices that we exercise. While reflecting on the philosophising self, I find myself already constituted by a complex of practices and relations which come to me from the tradition. These practices define and

determine my current status and, more or less obscurely, confer a meaning upon it' (Sini 2009, 103, translation modified).

In this sense, we can argue that the subject has a *fate*. The practices, which the subject engages in, impress a mark upon it and its intentionality. The practices give form to the subject, they confer sense upon its action. More precisely, practices are the horizon of significance within which the subject's action is embedded. Indeed, Sini remarks that 'a subject's intentionality can be understood only starting from the practice in which the subject is situated, from its form and the content of its form' (Sini 2009: 109).

Yet the subject is not only the result of many practices. Within the practices it exercises the *function* of the subject. That is to say, the subject – itself a product of practices – can 'open' a practice, which is, in turn, a complexity of practices. This opening is possible only within practices that have already been activated. There are neither subjects nor objects outside of the practices, so the subject can be an agent within the sphere of practices to which it is assigned and in which it can open a practice, it can introduce a novelty. Concerning this point, in *Etica della Scrittura*, Sini constructs an interesting example to clarify the subject's unique function:

> One should think of the Neolithic woman who *sees* in the seed the sign of the flowers and fruit. She is already the result of many practices (gathering, cleaning, cooking, and so on), within which she exercises the function of the subject. It is from the re-elaboration of these practices within the energy of a new meaning that she can open the practice of farming for a humankind still made at a stage of hunters and breeders. (Sini 2009: 109–10)

Beginning from these considerations, we can draw out the unique conformation that the subject takes on in the philosophy of Carlo Sini: on one hand, the subject is shaped by the practices, and on the other hand, the event is but the occurring of practices *through* the subject. In this sense, the subject is a sign of the event, it is a figure of it, it is a singular and individual happening of the event of practices: it is the novelty in the repetition, the variation in the identity. So the subject is subject *to* the practices, is formed by the practices, and is the subject *of* the practices, it is the singularity which is, at the same time, part of the practices and a supervenience. In other words, the subject cannot be reduced to the practices that it embodies, it is not simply the result of these practices, yet it can become what it is only by starting from a concrete world of practices: it is matter already formed, but at the same time also matter which must be formed again and again, time after time. Therefore the subject is not just given once and for all, but it is *in itinere*, it is a continual trans-formation, in which the 'formation' occurs through a rebound. More precisely every action of the subject contributes to forming the subject itself: by rebounds, by

reacting upon the same subject. For this reason, the subject is a *kinesis*, a movement: in other words, a process of continuous formation.

Through an inquiry into these rebounds, and into these peculiar relationships between voice and writing, body and psyche, nature and culture, Sini drafts a genealogy of subjectivity (Sini 2004–2005), according to which — as the philosopher writes in *La materia del soggetto* — the subject is, in every case, actor and author (Sini 2015b).

4. The Twofold Nature of the Subject: A Contribution to the Debate Between Postmodernism and New Realism

Sini brings to light a twofold nature of the subject, which appears the more significant if we relate it to the current philosophical debate involving New Realism and Postmodernism.[4] To put the terms of the debate simply, the latter criticises the former's constructivism and their view of the subjective character of truth and reality. Indeed, according to the realistic positions, the postmodern theory subsumes reality and the notion of truth within the hermeneutical circle: truth is relative to points of view and so there is no truth *tout court;* every interpretation depends on its context and it is ungrounded. This critique involves the notion of interpretation, formulated by Nietzsche and developed by Heidegger, according to which there are no facts outside of their interpretation; also and above all this critique concerns Kantian philosophy. In this regard, the German philosopher Markus Gabriel — in *Why the World does not Exist* — defines Postmodernism as a form of radical constructivism and recognises Kant as the father of this tradition.[5] Before Gabriel, Maurizio Ferraris had similarly considered postmodern thought as a radicalisation of Kantian philosophy (Ferraris 2014: 13), in which there is access to the world only through a conceptual mediation. In Ferraris's view, such conceptual mediation becomes — in postmodern philosophy — a real construction of the world, on account of which, according to the philosopher, ontology is mistaken for epistemology, i.e. confounding 'what there is (and is not dependent on conceptual schemes) and what we know (and depends on conceptual schemes)'

[4] A specific account of the debate may be found in A. Kanev (2020).

[5] Specifically Gabriel argues that: 'postmodernism, arguably, was only yet another variation on the basic themes of metaphysics — in particular, because postmodernism was based on a very general form of constructivism. CONSTRUCTIVISM assumes that there are absolutely no facts in themselves and that we construct all facts through our multifaceted forms of discourse and scientific methods. There is no reality beyond our language games or discourses; they somehow do not really talk about anything, but only about themselves. The most important source and forefather of this tradition is Immanuel Kant. Kant indeed claimed that we could not know the world as it is in itself. No matter what we know, he thought that it would always in some respect have been made by human beings' (Gabriel 2015: 3).

(Ferraris 2014: 27).[6] Within this line of inquiry, prior to the development of New Realism, we may place Meillassoux's speculative materialism, which sees in the Copernican revolution of Kant a 'Ptolemaic counter-revolution' in philosophy: modern science displays thought gaining access to a world which is indifferent to any relations the subject has to it; on the contrary, the *Critique of Pure Reason* reveals a correlationism according to which man cannot *'think what there can be when there is no thought'* (Meillassoux 2009: 121).[7]

Therefore, for the main proponents of New Realism, and of realism *tout court*, truth and reality, in a postmodern perspective, depend on the subjective side of experience: hence the world is inevitably a byword, a reality (Ferraris 2014: 15) in which illusion is preferred to truth, the latter dissolved and forgotten in favour of the power of rhetoric. Thus disengaging from truth (Vattimo 2011) does not have the value of emancipation, but it paradoxically implies, once again, acknowledging that 'the argument of the strongest is always the best' (Ferraris 2014: 3). Nevertheless, if New Realism on the one hand criticises postmodern thought, on the other it also seems to return to a pre-critical position, reducing reality to something independent of the subject, by virtue of which the object and truth are absolute. *Contra* such a position, Vattimo argues that no one speaks from nowhere, i.e. that there is no external perspective from which one may examine the world: 'truth is not encountered but constructed with consensus and respect for the liberty of everyone, and the diverse communities that live together, without blending, in a free society' (Vattimo 2011: xxxvi).

Yet between the two alternative positions upheld respectively by Postmodernism and New Realism, Sini's hermeneutical pragmatism could be a viable third option: one in which truth and reality do not depend on the subject. The transcendental, which Kant assigns to subjectivity, is 'embodied' in the practices. Therefore, the subject is not the creator of a world of meaning, but rather, the concrete world of practices 'runs through' the subject, it occurs through the subject. In this sense, truth occurs in the various interpretations as a self-eventuation, and the interpretations as well as the corresponding *ethos* of the

[6] According to Ferraris, 'postmodernism gathers at least three orientations of great cultural importance [...] but the element that was by far the most ubiquitous (as it also involves a great part of twentieth-century analytic philosophy) was the one that proclaimed, with a radicalisation of Kantianism, that there is no access to the world if not through the mediation (which, in postmodernism, is radicalised and becomes construction) of conceptual schemes and representation' (Ferraris 2014: 13).

[7] 'For as everyone knows, in the Preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant presents his own revolution in thought under the banner of the revolution wrought by Copernicus – instead of knowledge conforming to the object, the Critical revolution makes the object conform to our knowledge. Yet it has become abundantly clear that a more fitting comparison for the Kantian revolution in thought would be to a "Ptolemaic counter-revolution", given that what the former asserts is not that the observer whom we thought was motionless is in fact orbiting around the observed sun, but on the contrary, that the subject is central to the process of knowledge' (Meillassoux 2009: 117–18).

subject are not ungrounded, but they are the result of an intertwining of practices, which truth occupies and dwells in.

We must reckon here that Sini, in his works, discusses the nature of truth from two different perspectives: event and meaning (Sini 2011: 13).[8] On the one hand, the fact that the world occurs is the event of truth, and on the other hand, what occurs, in each circumstance of the various practices, is the truth in its contingent figures, so that we cannot resolve the event in its partial meanings, nor separate it from the transient figures in which it occurs.[9] Hence Sini can argue that both postmodern and neorealist philosophers 'frequent the event of truth in the figure of their practices and elicit [...] "evident objects" from it. Such "objects" speak of the truth of the world each in their own way and considerably enhance its comprehension' (Sini 2011: 14).

Insisting upon the movement of truth, which concerns its event as much as its interpretations, Sini's philosophy seems thus to overcome both the trammels of realism, addressed to a reality and truth – as an absolute – as well as the limitations of relativism, according to which only interpretations and no facts can be given: indeed in the philosophy of Sini there is no relativism[10] – as the philosopher remarks time and again in his *Denkweg* – but a thought of practice, for which the subject is a sign of truth; such truth has its place in the concrete world of practices, which ground their subjects and their objects. In this way, the two sides of the subject, and the double meaning of truth, respond to an issue that engages both Postmodernism and New Realism: the question of the relation or interrelation between subject and object.

This question is faced by Carlo Sini from a perspective that is neither subjective nor objective; rather, he refers to the notion of practice: not an absolute principle, as with the Heideggerian notion of Being that shows and hides itself, or the archi-trace or archi-writing proposed by Derrida. Indeed, the practice is a concrete intertwining of knowledge and life, starting from which, 'something' becomes subject or object. So the study of practices can lead to an identification of the characteristics of subjectivity, and allow us to understand its origin and its unique *ethos*. Specifically, for Sini, as we have expounded, the practices of alphabetic writing can outline the character of the subject as it has developed in Western culture, along with its rationality understood as an intellectual vision of meanings. Indeed, the universe of meaning that is proper to the human being is understood by the philosopher as the result of different practices involving body, vision, gesture, upright stance and their ultimate transcription and re-elaboration in

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[8] On the twofold meaning of truth in Sini see especially Sini 1993: 134ff.

[9] In this perspective, 'interpretations of truth, which are transient, and the event of truth remain for Sini separate concepts, albeit linked through the concept of event as eventuation of (vertical) truth in specific ways of inhabiting it' (Benso 2009: viii).

[10] According to Sini the very statement that all truths are relative is 'absurd, because the statement as such is attributing itself an absolute value; its apparent "weakness" is actually dogmatically very strong' (Sini 2011: 9).

the practice of writing: thus our rationality is not a mere metaphysical addendum to our being animal. Hence, in Sini's philosophy, through these practices, and especially the practices of writing, thanks to which we can avail ourselves of a universal world of meanings, the subject adopts the fate of becoming a sign of truth, a sign that is, as Carrera writes, formed by past interpretations and destined for future interpretations (Carrera 1998: 51). Similarly to Pierce's and Heidegger's claim that *'Man is a sign',* in Sini's perspective, man is a sign of truth; a truth not ungrounded and left to the will of the subject, as postulated by relativism, nor absolute, as postulated by the various forms of realism, but rather a truth that roams around in the multifarious practices, informing human existence, rendering it sign.

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Italian Philosophy before the Animals

Review of *Animality in Contemporary Italian Philosophy*
Eds. Felice Cimatti & Carlo Salzani
London: Palgrave, 2020

Ermanno Castanò

At the stormy beginning of a new millennium, the theme of animality has gained popularity in philosophy, possibly due to the intensifying grip of governmental devices on the biological aspects of human and non-human life. Contagion, nutrition, reproduction, environment, and others have become political themes of the utmost importance. They have overtaken subjects of greater prominence from the last century, such as freedom, equality, justice, and independence.

A further element that characterised the 'animal turn' was the growing importance of the relationship between humans, animals, and the ecosystem. In this regard, it is useful to recall that, starting in the 1970s, Peter Singer and Tom Regan called for greater moral consideration for animals, thus opening a debate that is still ongoing today. At the beginning of the 2000s, two texts were published that had a profound impact upon the terms and concepts of that debate: *The Open: Man and Animal* by Giorgio Agamben and *The Animal That Therefore I Am* by Jacques Derrida.

These works have contributed to pushing a part of *Animal Studies* toward a focus on human-animal relationships, which led to the inception of *Human-Animal Studies*. In this second turning point that characterised world culture, Italian philosophy (thus filling in a presumed gap within English-speaking philosophy) played a central role, with Agamben taking the lead in the debate.

Animality in Contemporary Italian Philosophy, published in 2020 by Palgrave MacMillan, reconstructs the unique way in which Italian philosophy has reflected on the question of the animal. It refers to already well-known figures from 'Italian Theory' such as Agamben, Roberto Esposito, and Antonio Negri. At the same time, it also focuses on lesser-known authors, who are introduced to an English readership in some cases perhaps for the first time. The book aims to contribute to the international debate on animality through the specificity of Italian thought, showing both its high points and the marginalisation it has sometimes suffered, which nonetheless also preserved it. The editors of the volume, Carlo Salzani and Felice Cimatti, are two Italian philosophers who have garnered considerable attention in Italy and abroad thanks to their groundbreaking studies. They have enriched the volume with an introduction and two essays. While the volume includes works by the most prominent Italian thinkers who deal with animality, all voices share a common perspective, which is unpacked in the book's

introduction (*The Italian Animal – A Heterodox Tradition*) and Cimatti's first essay.

The guiding thread of the volume is that Italian philosophy (rooted in mediaeval and ancient thought) has acted as an alternative to Cartesianism that today, as its mechanistic paradigm wanes, speaks to the present with renewed vigour. In short, Cimatti writes, Italian philosophy has never been Cartesian. When, in fact, Descartes articulated a theoretical system founded on the ontological division between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* (mind and body, man and animal), he found fertile ground in German and French philosophy, but not in Italy, where Giambattista Vico firmly criticised his dualism. Vico's criticism and philosophy would go almost entirely unnoticed outside the peninsula. This ushered in an era (beginning at the end of the 17th century) in which Italy and Italian philosophy were relegated to the periphery of Europe.

Cimatti traces how this anti-Cartesian paradigm had its forerunners in thinkers such as Dante Alighieri, Niccolò Machiavelli and Tommaso Campanella and reached its highest level of conflict with Giordano Bruno, who affirmed the identity of God and Nature well before Spinoza. Cimatti also shows how the Italian tradition embodied, after Descartes, a path of Western thought that has been violently disrupted. Nonetheless, the anti-Cartesian possibility, which had been rejected and sidelined for centuries, and which may be found in such cornerstones as Vico and Giacomo Leopardi, suddenly re-emerges in the work of twentieth century authors such as Antonio Gramsci and Pier Paolo Pasolini. Their almost Dionysiac immanentism rejects the idea of an unbridgeable separation between thought and matter, or man and nature. And this perspective points the way toward new paths in our society, the relationship of which to animality is so deeply in crisis.

The book is divided into three parts. The first, 'Animality in the Italian Tradition', is a historical reconstruction that opens with Cimatti's essay and continues with Luisella Battaglia's essay on the thought of Aldo Capitini, the 'Italian Gandhi'. Capitini, following in the footsteps of Francis of Assisi, advocated non-violence in the relationship between humans and animals, envisioning a moral consideration that embraces all sentient beings, a position very close to that of Peter Singer. The following essay from Giorgio Losi and Niccolò Bertuzzi, offers a complete overview of Italian anti-speciesist trends, from animal advocacy to the animal liberation movements.

The second part, 'Animality in Perspective' embraces the current Italian philosophy. Carlo Salzani, the co-editor of the book, dedicates a chapter to Giorgio Agamben's thought. According to Salzani, animality occupies a central point in the Agambenian reflection (inspired here by Furio Jesi) as sovereignty is nothing but the 'anthropological machine' that separates man and animal, allowing the former's dominion over the latter. Only a notion capable of jamming and going beyond such an opposition can disable this machine and cancel out its deadly effects on both man and animal, thus moving towards the idea of a life as destituent power.

Matías Saidel and Diego Rossello's essay examines Roberto Esposito's philosophy. Although he is not directly involved in a reflection on animality, Esposito has nevertheless engaged in a deconstruction of political dispositifs (such as those of 'person' and 'man') to highlight the harmful attempts that have been made to immunise the human against any contamination by the animal, that led him to elaborate a sort of biocentrism of impersonal life that characterises what he calls 'living thought' (the Italian philosophy of life that runs from Machiavelli to Benedetto Croce and beyond). A similar subject, linked to the 'posthuman' perspective, is dealt with in the paper by Giovanni Leghissa who compares ethology and cybernetics so as to affirm that it is not only humans who have reason and subjectivity.

For his part, Marco Maurizi develops the insights of the Frankfurt School by elaborating the implications of the dialectic between the human and the non-human along with that between reason and nature. His essay traces the history of Italian Marxism — showing how these problems are frequently present from Labriola to the post-workerists — and outlines the perspectives and unresolved issues of the debate. For example, Antonio Negri affirms, in a statement stemming from a Spinozist materialism, that we should break down all barriers between humans, animals, and machines. Applying the perspective of Theodor Adorno to anti-speciesism, Maurizi argues that we consider animals inferior *because* we exploit them, rather than the other way around.

The book continues with Federica Giardini's essay connecting the theme of animality with that of sexual difference as developed by Italian feminist thinkers such as Luisa Muraro, Adriana Cavarero and Rosi Braidotti, according to which women and nature stand equally in need of emancipation from patriarchy. An emancipation that Giardini calls 'zoopolitics': a politics of life that goes beyond any hierarchy between mind and body. This second part closes with Alma Massaro's paper, which illustrates the attention paid to animals, as innocent and Edenic beings, to be found in Paolo De Benedetti's theology, and with an essay by Roberto Marchesini (editor of the journal, Animal Studies–Rivista italiana di zooantropologia) on the recognition of animal subjectivity in scientific and philosophical ethology.

The third part, 'Fragments of a Contemporary Debate' opens with an essay by Massimo Filippi, who deconstructs the device of the abattoir as part of the sacrificial paradigm according to which the very idea of a 'rational subject' can exist only against the background of an infinite slaughter of flesh, as an effect of the separation of man and animal imposed by anthropocentrism. Even the apparently biological concept of species functions as a dispositif to separate humans from other beings, with which they might otherwise have stood upon the same continuum of life. His reflection is inspired by philosophers such as Agamben, Derrida, and Haraway. It indicates how the overcoming of anthropocentrism can occur only in an animal-political life as a joyful and sensual hybrid.

The book closes with a brief overview of essays that extend also outside of philosophy. Laura Bazzicalupo interprets the Anthropocene (or, following Jason Moore, Capitalocene) as the catastrophe of anthropocentrism and its will to dominate nature. The author reads the phenomenon through Foucauldian categories as a biopolitical battle to control human and non-human animality: a governmental apparatus in defiance of which the philosophy of the Italian Renaissance (from Machiavelli to Vico) can represent an alternative paradigm to that of the separation of man and nature. Valentina Sonzogni examines several cases of speciesism in contemporary Italian art, discussing artworks made of dead animals and, through them, documents the insensitivity to the pain of others that is characteristic of certain artistic practices. Finally, Leonardo Caffo, a prominent voice in the media, articulates an ethical vision of a relationship with animals that is no longer instrumental but carried out 'only for them', insisting in a deconstructive tonality that the time has come to talk about animality.

In the way of an 'archaeology of knowledge', the epistemological subplot that runs throughout the entire book is that of the stratification of philosophical thought, which thus appears neither linear nor univocal. If there is certainly a mainstream current running through it, that which has triumphed and that we can now identify with the Cartesian modernity that looks at nature as the object of scientific knowledge, there are at the same time defeated or underground currents that come to the fore in the form of cancellations or repressions. This is the case with the Italian Renaissance which (after the domination of theology in the Middle Ages) had opened up a number of possibilities for a thought of animality ranging from scientific empiricism to magical hylozoism, or, in other words, from the philosophy of nature of Galileo Galilei to that of Bernardino Telesio, Giordano Bruno, and Tommaso Campanella.

Despite the political theory that runs from Niccolò Machiavelli to Giambattista Vico proposing another way, one that kept together social empiricism and a conception of man in continuity with the animal (i.e. the figure of the Centaur in the former and that of the Beast in the latter), in the theory of nature the victory of the Galilean perspective over the Brunian one is undoubted. This led Italian philosophy to its notable contribution to world scientific culture, and, at the same time, to devalue the vitalistic philosophy of the Renaissance as mere superstitious magic or animism.

However, the defeated vitalism advanced by Bruno and Telesio that languished in shadow and (although it was partially taken up by Spinoza) remained substantially forgotten for a long time, somehow survived the oblivion and was rediscovered in the nineteenth century by Bertrando Spaventa. For this reason, the vitalistic thought of the Renaissance can hardly be considered a fundamental element in the European or Italian philosophy of its time, which went in a completely different direction for centuries. Probably the importance we nowadays recognise in it derives from a projection of the present onto the past, and it could

be more fruitful to ask, as Aby Warburg does, how that which has been forgotten can survive in history through the ages.

Among the images that tradition has handed down most frequently in the form of cancellation is the image of messianism. In general, the whole book is accompanied by Giorgio Agamben's thesis that the form of life practised by Francis of Assisi was a model both for subsequent ontologies, that attempted to reunite man and animal (or, in other words, nature and divinity) and for the communities that have tried to live beyond the law, understood as sovereign politics. This is testified to not only by the book's cover, which shows Giotto's painting 'Saint Francis Preaching to the Birds', but also by the number of times that the name of the saint of Assisi returns in the text to indicate how the gesture of revoking both the separation between man and animal and sovereignty is profoundly messianic in the most authentic and forgotten sense. A gesture that, perhaps, also recalls something of the inoperativeness of the pagan mysteries that early Christianity absorbed and hid in its very most intimate and recondite core.

Animality and Renaissance philosophy have been removed in the same way by scientific modernity. So contemporary 'Italian theory' cannot rethink and reactivate one without the other in its attempt to achieve a different modernity. For this purpose it must go back to the point where the possibility was originally denied: hence the interest in Spinoza (and all the anti-Cartesian heritage) shared by Agamben, Negri and Esposito. This vitalistic thought acquires renewed force in thinkers as different as these and affords new meanings for a Western civilisation in crisis precisely in terms of its relation to nature.

Animality in Contemporary Italian Philosophy introduces some of the most prominent Italian thinkers engaged in thinking animality to an English-speaking audience. It is a constructive resource written by highly respected researchers and addressed to scholars and those who care about the relationship between humans and animals, and it demonstrates the way in which Italian philosophy can help to provide an alternative paradigm.

From *Immunopolitics* to *Xenopolitics:* Sovereignty and Migration in Donatella Di Cesare's *Resident Foreigners*

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to offer a critical comment on *Resident Foreigners: A Philosophy of Migration* (2017, translated into English in 2020). A critical reading related to this work can be relevant if we assume it as an example of a philosophical experiment: Di Cesare proposes, in this regard, a 'Philosophy of Migration' project which should distinguish itself from Political Philosophy and Political Theory, adopting and mixing together two different and heterogeneous philosophical traditions: phenomenology and political ontology. In the first section, an overview of Di Cesare's recent works will be reconstructed, situating her work in the context of the *Italian Thought* movement and summarising her proposal for a new discipline, the Philosophy of Migration, using *Resident Foreigners'* main chapters. In the second section, a prominent feature of the same book, the concept of an 'ontology of autochthony', will be articulated in a way that draws near to Di Cesare's critical references (Michael Walzer, David Miller, Christopher H. Wellman and Joseph Carens, in particular), discussing a constitutive political and ontological relationship between the State and a *dispositive of exclusion* within Communitarianism and Liberalism. The third section, *The passenger paradox*, introduces Di Cesare's use of a *political phenomenology*, exposing a friction between political ontology and political phenomenology along with a lack of methodology which could compromise the whole project of a philosophy of migration. The same critical notes will lead to some final conclusions, where the concepts of both *the Other* and *the Same* can be situated in a broader philosophical context, *xenopolitics* — I will use this term in relation to Rosi Braidotti, Helen Hester and Paul B. Preciado — where Di Cesare's categorisation of 'immunopolitics' can be accompanied on the one hand by the rethinking of racism in 'meso-' and 'micro-' social and political areas — not just between the State and the migrant; and, on the other hand, *affirmative* ethical and political models (*constituent alienation*, *ethics of estrangement*, *affirmative politics*) can be further developed.

1. Introduction. On Di Cesare's *Philosophy of Migration* project

Between March and April 2020, with the outbreak of the COVID epidemic in Europe, the Italian public debate was shaken by a peculiar conspiracy theory: following some television reports that mistakenly used photographs of the caskets containing refugees who had died on Lampedusa's shores instead of pictures of the coffins for COVID–19 victims in Lombardy, speculations spread regarding media fabrications. The political theme of the migrant as a *casus belli* of the emergency returned to occupy centre-stage.

If the migrant is unwillingly part of any public debate concerning state intervention in emergencies, Donatella Di Cesare's *Resident Foreigners: A Philosophy of Migration* (2017, translated into English in 2020) gives us a guide to understanding the structural relation between the state's dispositives of power, which are engaged in building a national identity, and migratory phenomena. This is a novel framework and a welcome addition to the political theory of migration, employing insights from current events, journal articles, interviews and diaries, alongside philosophical research. It highlights hitherto neglected aspects, such as the distinction between, on the one hand, a sedentary, state–centric perspective, along with a neo–existentialist paradigm of life, bodies and movements, and on the other hand, a profound reflection upon the political status of the migrant as a 'citizen–without–citizenship'.

To see the overall picture of Di Cesare's thought, we could assume as a starting point that since the beginning of her work, Di Cesare articulates a complex and multifaceted comment upon Martin Heidegger's thought, with particular attention to the French phenomenology inspired by the Heideggerian philosophy. At the same time, Di Cesare conducts in-depth research on the Jewish philosophical tradition, from *Grammatica dei tempi messianici* (2008) to *Marranos: The Other of the Other* (2018, translated into English, 2020a).

Di Cesare's other works are structurally intertwined with a critical insight into the role of the state and national 'logics of belonging' in contemporary politics, discussing fundamental philosophical and cultural archetypes which structure the public debate on the concept of citizenship. The *resident* and the *migrant* are, in fact, two fundamental figures in her thought, appearing even more frequently since the publication of *Utopia of Understanding: Between Babel and Auschwitz* (2003, translated into English, 2012) and the pamphlet *Crimini contro l'ospitalità. Vita e violenza nei centri per gli stranieri* (2014a), a philosophical work dedicated to the Centres for Identification and Expulsion (CIE).

A new development of Di Cesare's political theory slowly emerges after the publication of Dario Gentili's *Italian Theory* (2012). Gentili's reconstruction of Italian political thought, from the 1960s to contemporary debates, gives birth to the philosophical movement of 'Italian Thought': biopolitics, in this context, is seen not only according to the perspective of Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben, but also from Roberto Esposito's trilogy, composed of *Communitas* (1998, translated into English, 2009), *Immunitas* (2002, translated into English, 2011) and *Bios* (2004, translated into English, 2008).

The analysis of Di Cesare's identity politics, enriched with an existentialist tone characterising the project of a philosophy of migration, refers to a form of existential *debt* as a condition for the migrant's ontological-political difference. Despite the heterogeneous modalities, the theme of debt allows *Resident Foreigners* to be placed alongside such works as Roberto Esposito's *Communitas* and Elettra Stimilli's *The Debt of the Living* (2011, translated into English, 2016), in what we could define as a 'second wave' of Italian Thought focused on the

conceptual dyad of community and immunity. More specifically, the meaning given to 'community' by Esposito is repeated by Di Cesare (p. 200) in an attempt to indicate in the Latin word *'munus'* an ineradicable absence, analogous to an infinite debt, which shapes the ideal community precisely because it fails to deal with that absence.

Even if Di Cesare could be considered a thinker who bears some relation to the *Italian Thought* movement, her political philosophy may be considered to distinguish itself from it by her conceptualisation of an 'ontological anarchism' (focusing on the Greek etymology of anarchy: 'ἀν–', absence or negation, and 'ἀρχή', origin, principle and government). The use of the 'anarchist' adjective, therefore, becomes more and more relevant after the publication of *Sulla vocazione politica della filosofia* (2018, forthcoming in English, 2021c); from this book onwards, Di Cesare advocates the retrieval of a neo-existential approach to philosophical knowledge, accompanied by a rethinking of the concept of 'ἀναρχία' which goes beyond the political history of the Anarchist movement. These influences become decisive in the most recent work of Di Cesare, *Il tempo della rivolta* (2020, forthcoming in English, 2021b).

In *Resident Foreigners,* certain formulations from Di Cesare's later work are anticipated — such as the idea of an 'immunodemocracy' described in *Virus sovrano? L'asfissia capitalistica* (2020, translated into English as *Immunodemocracy: Capitalist Asphyxia*, 2021a) — by the attribution to the State of a 'self–immunising logic of exclusion' (p. 1). The migrant is a ghost that haunts the territory of a national state, always exploited in critical situations as the bearer of the power of 'deterritorialisation' (p. 9) pertaining to the free passage of a living flow, naturally averse to the construction of identity. By blocking migrants at the border, the State acquires an identity and becomes the promulgator of a principle of identification of human beings in line with the contemporary biopolitical lexicon.

The book is divided up into four sections. In the first, *Migrants and the State* (pp. 5–77), she insists, from a historical and political perspective, on a form of irreconcilability between the 'migrant' and the 'State'. Di Cesare critically analyses the public debate on immigration, emphasising a 'state-centric' perspective (pp. 11–22) which groups political thinkers of various backgrounds in taking a political position on migratory phenomena; in this direction, Di Cesare underlines the 'sedentary' nature of these positions, which restricts the possibilities of a philosophy of migration to decisions that can be taken only 'within-the-State' (p. 21). Hence, what is really lacking in contemporary philosophies of migration is not a more precisely articulated political theory of border control, but a phenomenological perspective on the migratory experience. Di Cesare sets the boats full of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea alongside Foucault's *ship of fools*, making evident how a new philosophy of migration has to face off against 'the existential nudity' (p. 22) embodied by desperate migrants.

In the second section, the migrant is no longer considered as an *archetypal figure:* Di Cesare discusses tragic episodes which have catalysed the public debate

on immigration, combining these references with a qualitative ethnographical approach. To this end, we find the photos of the corpse of Alan Kurdi, a 3-year-old Kurdish child found dead on Turkish shores: after an emotional wave of shock and empathy, European citizens obliterated the case from their short-term memory (pp. 84–88). In addition, Di Cesare reconstructs *Fadoul's story* (pp. 91–95): born in Cameroon in a refugee camp, Fadoul obtains a provisional visa in France allowing him to live in another refugee camp, only to see, after a short period, his asylum request refused for bureaucratic reasons. Di Cesare attempts to tell his story, in each of its steps, shedding light on Fadoul's frustration at being separated from his family, who are in another camp, as well as the 'trauma' of having survived his boat's sinking in the Mediterranean Sea, remembering his dead friends and their common dream of reaching Europe.

In the third section, *Resident Foreigners* (pp. 128–66), Di Cesare investigates 'citizenship' as a concept that includes institutionalised models of living, distinguishing between an 'earth-born' identity (pp. 140–47), a juridical citizenship (pp. 147–53), and the 'theological-political' form of *'ger'*, which represents a unity of 'resident' and 'foreigner' in Biblical Jerusalem (pp. 153–63). A central reference is the figure of the *exile* throughout 20th century philosophy; more than a specific form of exile, it is 'exileness' as a property of the human condition that can be philosophically reconstructed by means of such examples as Martin Heidegger's notion of *Heimatlosigkeit*, Simone Weil's conceptualisation of *Déracinement* or Emmanuel Lévinas and María Zambrano's philosophies of exile. The metaphor of the *root*, in this respect, can be characterised differently if one begins from the experience of exile; the latter testifies to a life which takes shape through a practice of *crossing spaces* more than an identitarian *rooting* within a territory (p. 130).

The last part of the book uses walls as a symbol of contemporary national sovereignty and analyses the militarisation of national borders to critically reconsider globalisation as a whole. Di Cesare refers to Wendy Brown's *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (2010), discussing a 'psychopolitics' engineered by security dispositives of control and intertwined with identitarian politics. This kind of emotional manipulation can produce collective neurosis and lead to a psychopathological status of 'self-segregation' (p. 170). Di Cesare mentions two paradigms consistent with this interpretation: Giorgio Agamben's theory of biopolitical *fields* and the geopolitical map of the globalised world developed by the French anthropologist Michel Agier.

In a world made by fields, walls and identitarian states, political power is exercised in the control of passage. In this respect, Di Cesare distinguishes etymologically between three kinds of passage between national states: *confine*, composed of 'con–' (with) and 'fine' (end), implies a mutual acknowledgement on the part of the two regions, linked by a passage-zone; *limite* (limit, from the Latin *'limes')* is something imposed by one part upon the other, and *frontiera* (frontier), a military term that has been invoked in contemporary debates concerning immigration hotspots, expresses the idea that *border* and *struggle* are one and the

same (p. 175). The border becomes a site of control from which we cannot escape, where life must be stopped, controlled, and dominated. But *Resident Foreigners*, adopting a biopolitical perspective, partially excludes a unique answer to the question of what a border is: in the near future, or in a dystopian scenario, a *biometric passport* could be the way in which the body itself is identified with the person and biological data will replace civil registries (pp. 180–182).

From this standpoint, Di Cesare's critical analysis of the identity politics of European states aims to trace a constitutive relationship between maintaining state borders (from the war between states to the war between 'Them' and 'Us') and the social reproduction of the feeling of national identity. The resident citizen becomes persuaded of this identity by learning to use 'the grammar of the possessive', consisting of ownership and appropriations, divisions and distinctions, and within which even tolerance depends on overcoming an underlying hostility (p. 13). Di Cesare draws inspiration from the critical interpretation of the etymological relationship between 'birth' and 'nation' in Hannah Arendt (p. 35). The dramatic discovery of an external agency leads the national political body to define the attainment of citizenship rights through the terminology of naturalisation: the excess of migration must be thwarted by immunopolitical manoeuvres, although each migratory wave shakes up the dispositives of identity.

Rather than recounting each one of *Resident Foreigners'* arguments, we shall try to shed light on the philosophical method which Di Cesare uses in her proposal. The main objective is not to produce a variation on the current 'Political Theory' or 'Political Philosophy' of migration, but to lay the foundations for a 'Philosophy of Migration' and, at the same time, to shed new light on the same issue. Di Cesare makes full use of two specific traditions: political ontology and phenomenology. With this in mind, the following section will reconstruct Di Cesare's ontological approach by describing the range of political positions that can be defined as identity politics, a definition produced by way of a philosophical insight into the relation between an idea of subjectivity as 'self-determination' and the political concept of sovereignty. Once this has been achieved, a sample application of phenomenology as a philosophical technique will be commented upon, so that some critical notes on the philosophy of migration may be proposed in the conclusion, along with some proposals for further developing it.

2. The Ontology of Autochthony. Critical perspectives on Communitarianism and Liberalism

On closer examination, the 'grammar of possessives' characteristic of national identity politics is based on an *ontology of autochthony*. In this sense, the migrant's existence presupposes absolute negativity, since he has *no right to exist* as he does not belong to any territory and he is extraneous to any habitus: 'According to this view, then, one can only exist as the autochthonous, in the presumed naturalness of those born to the land in which they live. *I exist* in that *I am from here'* (p. 106).

Citizenship preserves and exacerbates the problem of the growing presence of the stateless, rather than solving it, within a framework of social and political ontology such as the globalised one, where the stateless-without-citizenship come to assume a critical role. The public identification of human existence is contradicted by the simple presence of the Other. The ontology of autochthony, faced with the stateless, sternly replies: '[Her] simple presence does not justify her existence' (p. 107). What is more, Di Cesare relates the migrant condition to certain Kafkaesque characters, persecuted by being *perpetually on trial*, and to a theological sensitivity, the migrant being similar to the bearer of original sin, that is the identity/territorial uprooting: 'The migrant also has to face the demand: why are you here? This question summarises an incessant and reiterated process. [...] [A]n original sin that the migrant will never stop having to answer for. The guilt will dog her forever. [...] Whoever emigrates remains on trial for her whole life' (p. 108).

Of particular historical-political relevance is, from this point of view, Di Cesare's critical reading of Michael Walzer, which seems to assign some political responsibilities to the communitarian thought of the American philosopher. Since the publication of *Spheres of Justice* (1983), communitarianism has provided a model for other political doctrines that, directly or indirectly, advocate 'sovereigntist perspectives' (p. 40). More precisely, Di Cesare uses 'sovereignty', a term particularly popular within Italian far-right factions; for she describes sovereignty as an identity politics centred on the three guiding axes of 'self-determination', 'the integrity of an identity' and 'the ownership of territory' (p. 46), matched by performative processes of biopolitical devices now part of the European democratic lexicon, such as 'adaptation', 'insertion' and 'assimilation' (p. 114).

In considering communitarianism as part of the history of the theory of sovereignty, Di Cesare attributes to communitarianism the affirmation of an identity within borders, theorising only a *political vacuum* (always keen to contribute to the formation of states of exception) beyond them. The construction of an identity fortress assumes, in Walzer's more liberal thought, the image of the political community as a *club* and of refugees as candidates who apply for membership (p. 42). Not only does such a logic not take into account the existential condition of the migrant, willing to die amidst the storms of the Mediterranean, but it also fails to recognise the mass production, in the economic-political order of globalisation, of a multitude of the desperate, the precarious, and refugees, defined by Arendt in 'We refugees' (1943) as 'the scum of the Earth'.

Communitarianism has a decisive role in Di Cesare's critical insight. Nevertheless, in relation to migratory phenomena, political and philosophical perspectives of a liberal and cosmopolitan character also share the exercise of state sovereignty (p. 46). Sovereigntist political decisions on others' lives are presuppositions common to 'liberal nationalist' (p. 47) thinkers such as David

Miller and Christopher H. Wellman, and liberal cosmopolitans such as Joseph Carens alike (p. 57).

Di Cesare uses Miller's *Strangers in Our Midst* (2016) — which emphasises a divisive identitarian rhetoric already in its title — to criticise the political concept of 'self-determination'. The legitimacy of the self-determination argument depends on 'rhetorical acrobatics' from a philosophical point of view — 'a tautological shift, in which the response appears as a repetition of the premises' (p. 47) — which hides an authentically political affirmation of power in an 'Us', a pronoun which places the grammar of the possessive and the ontology of autochthony on the same level. Not only are the state and its role never problematised by Miller, but he conceives a fundamental principle of contemporary governmentality through the construction and the conservation of national identity's *sufficient cohesion:* 'The more cohesive the self is, the better it is able to self-determine' (p. 47).

Di Cesare reads Wellman's philosophy of migration, in addition, as a development of the Walzerian communitarian proposal revisited by a 'pathetic liberalism' and based on a specious 'fiction of self-determination' (p. 50). From this point of view, Wellman puts on the same plane of reasoning a woman's *freedom to reject* a marriage proposal and religious freedom of faith, to bolster the argument for popular sovereignty's legitimacy in banishing migrants. Di Cesare sees in Wellman's association between resident citizens and club members the reduction of the complex and tragic conditions of contemporary migrants to a 'ridiculous analogy' (p. 49).

Di Cesare devotes more time to Joseph Carens' *open border* proposal and a 'liberal cosmopolitan' approach (p. 61). In Carens' perspective, citizenship rights can be seen as class privileges in Western societies (p. 58); nevertheless, Carens 'depoliticises' his analysis of migratory phenomena using a theory of a universal *right of migration*. Carens, in addition, considers as valid a provisional suspension of the right of migration in emergencies involving unstable political and economic situations, at the discretion of the state. This kind of sovereign power — which, in Schmittian terms, is principally the power to declare a *state of exception* — is substantially incompatible with an anarchist model of the philosophy of migration, such as the one advocated by Di Cesare. Communitarianism, Liberalism, and Cosmopolitanism all presuppose a *decision on identity*, dividing human beings into two factions on two sides of a divide and founding a political ontology of autochthony.

Furthermore, Di Cesare discusses different historical ways of looking at the right of citizenship in the sections of her work devoted to Athens (pp. 140–47), Rome (pp. 147–53) and Jerusalem (pp. 153–63), tripartite in increasing order, from the territorial conceptualisation to one open to hybrid forms of citizenship. In the Jewish idea of *'ger'*, which Di Cesare uses as a prototype for the *resident foreigner*, the philosopher proposes a form of acknowledgement of those living in a foreign land. The resident foreigner appears as an ethical figure for Di Cesare, related at once to the perception of *exile* in the mystical and nomadic tradition of Judaism as

well as to *ecstatic living* in Martin Heidegger's sense, which establishes the foreigner, and not the native, as a human model of the terrestrial inhabitant (pp. 215–16).

Di Cesare's argument is also inspired by Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Lévinas and, more generally, the French phenomenological interpretation of Heidegger's thought. From Derrida's philosophy it inherits the notion that hospitality is *an absolute law* of human ethics, an idea which in Derrida's work forms part of an attempt to detach *'xénia'* from an exclusively legal paradigm (p. 190). The French philosopher confers a messianic value upon the encounter with the Other, although the Other can be anybody, and such an ethical predisposition is better defined as *messianic without messianism* (p. 188). The link between ethics and hospitality is vehemently reiterated by Lévinas, who distinguishes an 'ethics of hospitality' from 'ethics *as* hospitality'. From Lévinas, Di Cesare draws a critical vision of the philosophical-political idea of *sovereign subjectivity* which is at the basis of Western cultures and which the French philosopher historically links to the advent of Auschwitz (p. 188). If the 'grammar of possessives' permeates not only our common language, but also our visual perception, the idea of a sovereign subjectivity connects the Western ethical paradigm with something broader and deeper, hidden in history, culture, and even in philosophy. The political ontology of sovereignty and autochthony admits the possibility of a collective subject only through the government of others' lives; at the same time, an idea of subjectivity limited to identity involves being successful in the domination of the Self as the Other. The state presupposes a governmentality which extends itself to migrants and the stateless, creating borders and exceeding them at the same time, whereas the Self must transform the inner Other into an identity, presuming a psychological *immunologics*.

3. The passenger paradox

If one of *Resident Foreigners'* most precious facets consists in the attempt to fuse together two different and heterogeneous philosophical filters — in this case, political ontology and phenomenology — none of them is analysed and considered expressly in a methodological light; the two could appear, moreover, in mutual contrast in some loci. So as to consider this aspect critically, we shall refer to a particular example.

Di Cesare does not passively address the phenomenological tradition, she rather articulates, in one of the most experimental sections of her work, *The power of place* (pp. 205–208), a thought experiment that reflects on the encounter with the Other in an everyday setting: a railway carriage. The actions and reactions of passengers, who must share the spatiality and maintain the regularities of their habits as passengers, serve Di Cesare to show how a philosophy of migration can develop through a phenomenological investigation of the way in which different bodies share a common space. The principles of immunopolitics do not develop

only on a vertical plane, such as that of sovereignty: they act in a micro-political and psycho-social context, and the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion inside a train carriage can testify to the horizontal plane of immunopolitics, an 'immunising good sense' (p. 205).

In Di Cesare's example, the compartment of a carriage has six seats, initially occupied by only two passengers. The two arrange their objects in the empty seats and seize the compartment space, positioning themselves more freely; but the arrival of two new passengers jeopardises the achieved serenity, creating a temporal border between those who arrived first and those who arrived later, a 'Them' versus an 'Us' analogous to a micro-community that must immunise itself from the Other. The four passengers' moods change once more with the arrival of two other passengers who fill the compartment and force each to the limits of their *own* space: 'The situation changes instantly. Those who had previously been outsiders now, in turn, feel themselves to be co-proprietors of the compartment together with the two passengers who had been on the train from the start. Though they have nothing much in common, they tacitly constitute a clan of the autochthonous determined to defend the privileges they have acquired' (p. 206).

Following this event, Di Cesare proposes an interpretation of the apparent removal of the nomadic condition of each passenger — as a passing figure — while considering the feeling of appropriation that arises simply by occupying a place with one's body. This leads us to the *passenger paradox:* 'The paradox reaches its pinnacle when one considers that the passenger is the negation of sedentary. Yet those who enter the compartment not only overlook the precarity of territory that has been conquered but rapidly forget that they were themselves unfamiliar to the others, as they proudly and arrogantly present themselves as autochthonous' (p. 207). The Italian philosopher affirms that the phenomenological analysis of appropriation and estrangement stemming from the sharing of a space between bodies is a precondition for a future 'ethics of space' (p. 207).

The first criticism of the same example is related to its brilliant efficacy and clarity: the dynamics of inclusion/exclusion, far from community- or state-centred political models, can be traced back to invisible 'micro-territories', which could be dismantled through a phenomenological exercise. How could a new ethics of space emerge from these complex, and yet instituted, cognitive schemes, freeing human life from every form of appropriation? Sight, more specifically, is not analysed through the lens of the social construction of perception, in Di Cesare's terms. The passenger paradox, particularly in its phenomenological aspect, can introduce the philosophy of migration into a major order of critical issues: appropriation and alienation, identification and estrangement, and other conceptual dyads of a similar character, can be applied to a political phenomenology of human intersubjectivity, which surpass the current historical and cultural context and, even more, the political ontology which sustains the state's role in Western societies. Di Cesare, from this point of view, seems inadvertently to open the door to a major problem: the mere co-presence of two different bodies in the same space can engender a

political relationship, which could also assume the form of an including/excluding dispositive, acting and reacting autonomously simply to the Other's *presence* (rather than to a specific form of its subjectivity).

Di Cesare, in response, singles out the idea of 'return' as crucial for a new ethics of migrations. Against the dyad constructed by a sedentary and rooted way of life and an absolute errancy, which is more a figure of the 'extraneousness' of a globalisation process driven by capitalism, the 'return', in Di Cesare's term, is a *form of living* in time and space with ethical contents. Returning *somewhere* does not mean that we have a fixed origin, a localisable destination at which to end our journey: the need for a return exposes a sense of loss and does not erase the experience of a journey which has modified the traveller, deconstructing the meaning of 'from' and 'towards'. The resident-foreigner, consequently, has to return *nowhere:* the arrival is not refused — it is an existential necessity, as it is for the contemporary migrants approaching the Mediterranean coasts of European countries: *no one is autochthonous, but everyone needs to return somewhere, someday.*

The concept of return, strongly charged with references to ethics, philosophy and even history in the Jewish tradition, seems to get the final answer supplied by the book back on the rails of political ontology. How, if not paradoxically, could returning testify to the leaving behind of metaphysical issues, such as the origin and foundation of human existence? Furthermore, could a modality of reasoning which intertwines theology and ethics give practicable solutions to the problem of future political reforms and social experiments that work against identity politics, when the same identitarian tendency of contemporaneity is largely driven by religious confessions? In Di Cesare's ontological-political proposal, a *dissolving origin* can be, at most, encountered, but the origin itself is not denied insofar as it involves the false consciousness of a false problem to its core.

An aspect which could supplement Di Cesare's Philosophy of Migration concerns a rigorous reflection on the analytical method which it employs — which should be undertaken carefully every time a new theory is proposed. The phenomenological technique, recalled in the passenger paradox, seems to generate some friction with the approach of political ontology right up to the end of the book: the appearance of a spontaneous dynamics of inclusion/exclusion is, in some respects, disconnected from Di Cesare's ethical proposals due to its immanent and sensory nature. A different result could be given, nevertheless, using phenomenology and political ontology not merely side by side, but conferring upon the former a *deconstructing* and *destitutive* power with respect to the latter.

The absence of a methodological programme for the philosophy of migration project, one that is able to show us how it might function beyond any determinate ethical or political position, will lead us towards two other unresolved moments within *Resident Foreigners*, which implicate the whole 'immunological' conceptual apparatus of *Italian Thought:* the need to exploit the full potential of

biopolitics, directing biopolitical categories in the direction of 'micro-' and 'meso-' spatial areas on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the missing development of an anti-identitarian *affirmative* proposal — through which we could distinguish between a 'constituent alienation' and alienation as such, between 'self-estrangement' as a practice and a passive estrangement, and so on.

4. Conclusion. From *immunopolitics* to *xenopolitics*

Racism will occupy a prominent place among the phenomena of the philosophy of migration, a new discipline emerging in our day that cannot ignore the violence against migrants. Therefore, to make sense of racism with a philosophical analysis could mean to employ a social and political phenomenology of racism, capable of guiding the theory of identity politics through more 'planes' and to expand the totality of its facets.

Following the reflection of Di Cesare even racism might become an ontological-political category, branching off as a fundamental process of Western sovereignty both subjectively and collectively. In this sense, the future philosophy of migration would be responsible for its difficult deconstruction, not only in the field of national sovereignty but also in micro-political and psycho-social perspectives which seem to function autonomously (micro-aggressions, schools and families with their specific features, criminal contexts and so on).

Even if a political theory of migration aims to be associated with an ontological-political perspective, a more radical and methodical approach could discuss the constitutive correspondence between 'state' and 'racism'. How racism, after Foucault's reflection on the same topic, could be explored and analysed as a phenomenon deeply intertwined with the dispositives of individualisation and social subjectivation that belong to nation-states? What could be said of living human singularities *without* the state?

Besides, the Other (ξένος in ancient Greek) — which is not the same as 'barbarian' and can be related to its opposite, ἰδιώτης, *idiot*, derived from ἴδιος, being purely its own, identical) — is at risk of being reduced to spatial categories (root, nation, migration, exile, return, and so on). The migrant, as we have seen whilst commenting on *Resident Foreigners*, is the Other, but from a perspective in which the duality 'within the border'/'beyond the border' plays a pivotal role, making the aforementioned inclusive/exclusive *dispositif* comprehensible only within a phenomenology/ethics/ontology of private and public space.

The Other and the idiot/identical are protagonists with different nuances in Helen Hester's *Xenofeminism*, which underlines the necessity of also working at the same time with micro-political or meso-political dimensions, in order not to overlook the plurality of different levels of discrimination — the sexual and the racial become more closely allied in a broader meaning given to '*xeno*-phobia'.

The 'control of borders' cannot be restricted to national frontiers: a fundamental reference for *Xenofeminism* results, in this direction, in Paul B.

Preciado's conceptualisation of *'gatekeeping'*, a reasoning which involves at the same time an expansion of the biopolitical lexicon and the analysis of identity politics from a pharmacological and physical perspective. In addition, it seems clear already in Di Cesare's passenger paradox how a micro-sociological and auto-ethnographical scientific literature cannot be ignored when it comes to explaining processes and practices which work on a horizontal and immanent plane.

Beside the dual polarity of roles (resident/foreigner) that represents the drama of Western identity, we do not find in *Resident Foreigners* examples of an *affirmative politics of otherness* which moves beyond the resident and the migrant. In addition, more questions arise if we consider politics, at least since the Modern Age, in relation to the conceptualisation of *'affirmation'* — an issue at the centre of Rosi Braidotti's feminist and posthuman thought, for example. How could *the Other* be acknowledged not only in the foreigners' presence and arrival, but also beginning with an affirmative and horizontal politics of otherness?

As an ontological-political concept, the 'return' has been used by Di Cesare in one of her most widely discussed works, *Israele. Terra, ritorno, anarchia* (2014), which considers a philosophy of Zionism — Italian readers remember the fierce polemic between Di Cesare and another philosopher of the Heideggerian tradition, Gianni Vattimo, on the same topic. Di Cesare's thought could help us to rethink a philosophical anarchism, but her proposal is not radically atheistic and without any instituted political models in sight — models which do not seem to embody a deconstruction of the state apparatus. Furthermore, even the more proactive among *Resident Foreigners'* paragraphs are not related to any concrete anti-identitarian and experimental practices of contemporary societies.

In this context, Hester, Preciado and Braidotti help with a specific problem: how to conceptualise *xénos* in an intersectional manner, indeed racial and sexual, but also with the theoretical aim of radically deconstructing 'subjectivation' in itself as a psycho-social process rather than taking aim at individual historical and political models. The *xenopolitical* proposal — Di Cesare doubts that *xeno-* as a prefix, making use of the same word only in the ancient Greek meaning and without taking into consideration the contemporary paradigm which moves from the same term — offers, in addition, the idea of a *constituent alienation* and distinguishes between 'self-estrangement' as a practice, with strong political and ethical facets, and a passive estrangement caused by identity politics.

The ancient Greek word ξενιτεία, derived from a substantive form of *xénos*, was used by Christian monks to indicate an ascetic practice consisting in living as strangers in the world: in the contemporary era, what kind of estrangement practices could provide an *ethics of estrangement* to replace identity-based forms of life? Nevertheless, a relevant absence could be traced in the missed connection with *transformative politics* — one of the richest traditions of contemporary philosophy which, maintaining a constant focus on bodies and new categories of biopolitical 'inscription', has been directed, at least during the last twenty years, towards a *Queer Ontology* which leaves the sexual dimension of its initial

assumptions far behind. When the features of the foreigner from another territory are confused with those of the alien emerging from the human, the critique of immunopolitics implies a broader discussion of *xeno*-politics.

The roots of identity politics are deeper than those of community and state, maybe even deeper than the body itself: xenopolitics, from this point of view, resists even being named (the *xénos* cannot be identical to itself or, more precisely, the *xénos is not* the *xénos*). To maintain a non-identical, hybridised and bastardised status means to articulate affirmatively and actively a *xeno-logics* against an immune-logics, making clear the difference – in a philosophy which works, at least with language, in the opposite direction to biopolitical categories – between a different model of subjectivity and a radical practice of de-subjectivation.

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Review Essay. Giorgio Agamben, *Where are we now?* & Other Writings

Where are we now? The Epidemic as Politics. Trans. Valeria Dani

London: Eris Press, 2021

Paperback, 104pp. ISBN: 978-1-912475-35-3[1]

Michael Lewis

Most of the texts composed by Agamben *ex tempore* in response to the epidemic were collected in a book entitled *A che punto siamo? l'epidemia come politica.*[2] This was published in June of 2020, as — in England at any rate — the attempt at a lockdown of a population was finally reaching a point of exhaustion and abandonment. The English translation of the book was published much later, in February 2021, when there seemed to be a much more troubling reluctance, at least on the part of a certain portion of the population, to abandon enforced confinement. At the time of writing (December 2021 and January 2022), this seemingly endless dialectic between enclosure and 'opening up' is continuing even beyond its promised end, after the last day.

Practically speaking, the delay that necessarily affects the transition between languages allowed the English translation to contain four more chapters than the Italian:

State of Emergency and State of Exception
The Face and the Mask
What Is Fear?
On the Time to Come.

All of these were included in the expanded Italian edition that appeared in September 2021[3] with the addition of:

Capitalismo comunista (Communist Capitalism)
Gaia e Ctonia (Gaia and Cthonia)
Filosofia del contatto (Philosophy of Contact)
L'arbitrio e la necessità (Arbitrariness and Necessity)
La guerra e la pace (War and Peace)
La nuda vita e il vaccine (Bare life and the Vaccine)

[1] Later reprinted unchanged by Rowman and Littlefield. Paperback: ISBN: 978-1-5381-5760-2. Many thanks to German Primera for reading the present work in an earlier rendition and for his advice on ways to improve it.

[2] *A che punto siamo? l'epidemia come politica.* Macerata: Quodlibet, 2020.

[3] *A che punto siamo? L'epidemia come politica. Nuova edizione accresciuta.* Macerata: Quodlibet, 2021. An expanded version of the first English translation appeared in October 2021, published once again by Eris.

Cittadini di seconda classe (Second Class Citizens)
Tessera verde (Green Pass)
Uomini e lemmings (Men and Lemmings).[4]

As time passed, Agamben's concerns came to encompass the character of a society that ostracises those who refuse to recognise the messiah that has arisen as the true one, if only because such a promised termination risks acting as something like a retroactive justification for all of the 'measures' that have gone before ('just until the vaccine arrives…'), not to speak of the shattering consequences of instituting such a moralising apartheid.[5]

We shall in the present work also incorporate other texts, by Agamben and by others, as they appear necessary to a proper understanding of the book currently under review.

At the time of their original publication, we followed the release of these texts chronologically — we still are following them, in the mid-winter of 2021–22, almost two years later. Reading them again, particularly Agamben's contributions, this time bound together between the covers of a book, allows us to traverse them at our own pace, and in whatever order seems most reasonable to us: as Hegel put it, once history has reached its end, the epochs are laid out before us simultaneously, not consecutively, and they may then be filtered and rationalised so as to form the moments of a single concept, which thought traverses at an infinite speed, and synthesises, when it thinks. Such is the experience of finding these marvellous, lapidary pieces all together, once again. So profoundly did they colour our way of thinking and speaking that they seem always to have existed, and the relation of influence between their speech and our own (often silent) thought becomes very difficult to determine.

Our experience was most immediately of the English context, and thus we shall expand on Agamben's remarks largely by (implicit) reference to that experience. We shall also position Agamben's thoughts in the context of other philosophers who entered the debate, sometimes much later, and very often in direct or indirect response to Agamben's bold opening. This essay attempts a

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[4] Neither the Italian, in either edition, nor the English includes 'Some Data', 'Phase 2', 'What Colour is the Night?', a number of very short pieces, sometimes comprised of citations or paraphrases of others (from Lichtenberg to César Vallejo) or the more substantial 'When the House is on Fire', which was eventually published in *Quando la casa brucia. Dal dialetto del pensiero.* Macerata: Giometti & Antonello, 2020 (translated by Kevin Attell as *When the House Burns Down: From the Dialect of Thought,* London: Seagull, 2022, forthcoming) and includes other short works less immediately or less obviously related to the virus: these other texts have not, to our knowledge, previously been published online, as were the other texts to which we have referred here, on the website of Agamben's publishers, Quodlibet: https://www.quodlibet.it/una-voce-giorgio-agamben.

[5] His most recent interventions, sometimes in collaboration with Massimo Cacciari on 'vaccination' (for it is not clear that this word is appropriate to this type of therapy — we shall use it for convenience) and its certification, may be found here: https://www.iisf.it/index.php/progetti/diario-della-crisi/date/2021/8.html?catid=35.

robust defence of Agamben's position, whose very earliness has allowed it to become something of an easy target — perhaps more for various types of media and pseudo-philosophers often writing and speaking therein, than for those other philosophers, who nevertheless only rarely fail to take their distance from it, whether respectful or not. In any case, the effect for those who think as he does has been to add to an intolerable physical isolation a still more suffocating intellectual and discursive ostracisation, as if one could be philosophically leprous. But in the end, Agamben remains quite distinctive, and thus worthy of especial attention, given how few professional philosophers, even those versed in biopolitics, have truly opposed what it is that Agamben tirelessly denounces.[6]

In fact, Agamben's writings represent the most penetrating and unwavering intervention, a pure origin renounced and forgotten in what ensued. It is time to revisit this origin as we approach — almost incredibly — the third year of the most extraordinary legal prohibitions of human community (along with movement, thought, speech…) and now with the most disturbing conditions set for re-entering that community, a set of conditions that is being allowed to become limitless: one must effectively be certified as 'healthy' (a malleable term if ever there was one), and is turned back at the border of this community if whoever has the power to set these conditions adjudges that one's papers are not in order — as if, to use Roberto Esposito's terms, community and immunity should absolutely coincide.

Another reason for incorporating some of the many other texts that were written by others besides Agamben, apart from their inherent interest — even if only as symptoms of a failure that seems endemic to an abjectly cowardly and insular academia, unable to see forms of life, requirements, and sufferings other than its own, and which, as a joyful 'normality' was returning to places of public gathering in the later Summer of 2021, seemed intent on prolonging the state in which it found itself surprisingly at home — is to allow us to delineate the borders of the concept that Agamben presents us with, in a more nuanced way. These texts will let us consider other possible moments of the concept of the epidemic that might have formed part of Agamben's own, and which often stake out its boundaries in such a way as to set it in starker relief.

Inventing an Epidemic

Agamben's text opens by speaking of 'the invention of an epidemic'.[7]

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[6] Those figures may be found in the references below, and if we have no space for them all here, they shall be included in a forthcoming book version of the present text. The short intervals that separate the publications, often condensed into the space of a few months, together with their unusual form, has necessitated the somewhat regrettably non-standard form of citation that we have allowed ourselves here.

[7] *Where are we now?* 11ff. Of the term itself, Agamben says this: '"Invention" in the political sphere should not be understood in a purely subjective sense. Historians know that there are, so to speak *objective* conspiracies that seem to function as such without being directed by an identifiable subject. As Foucault showed before me, governments that deploy the security paradigm do not necessarily produce the state of exception, but they exploit and direct it once it

Nothing should be less controversial than a statement such as this.

The question of what becomes visible and what remains in shadow is that of the transcendental conditions for the formation of entities, in which post-Kantian philosophy has instructed us for centuries. Analytic philosophers may be forgiven in that respect for having said so pitifully little in criticism of the gesture of 'invention'.

We can speak here of the manufacturing not just of consent, but of a consensus or dogma, with regard to the interpretation of both the disease itself and the response that was supposedly demanded by it. This invention has proved so successful that to many it has come to seem as if there simply was no alternative to the hitherto unheard of enclosure of populations, the 'non-pharmaceutical intervention', which was at first rendered acceptable only by the promise of a pharmaceutical invention that would arrive at some indefinite point in the future. The incarceration of the healthy, at the level of entire national populations, along with the closing of national borders, was presented as necessary on the supposition – based on a set of eminently contestable and contested predictions[8] – that the more usual manner of treating diseases might not be possible in this case (isolating one's self, visiting a doctor if one cannot spontaneously improve, and if directed by them, in the worst cases, a spell in hospital). 'Lockdowns' were, in the end, on the very most charitable interpretation, a remedy for a health service that lacked capacity. That an entire population could undergo such hardship for such a reason still fails to astonish us as much as it should. The reasons for that failure shall be a concern of ours in what follows.

So exceptional were the measures, it took no small effort to convince the majority (if indeed they are convinced) that the disease itself was equally unprecedented. The consensus surrounding event and response was formed by means of an extraordinary deployment of the media by the government, including an astonishingly infantilising and violent campaign of advertisement instituted directly by the government.[9] This took place over the course of a very few months at the beginning of 2020. With the passing of time, along with the retention and recurrence of the measures taken, and the need to give some meaning to this mass suffering ('this cannot all have been for nothing'), the consensus has hardened into a dogma, affirming that one and only one conception is plausible. It is this question of a doctrine's exclusive acceptability that any serious philosopher should have begun by interrogating: philosophy's task when faced with dogma is to put it in

occurs' (*Where are we now?* 27). And of the distinction between epidemic and pandemic: 'The epidemic – which always recalls a certain *demos* – is thus inscribed in a pandemic, where the *demos* is no longer a political body but, instead, a biopolitical population' (Agamben, *Where are we now?* 68).

[8] On the 'Imperial model' and its flaws, cf. Toby Green, *The Covid Consensus: The New Politics of Global Inequality* (London: Hurst, 2021), 55ff.

[9] The connection between government and media is addressed by the present author's other essay from the current volume, on Esposito and Agamben, with particular reference to the latter's *Kingdom and the Glory.*

question, with either scepticism or the more Kantian form of critique. This would involve seeking the very conditions for the possibility of the formation of such a dogma, and thus initiating a critique that, under the influence of scepticism, confines the claims to certain knowledge within bounds, restraining Reason from assertions that it is not justified in making. If we allow the notion of an 'epidemic' to include both the supposed cause and the response postulated as necessary, then we can say that philosophy must, if it is to remain true to its own (post-Kantian) nature, ask after the processes and motivations that went into the 'invention of an epidemic'. How did it come about that to speak of any other response to a disease has become logically and morally unacceptable? In rather trivial terms – for we are speaking about an a priori exclusion from *logos* and *epistēmē,* and little could be more serious – 'censorship', and kindred forms of negation ('blocking', 'no-platforming'...), that we shall be speaking of indirectly and to which we shall return explicitly in conclusion.

Each of the dogmas we are faced with on the two sides of the epidemic involves positing a differentiated multiplicity as if it were an undifferentiated unity. The first dogma affirms that the dissemination and peril of the virus are 'total' and this is expressed – either denoted or connoted – by means of the very word 'pandemic'. This term encompasses the 'all' (πᾶν) and at least subliminally conveys the message that disease is everywhere and poses a threat to everyone equally. Every aspect of the way in which the affair was presented by government and media affirmed as much, at least once the need to justify harsh measures had come to urge itself upon those in power, from the initial messages which intoned sententiously that 'anyone can die of it', right up to a later phase in which even those who did not have it, and were unlikely to suffer even mildly if they did, were instructed to act as if they had it. What mattered was not actuality, but potential: a potential we did not even know that we had. As Byung-Chul Han puts it, we have all been potential terrorists for several decades now, but at least in that respect we know whether or not that is what we are; in the present case we are told that the right thing to do is not simply to suspect everyone else of being a potential bearer of disease, but to suspect even ourselves.[10]

[10] 'At airports everyone is treated like a potential terrorist. [...] The virus is a terror in the air. Everyone is suspected of being a potential carrier of the virus, and this leads to a quarantine society, which, in turn, will lead to a biopolitical surveillance regime' (Byung-Chul Han *The Palliative Society: Pain Today.* Trans. D. Steuer (Cambridge: Polity, 2021), 18). The hysterical obsession with 'testing', so that one's true – and otherwise concealed – identity (as infectious) might be revealed, is therefore akin to the x-rays and other intrusions that one undergoes here: but in this case, the security procedure is ever so slightly distinct from a passport check. This gap is steadily being closed, as the question of one's identity, of what one really is, gets collapsed together with one's 'health status'. This has become ever more clear as the question of certification (which integrates one's potential infectiousness with a proof of identity already rife with biometric data) has come more and more to occupy the forefront of governmental attention – almost as if this were the ultimate goal from the very beginning, or close to it.

The second dogma affirms the same with respect to the predominant response to the virus: the police strategy of 'lockdown'[11] — legal confinement, isolation, and separation, the prising apart — by force of law — of the social bond to the point of severance, compulsory shunning and self-ostracisation. This was presented overwhelmingly, after a certain point, as the only adequate response, and as applying everywhere, to everyone, at all times.

Philosophy is once again and always obliged to ask: how did such a state of affairs become possible? The very first questions that philosophy asks of any phenomenon fall under two headings: the 'that' (in Latin, *quod*) and the 'what' *(quid):* does it exist, and if so, what is its nature? Existence and essence. This makes it all the more surprising that most philosophers still appear to speak without blinking of a 'pandemic', or in an even tone of 'lockdowns', as if these were unquestionable facts, mere givens, rightly enjoined and these injunctions simply to be obeyed, by the virtuous majority (if there is one), to be doubted only by the illogical and the immoral, in a deranged howling that emanates from the margins of respectable discourse, and that should righteously be confined there.

Principles and Pragmatism

If we allow that there is at least a question as to how one might respond to such an event as a virus, then there is at least one fundamental decision that must be brought

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At the heart of everything that is taking place here — and Han is acutely attuned to this, as well — is a destruction of any question of trust, belief, or faith, in the name of an absolutely certain and all-pervasive Knowledge. Once again, no philosopher after Kant should have remained impervious to this distinction and its fate.

[11] The official jargon makes no secret of the fact that this is a police response: 'lockdown', a term blessedly unfamiliar to English audiences before March 2020, comes to us on loan from the lexicon of American law enforcement. To underline this point, Donatella Di Cesare speaks of 'house arrests' (*arresti domiciliari*) (Di Cesare, *Immunodemocracy: Capitalist Asphyxia*. Trans. D. Broder (Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2021), 84, cf. 89 & 90). Lambros Fatsis and Melayna Lamb devote a brave book — with an apposite title — to a critique of the very notion of 'a law enforcement response which *treated the public as the virus*' (*Policing the Pandemic,* 1).

As Agamben has it, health moves very suddenly from being a right to being an obligation — thus begins the new reign of 'biosecurity', the criminalisation of failing health: either its failure or the failure to protect it — or even, still more absurdly, the failure to protect those 'services' which protect it (*Where are we now?* 56). Even the *potential* for unhealthiness is enough to warrant legally mandated confinement or curfew. And it is true that such an infringement, such a legalisation would likely have difficulty in ensuring its observance without the deployment of force. We are now compelled by police and in some countries by the army not to get ill, for our (moral) duty is to protect the very services that were instituted to protect us in moments of illness.

One witnesses a similar logic — at least at the level of advertising — with respect to the other 'emergency services': in England, at least, one is often confronted with posters proclaiming, apparently in all seriousness, 'You wouldn't call the fire brigade to put out a candle'.

(The troubling confusion of legality and morality — often touched upon at the earliest stages of a philosophical education in the form of an elementary fallacy — that has blighted social and political life for the last few years, demands a serious treatment that we cannot properly attempt here.)

to the fore in the very first instance: the question of the absoluteness of principles and values.

It would be perfectly possible — and often, but not always, Agamben may be read as adopting this stance — to affirm the absoluteness of the 'human rights' (if that expression were in any way adequate here) that are violated by these non-pharmaceutical measures quite irrespective of the seriousness of the disease.

The other position is one which ameliorates this absoluteness by adopting a pragmatism that relativises the absoluteness of any principle whatsoever. This manifests itself in the language currently used by politicians and all those in power of 'difficult decisions' (or in the paternal way British politicians, of either sex, have taken to speaking, 'tough' decisions). This effectively means that whatever principles or values one might hold dear are to be rescinded, and those subject to these powers will be made to renege on those principles and to reject those values — by force if need be. (One could imagine a better world in which a decision would be characterised as 'difficult' if it involved *adhering* to one's principles in the face of strong temptations to compromise them.)

If we adopt the former position then the actual 'facts', if such can ever be established and indeed if such there be, regarding the severity of the disease and the character of the virus that causes it are irrelevant; if the latter, we might be forced to accept a certain threshold beyond which such measures might be countenanced. Clearly we have been faced with the latter, almost everywhere, and what caused these malleable principles to bend was in fact merely a prediction, a prognostication of seriousness, later withdrawn, and then an impossibility of proving a counter-factual: what might have happened had 'we' not... But it was enough.

The Nature of a Pandemic

Let us then, for the moment, give the benefit of the doubt to the latter position, and assume that the nature of the disease might be such as to justify the suspension — or even abandonment — of certain legal rights and moral obligations. If this were the case, then it would unquestionably be a matter of commensurability, and thus we would need to say something about the event, and whether the title 'pandemic' was just. To determine whether we have indeed lived through a pandemic, and so to answer the question of the 'that', we would need to say just what a 'pandemic' is, and then to determine whether the distribution of the particular crown-shaped virus first individuated in 2019 (from which two features the disease engendered by it acquired its name) meets that description.

Things are by no means straightforward here: the definition of 'pandemic' has a history, and is thus demonstrably mutable, and for reasons which are not at all confined to the medical.[12] The official definition of a 'pandemic' was changed

[12] For a summary of this history, with particular reference to the defining authority of the World Health Organisation, cf. Green, *The Covid Consensus,* 163–66. As soon as institutions of any kind are involved and acquire such authority, one loses any right simply to assume that what is involved in such definitions is an entirely unimpeachable 'scientific objectivity'.

quite recently for the sake of a virus in its way quite similar to the one that has come to monopolise our attention of late. This alteration allowed a certain body (the World Health Organisation) to authorise itself in pronouncing this particular incidence to be 'pandemic'. In the conventional understanding of the word, a pandemic encompasses all (πᾶν) of the people (δήμος), and as a result the measures taken in the face of it must be equally global and undiscriminating, to be applied pervasively within cultures and across them: total and so utterly intolerant of 'dissent'. Such measures require observance; they must be 'locked' in place, by police and military force if necessary.

David Cayley, a student and expositor of Ivan Illich, has emphasised the efficacy of the very designation 'pandemic'.[13] Given that the effects of this act of naming are precisely what we are attempting to understand, we have followed Agamben himself in frequently replacing the word 'pandemic' with the more cautious 'epidemic' (*epidemia*), thus transporting us in speech and thought to a moment *prior* to this performative gesture and the decisions that led to it.[14]

The very word 'pandemic' was crucial in allowing these measures, which originated in more explicitly totalitarian regimes, to appear acceptable in democratic regimes. As Cayley puts it, 'the declaration by the World Health Organisation that a pandemic was now officially in progress didn't change anyone's health status but it dramatically changed the public atmosphere. It was the signal the media had been waiting for to introduce a regime in which nothing else but the virus could be discussed. [...] If you talk about nothing else, it will soon come to seem as if there is nothing else'.[15] No other diseases, no other causes of death, nor any 'side-effects', physical, psychical, social, economic (in wartime these are spoken of as 'collateral damage') carried any weight, being shunted into invisibility or irrelevance, deferred to the future where they might not be seen to count as 'corona

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[13] David Cayley, 'Questions about the current pandemic from the point of view of Ivan Illich' https://www.quodlibet.it/david-cayley-questions-about-the-current-pandemic-from-the-point, 8th April 2020.

[14] The gesture of renaming an epidemic 'pandemic' also encourages a political transition in the sense of the conception of the human community, which is thereby encouraged to conceive itself as a 'population', subject to a form of thinking that might be named in terms of either 'public health' or, which is the same but broader, 'biopolitics': 'The epidemic — which always recalls a certain *demos* — is thus inscribed in a pandemic, where the *demos* is no longer a political body but, instead, a biopolitical population' (Agamben, *Where are we now?* 68). And indeed the shift to a form of 'population thinking' among the very people targeted by the media and governmental 'messages' involved precisely a shift, effectively from the first person, to the second, to the third, the third which each of us was to become, to consider ourselves as anonymous parts of a larger population, all of the members of which were involved in an obscure game of protecting one another, but never themselves, such that no-one was in the end protecting anyone in particular, but one was simply keeping 'levels' of incidence among this population somehow acceptable, according to shifting criteria. David Cayley was highly attuned to this shift thanks to his studies with Ivan Illich, to which we shall return.

[15] Cayley, 'Questions'. Cf. Bernard-Henri Lévy, *The Virus in the Age of Madness*. Trans. Steven B. Kennedy (New Haven: Yale UP), 79ff.

deaths' were made to. The sensationalistic media adopted with a dubious enthusiasm a wartime mentality in which nothing else mattered apart from winning this 'war' in the name of which everything might be sacrificed, including long held principles and basic human decencies.

The announcement of a 'pandemic' on the part of a body which seemed to be taken as trustworthy, authoritative, and 'objective', was partly responsible for bestowing upon this coronavirus the extraordinarily exclusive visibility that it attained among all of the many and various diseases that were more or less eclipsed by the sheer spectacle of the thing and the fascinated terror that was quite deliberately manufactured in those looking on, forced to look on, with nothing else to look at.[16] It was constituted as *the* pathogen of overriding importance, to the government, the media, and even the health services themselves. To the exclusion of all else.

Did it Exist? Has an Event Taken Place?

Apart from the question of definition, which demonstrates that an event can become something simply by way of a — presumably not disinterested — redefinition, and apart from the question of the decisions taken as to which of many equally serious or trivial diseases are to become visible in such a glaring fashion, the existence of such an event as a 'pandemic' should be uncontroversially questionable. This is not least due to the fact that measures were taken precisely in order to *pre-empt* that event's complete unfurling. This means that no advocate of the efficacy of lockdowns can simply say that the event happened, completely, altogether. Everything that has been done to us was done precisely in order to prevent that. Those gestures would forfeit their justification if the event were said to have happened as it might.

But there are other reasons for questioning the apparent uniqueness of this one event and thus its very eventual character. As has already been indicated, philosophy after Kant has devoted itself in large part to identifying the necessary conditions that must be in place in order for entities to reveal themselves to us in the way that they do. Crucial to the formation of both the pandemic and the police-response was the question of visibility — what comes to the fore and what remains in the background in any particular situation. Why did it happen that every other cause of death, present and past, every other reason to become ill, every other potential social, economic, and political problem, was elided from mediatic presentation for the past two years (save for those lighter moments when restrictions were temporarily suspended and one could finally breathe again; only then was light allowed to be shed upon the sheer extent of the waiting lists, the deficits and losses of social, cultural and economic life)? No-one can, in all good faith, pretend that we were dealing with the most deadly disease in our history, the urgency of 'protection' which it was said to dictate rightfully outweighing all of this

[16] Cf. Laura Dodsworth, *A State of Fear: How the UK Government Weaponised Fear during the Covid-19 Pandemic* (London: Pinter & Martin, 2021), passim.

devastation.[17] At the very least a trip to the poorer parts of the world, not to speak of earlier moments in our own history, would establish that rather vividly.

One of the factors that seems to have been decisive in the ascent of the coronavirus is the status of the particular group that is perceived to be – or is presented as – sick and dying: if millions die each year of mosquito bites in the distant Tropics, of diarrhoea and sepsis, even if this is also announced by WHO, the event goes unnoticed in the West.[18] But if there is a 'concern' that hospitals in the more affluent parts of the world might overflow – forgetting for a second, or for as much as two years, that this occurs every winter and that doctors are compelled by their very vocation to make choices as to who is to be treated and when – it is in part because death would become 'public', exceptionally visible, over *here,* with a tangible presence that is then available for (mostly sensationalistic, even gleeful) amplification by the media. Suddenly this perfectly quotidian affair of the old, sick, fragile, or unlucky passing away in their thousands acquires an unaccustomed phenomenality, easily capable of eclipsing the already obscure and far more numerous deaths and disorders of other kinds taking place elsewhere – not to speak of the thousands of deaths which occur every day, quite unnoticed, under quite normal conditions, in our own territories.

Why should this particular event be deemed a pandemic, and one which warranted absolutely exceptional measures, whilst other events, much more fatal, both concurrent and historic, dealing death slowly or rapidly, are not and do not?[19]

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[17] Although, as Cayley point out in reference to the Canadian prime minister, this was precisely what the rhetoric of politicians unambiguously affirmed (Cayley, 'Questions').

[18] Cf. Matthew Ratcliffe and Ian Kidd on sepsis, 'Welcome to Covidworld' https://thecritic.co.uk/issues/november-2020/welcome-to-covidworld/, November 2020; Alex Broadbent on the other, much more serious diseases plaguing the African continent, 'Lockdown is wrong for Africa' https://mg.co.za/article/2020-04-08-is-lockdown-wrong-for-africa/, 8th April 2020; and, on the African context more generally, Toby Green, *Covid Consensus*, esp. Ch. 3. Cf. Lévy, *Virus in the Age of Madness*, for a more global approach to the same enforced invisibility.

[19] A number of writers have contrasted the response to the coronavirus of 2019, understood as an event, with the (limited) response to climate change, also understood as an event, but one which unfolds at a much slower pace, an event which is presumed to be degrading and, already, albeit in a way that is in larger part storing this up for the future, ending far more lives, both human and non-human (cf. Bruno Latour, 'Is This a Dress Rehearsal?', Critical Inquiry https://critinq.wordpress.com/2020/03/26/is-this-a-dress-rehearsal/, 26th March 2020; Andreas Malm, *Corona, Climate, Chronic Emergency: War Communism in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Verso, 2020), 3 et al., which was written as early as April 2020; Bruno Latour and Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'The Global Reveals the Planetary', in *Critical Zones: The Science and Politics of Landing on Earth,* ed. B. Latour and Peter Weibel (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2020), pp. 24–31; Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'An Era of Pandemics? What is Global and What is Planetary About COVID-19', Critical Inquiry https://critinq.wordpress.com/2020/10/16/an-era-of-pandemics-what-is-global-and-what-is-planetary-about-covid-19/?fbclid=IwAR3rEngBjpm97_pwjSmgf5s_4JRxjrYSQRHtkPQu0JBsuPGMGBatR4o1XSI, October 16th 2020).

This leads us back to the question: did the pandemic take place? It is perhaps beyond doubt — but only so far as any falsifiable scientific statement ever is — that there is such a thing as a virus which received the abbreviated name SARS-COV2 around the winter of 2019–20, even if a virus is a particularly difficult entity to classify and even to isolate; it is neither living nor dead, in some respects a literal 'non-entity'. But did the disease it is said to cause unambiguously come to pass, and in such a manner as to warrant the way in which it was described and the measures taken to remedy it?

The Piety of the Event and 'Philosophical Narcissism'

In questioning the full occurrence of the event, we have had in mind something like the notion which Alain Badiou has made his own. If we consider the epidemic as a potential 'event' in this sense, the question as to whether or not the virus itself amounted to anything could *only* be decided after the fact, and on the basis of the *consequences* of the event: 'Events produce transformations that prior to their taking place were not even possible. In fact, they only begin to be "after" the event has taken place. In short, an event is such because it generates "real" possibility'.[20]

One of the ways in which events prove their eventual character is by refusing to fit into existing conceptual schemes: in this way, in order to be thought, they demand the invention of new concepts and perhaps even a new way of thinking (and in turn a new way of acting). One frequent response on the part of those who advocate harsh restrictions of communal life, in good faith or bad, has been to suggest that any philosopher who asserts that the epidemic can be made intelligible by already established modes of thinking (which by itself may be taken to imply that no exceptional measures are warranted in this particular case) is simply refusing to accept the novelty of the event.[21] In extreme cases, a curious argumentative move is then made against philosophy itself (Agamben's in particular, but often as an

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That said, we should introduce a note of scepticism even here: once measures to combat the current event have been rendered acceptable, and this state of exception normalised so blatantly, one is led to question any event which might elicit a similar set of measures, now that a precedent has been set: climate change seems to be first among these, whether it is serious or not, the one overriding problem facing the world or just one amongst many.

Curiously enough, the incidence of the epidemic has provided the occasion for one of Agamben's own extremely rare excursions into the question of environmental damage ('Gaia and Chthonia', https://www.quodlibet.it/giorgio-agamben-gaia-e-ctonia, December 28th 2020, reprinted in the second Italian edition of *A che punto siamo?*).

[20] Rocco Ronchi, 'The Virtues of the Virus', https://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/on-pandemics-nancy-esposito-nancy/, 14th March 2020.

[21] Daniel J. Smith has urged us, in a cautious and significant piece, not to assert but to countenance the *possibility* that the event is exceptional. 'On the Viral Event' https://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/on-the-viral-event/?fbclid=IwAR08av4U3cjesCLk38RDmAL6Za91F576Dfb2amK541QS_luQLY0ZTAbmpRw, 25th June 2020. This in the course of pursuing those aspects of the affair which Agamben is said to omit; although whether every item on the list he provides can be said to be anything other than a continuation of ongoing events is not altogether clear.

acknowledged representative of philosophy as such) as if philosophy could only be the application of a conceptual scheme already set in stone, rather than the constant and restless refusal to remain content with any one, or — as with Hegel — the spontaneous and presuppositionless generation of new categories followed by the identification of this conceptual structure in the very fabric of the world itself, so far as this is possible.[22]

But here, we risk drawing near to a kind of piety before an event so exorbitant that all rational thought as such blasphemes it. Anything but a kind of blind acceptance of a certain dominant narrative, based on the pronouncements of a certain group of scientists, and a certain set of politicians and their media, should be rejected as dangerous heresy. This piety of the event is perhaps what has allowed the extremely dubious analogy to be drawn between any serious form of critical thinking with regard to the virus and holocaust denial. The notion of denial in this case, as Agamben effectively shows, should be banished from philosophical discourse altogether, along with all of the other abstract negations (in Hegel's sense, absolute annihilation, oppositional exclusion) that have come to characterise contemporary life and academic life in particular, in the form of 'cancellations': a negation that always attempts to exclude the opponent from reason itself on the grounds of a self-authorising assertion to the effect that the other person is negating something in a non-rational way, presumably under the influence of dubious ulterior and perhaps unconscious motives.[23]

What such an argumentative gesture forecloses is the possibility that the event *is* intelligible in terms of Agamben's — or anyone else's — earlier philosophy.

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[22] Alexei Penzin speaks of a 'philosophical narcissism' in this case ('Pandemic Suspension', Radical Philosophy 2.08, Autumn 2020).

Sergio Benvenuto, in an otherwise useful piece that considers the question of comparative statistics, avers that, 'this is not the time for philosophy': '[i]n some cases, spreading terror can be wiser than taking things "philosophically"'. (Benvenuto, 'Welcome to Seclusion', Antinomie https://antinomie.it/index.php/2020/03/05/benvenuto-in-clausura/, 2nd March 2020). He even comes close to identifying the very notion of a philosophy of history with the 'conspiratorial' or 'paranoiac'. As we shall see, Agamben himself also risks proposing such an identification, but in quite another tone and with quite different intentions.

Benvenuto is by no means alone in thinking, albeit without enthusiasm and with serious reservations, that any old thing can be inflicted on populations if it is deemed 'good for them': as an unwitting testimony to the aristocratism that characterises the preponderance of academics in this respect (or at least those possessed of the most strident and amplified voices), cf. Fabienne Peter, 'Can Authoritarianism ever be Justified?' https://www.newstatesman.com/world/asia/2021/08/can-authoritarianism-ever-be-justified, 27th August 2021. Apparently, it can.

[23] Agamben, *Where are we now?* Ch. 16, 'Two Notorious Terms'. Just plausibly, Agamben is writing most immediately in response to Donatella Di Cesare, who, in a brave text that remains close to Agamben's theses, to the point of reading at times like a systematisation of them, but *avant la lettre*, falls to speaking, albeit cautiously, of 'conspiracy theories' (the other of Agamben's 'notorious' or 'infamous' words) and 'denialism' (*negazionismo*) (Di Cesare, *Immunodemocracy,* 65–73).

And this seems to be an equally unphilosophical presupposition, in need of demonstration.

What might allow one to suggest that current events are potentially intelligible in terms of an already extant philosophy? One option would be to demonstrate a discrepancy between the event and the response made to it. Such a gesture need not in fact involve itself in the unprincipled pragmatism alluded to above, but could simply be a matter of demonstrating to those whose flexibility with respect to principle has allowed them to assert the commensurability of the response, that it is in fact disproportionate. This would imply that some other as yet unexplained motivation lies behind the measures taken, and bars at least one of the ways in which the event might be argued to be exceptional.

Agamben has insisted upon the fact that far worse epidemics have occurred in the past – and indeed we know that many more people die for other reasons every day – and no such response has ever been mounted.[24] Thus it is the very disproportion between event and response that must be explained: such a disproportion is completely elided if one simply assesses whether or not an event has taken place – and asks what its nature is – on the *basis* of the responses given, since this presupposes that there must by definition be a commensurability between the two. This is indeed what has happened, and in fact the event itself came to be continually redescribed precisely in order to justify the continuation of the particular response that had been elected, to the point of rescuing it from the sheer absurdity that it became. The magnitude of the event is measured first in terms of deaths, then hospitalisations, then cases, then… in November 2021, in England, a promise of an irreversible turn away from restrictions was broken simply in the name of what had been employed so as to justify the measures of March 2020 in the first place: non-knowledge. One simply didn't know what this new variant was capable of – a variant baptised with the ominous foreign-sounding name, *'omicron',* alarming to those who do not know Greek and remain blissfully unaware of the fact that a much more ominous *'o'* was yet to come. Given this paucity of certainty, it was argued, one should lock people down just to be 'on the safe side'.

The response has been so extreme, and so prolonged, that it cannot but have had retroactive effects on our perception of the magnitude of the event that might have taken place but presumably did not, and this thanks to the extremity of the remedial measures themselves.[25]

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[24] Agamben, *Where are we now?* 18 & 28.

Curiously, Alain Badiou draws the exact opposite conclusion from the 'non-exceptional' character of the virus: complete obedience to measures which are anything but non-exceptional. State power is not in fact even to be criticised for implementing such exceptional measures, for these seem to Badiou quite normal as well: 'the powers that be […] are in fact simply doing what they are compelled to by the nature of the phenomenon' (Badiou, 'On the Epidemic Situation', trans. A. Toscano https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4608-on-the-epidemic-situation, 23rd March 2020); cf. Alain Badiou, *Sur la situation épidémique*. Paris: Gallimard, 2020 (published 27th March 2020).

[25] Cf. Cayley, 'Questions'.

A counter-presentation of a fuller set of data, or of a dissenting interpretation of the hegemonic data, reveals the incommensurability of event and response, and thus opens up the necessity for an explanation of the response that would itself be non-medical. It is to this explanation that Agamben devotes himself, an explanation which, given the unexceptional character of the event, can indeed be 'old', and this would involve the philosopher in no 'narcissism' at all. It might indeed be a sign of courage.[26]

Some Data and 'The Science'

Agamben does indeed have occasional recourse to the 'data'. He insists on the fact that the discrepancy between the unimpressive data regarding the effects of the virus in relation to other diseases and causes of death (not to speak of the dangers of the proffered solutions, pharmaceutical or otherwise), and the political mobilisation that followed is so vast as to warrant serious theoretical investigation.[27] Thus Agamben does indeed incline towards a sceptical gesture, and often on the basis of statistics which were often not at all presented by those in power, or were only obscurely so; figures which dispel the aura of exceptional gravity that has come to surround the event. Such a presentation of data could in any case be justified by their omission from the official narrative and the consequent stifling of debate, along with the all too swift elision of the question of interpretation which the Humanities and Social Sciences at any other time would insist upon in the reception of any scientific 'facts'. This gesture might have led to a rightful shattering of the apparently monolithic notion of 'the Science', which has, at least rhetorically, played such a significant role in the events of the last few years. The near silence of professional philosophers of science, if not epistemologists and scholars of the Human Sciences in general, has been quite damning.

It may be that it is precisely to insist on the concealed disunity of science that Agamben himself has recourse to statistics. Speaking later in the Summer of 2020, of a jurist who pronounces a 'health emergency' with 'no medical authority', he affirms that, 'it is possible to submit many opposing judgements that are certainly more reliable – all the more so since, as he [the unnamed jurist in question] admits, "conflicting voices are coming from the scientific community"'.[28] One of the most disturbing aspects of the last two years, which should have been among the most troubling for the scientists themselves, is the way in which these alternative voices, many of them eminent, from the natural sciences, the medical profession, and the pharmaceutical industry, were not only excluded from serious consideration but deliberately translated for the public imagination so as to assume the distorted form

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[26] Byung-Chul Han is another figure who has refused to bend the trajectory of his thought in the face of the pressures of the moment.

[27] Agamben, 'Alcuni dati' ('Some Data') https://www.quodlibet.it/giorgio-agamben-alcuni-dati?fbclid=IwAR2YHUep7jLiq57DPCc8TWzSv9_Su3RZeVIXwcEUBrBNmFF5jh_O2cOWPxQ, 30th October 2020.

[28] *Where are we now?* 83.

of 'conspiracy theories' or (lunatic) 'fringe' science. To avoid complicity in such obviously vicious things, and to appear to be on the side of the virtuous, most media simply excluded all dissenting voices, save occasionally to make an example of them. As Agamben insists, 'there is no consensus among scientists — even if the media are keeping quiet about this'.[29]

Agamben himself supplements the mediatic silence by providing what he suggests should have been provided all along, and that is the overall 'mortality rate' from the previous 'normal' year (1772 deaths every day in Italy alone[30]) along with the data relating to the effects of the recent coronavirus set alongside those from a previous year for cancer, cardiovascular disease, and respiratory diseases in general: 'The real texture of the epidemic can only be ascertained by comparing, in each instance, the communicated data with statistics (categorised by disease) concerning the annual mortality rate'.[31] Agamben thus makes a point that is simply one of the most basic intellectual 'hygiene' (a metaphor now forever corrupted): figures presented in isolation, often in the form of slogans and images, have more of rhetoric than of truth. The quite blatant instilling of fear that is involved in presenting a daily tally of deaths from a single cause, to which almost every media outlet fell for so long, will stand eternally to their discredit. It seems to have been essential to elide the other data that would have contextualised and thus bestowed a lesser significance upon this number, in order to motivate compliance with the repressive actions imposed on this pretext.

In addition to this essential contextualisation and comparison, one has every right to question the reliability of whatever methods and tests were used to generate the ultimate number of 'cases' (another word misused for reasons that were presumably ideological: being conflated with often *a*symptomatic 'infections'[32]).

But one can prolong the questions regarding these deaths still further: do sciences of mortality and morbidity even speak so bluntly of such a thing as 'a death' equal with respect to all of the others? Do they not take into account the number

[29] *Where are we now?* 45, cf. 10.

[30] *Where are we now?* 43.

[31] *Where are we now?* 44, cf. 47 & 18. Cf. Sergio Benvenuto, 'Welcome to Seclusion'.

[32] Cf. Karina Reiss & Sucharit Bhakdi, *Corona False Alarm? Facts and Figures.* London: Chelsea Green, 2020, 15f. One could multiply almost without limit the statistical concerns here: these 'cases' will include 'false positives' as a result of remnant RNA from earlier encounters with the same and related viruses. And one should not forget the once well-known affair of the certification of deaths — coroners' inquests rarely carried out, co-morbidities dismissed as irrelevant, deaths often simply presumed to be '*of* Covid', particularly if a positive test result has been returned within a certain period of time prior to death, often ignoring the fact that a patient was admitted to hospital with something else, potentially terminal, but, as so many did, this being one of the prime sites of contagion, contracting Covid-19 after admission. Sometimes such presumptions were even rewarded. And once these fearsome figures have been established, they are then presented not just in isolation from every other cause of death, but with little attention paid to longitudinal trends, and innumerable other factors. So many decisions that could have gone otherwise; the fact that they did not in so many cases suggests a motivation beyond the merely 'scientific'.

of years expected to remain for that type of life, the time lost to death's 'prematurity' (if such it was, when viewed across the whole population, for a disease where the average age of death 'from' the virus stands higher than eighty years; and there can be prematurity of death in general only across an entire population viewed as such). Perhaps most importantly, what could justify the complete elision — from a certain point onwards — of differential susceptibilities among the 'demographic', particularly in relation to the age of those who succumb?

But questions were not, it seems, to be asked, for — if one trusts, naively, to the good faith of those instigating these measures and those supporting them — to do so would be to introduce uncertainty and 'hesitation' (a word and a notion which seem to have fallen into disfavour, though it is the very heart of philosophy), to the point of disobedience: which is the very last thing those in power seemed to brook.

All of this ideological exclusion goes to create a vision of an essentially plural science as a monolithic entity capable at all times of generating sure and certain knowledge that is absolutely unequivocal. And thus in its directives, too: one can, therefore, in all good conscience, without hesitation, present one's actions, however violent and harmful, as 'following "The Science"'. Once this vision of 'the Science' is presented by those who authorise themselves to enunciate it, it has a significant effect upon the mediatic presentation of 'scientific consensus', for any of the voiceless alternatives to the hegemonic account are then thrust into invisibility and forced to seek refuge on the fringes of 'respectability', largely on the internet or in smaller online and offline communities, a marginalisation which only renders their appearance still less respectable. This has the advantage of making it easier to dismiss these already strangulated voices as merely crankish, and thereby to bolster the hegemonic position.

This is not to say that science as an *idea* does not pursue a single truth and a unique form, but at least in this case, the idea that there was '*a* Science', even a 'consensus', was manufactured and — it may be presumed — presented to the public for reasons that stand apart from the scientific.

David Cayley, following Ivan Illich, has devoted himself to determining how the natural sciences in particular could have achieved such a hold over our political life. He demonstrates that in order to achieve sovereignty one must first be seen to acquire *unity,* indivisibility, the absence of strife and dissent: 'contemporary society is "stunned by a delusion about science" [Illich]. This delusion takes many forms, but its essence is to construct out of the messy, contingent practices of a myriad of sciences a single golden calf before which all must bow'.[33]

Once it has been endowed with the appearance of unity, science can adopt, or have bestowed upon it by those in power, the role of a sovereign leader. Power can then devolve upon Medicine and the various branches of the natural sciences

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[33] Cayley, 'Questions'; cf. Cayley, 'Pandemic Revelations' https://www.davidcayley.com/blog/category/Pandemic+2?fbclid=IwAR2fID6gWCw4AjCSIl-_QYlfQgtUv04PsmtsAaoFDZvdnhpY9HqFUE1QZT4, 4th December 2020; cf. Green, *Covid Consensus,* 15.

in the form of the capacity to make binding decisions with respect to society and politics. As David Cayley points out, the very act of attributing such authority to 'the Science' — or to science as such — is a *political* decision, even if the decision is one that abdicates power in favour of the scientists: 'Epidemiologists may say frankly, as many have, that, in the present case, there is very little sturdy evidence to go on, but this has not prevented politicians from acting as if they were merely the executive arm of Science. In my opinion, the adoption of a policy of semi-quarantining those who are not sick [...] is a political decision'.[34] One could, in other words, *not* have transferred decision-making powers to the doctors; one might even have listened to those in the humanities, had they spoken above a whisper.[35]

The construction of 'the Science' in the context of recent events reveals at least two moments which may be identified as 'political': first, consider a panel such as the United Kingdom's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE, a non-accidental abbreviation, already implicitly licensing the attribution of power to this 'wise' group). A panel implies a multitude of voices: those in power must decide which views to give prominence to, which to represent and which to act upon — this, as so often in this affair, is a question of what becomes visible and what does not. Even if the decision simply amounts to a choice to abide by the vote of the 'majority', this very choice is itself political, or meta-political in the sense that it involves a decision regarding how politics should be conducted.

Secondly, one can identify an even earlier political decision, and one more likely to recede into a still deeper obscurity as a result of its very priority: decisions had to be made as to the very constitution of the panel itself, thus determining the range of options from which the first decision selects.

In both of these moments, some voices are heard whilst some are denied a hearing; in the first case, they speak and are then silenced, while in the second they are never allowed to speak at all. In either case we witness a decision which is taken and then elided, a decision which casts certain voices to the margins of *logos*. As a

[34] Cayley, 'Questions'. Donatella Di Cesare has devoted an important chapter to the topic of 'Government by Experts: Science and Politics' (Di Cesare, *Immunodemocracy*, 50ff), which is more than can be said for Anglophone philosophers of science, who, at precisely this moment, should have come into their own, but chose something else.

[35] Such a silence is belatedly being broken, and Toby Green is warmly to be praised for his bravery in leading the way with *The Covid Consensus*. A forthcoming volume follows in his footsteps by demonstrating in a number of its ramifications that it is not only the Right who ought to and could have spoken out against these measures: Peter Sutoris, Aleida Mendes Borges, Sinéad Murphy and Yossi Nehushtan (eds.), *Time for Debate: Perspectives from the Humanities and Social Sciences on Lockdowns* (London: Routledge, 2022), in which a much shorter version of the present work will be found. Agamben himself could also be situated in a tradition that might be identified as a certain form of Leftism, marginalised but once again stirring and still more vigorously in light of the failure of all parts of the institutional Left to present any kind of opposition to recent events.

result of the decision to erase multiplicity, the government and media can present a very particular semblance of unity: 'scientific consensus'.

Seeing the Future: Predictions

But what was the foundation of this supposed consensus? It was a prediction. The responses to the virus were justified not on the basis of what was happening, and could barely be justified by what did happen; they were presented as being justified on the basis of what *might* happen. They were grounded not on something actual but on something *possible*, which was laid out in the form of a prediction that was based on a very particular model, which is inherently contestable and was vigorously contested.

The model chosen as the basis for action predicted a future that was supposedly far enough beyond the scope of what could be addressed by conventional means — and indeed beyond pre-existing plans for dealing with pandemics — that it was taken to justify the actions that were to follow. It is one thing to attempt to present a reported state of the actual situation as a pretext for action, but here measures were taken on the basis of a prediction with regard to a future the character of which could never be verified, by definition, unless no action were taken at all or one could isolate an exactly comparable country (for measures were in every case national, or at least state-wide in the case of the United States of America) that could be used as a 'control'.

And yet this ambiguous, forestalled status of the event, far from leading to questions regarding the justice and proportionality of lockdowns, the certainty of their rectitude and inevitability, led, after a moment's uncertainty, to an ever more convinced faith in their efficacy: it seemed to be implicitly believed that in the absence of certain knowledge, what was needed was not a critical appraisal of those predictions which took the place of this knowledge, but a simple and obedient belief in the correctness of one particular predictive model. Despite their very repetition or simple continuation demonstrating these measures to be ineffective in terms of what they were said to achieve, the fact that these measures were taken and the predictions failed to materialise was understood, implicitly or explicitly, as a testimony to the exactness of those predictions and the justness of the actions they urged.

Another thing Kantians and post-Kantians should know by heart: at the limits of reason and knowledge stands faith: predictions came to play the role of prophecy, and scientists that of prophets. With faith come endless commandments to obey, promised ends in the form of messianic moments, and the ostracising or sacrifice of heretics. This, together with the role given to 'the Science' in political decisions, at least in part explains why Agamben speaks of 'Science as religion'.[36]

[36] Agamben speaks of the religions of both science and medicine (*Where are we now?* 45, Ch. 12 passim, inter alia), and even 'health-religion' (ibid., 97), although he does not explicitly compare prediction with prophecy.

The Disunity of Lockdowns: *Gestell*

We have examined the event itself, and the various unities that have been manufactured in order to justify it; we have also shown how philosophy, represented here by Agamben, is obliged to put in question this unity in the name of a disunity or differentiated multiplicity many strands of which must be marginalised in order for the ideological impression of unity to be created. This gesture may be seen all the more vividly in the case not of the disease but of its supposedly unique remedy. Here the impression of unity is all the more significant, indeed it is essential to the very (putative) functioning of the cure: a 'stay at home' order cannot but present itself as total, and yet it can never be so complete; but nevertheless, the *appearance* of totality by itself can have significant effects.

Any serious philosophical response to the mass enclosure of human beings has to begin from the fact that it is *not* what it is presented as being: universal, as if the command to 'stay at home' or – still more offensively, speaking this time in American – 'shelter in place', could possibly be heeded by everyone. A 'lockdown' is possible only if it excludes some, and perhaps more than half the population: most of all, those who maintain 'our' 'essential services' – which is to say, those which allow us merely to survive.[37] This is in large part the working class, to whom the message was never addressed and upon whom the potential for virtue and its all too public performance ('virtue signalling') could never have been bestowed.[38]

The functioning of a single procedure applied in an undifferentiated way everywhere amounts to what Heidegger called a *'Gestell'* – a framework that produces multiple instances of the same (or rather, the identical), from heterogeneous material, each part of which is singular. This 'en-framing' constitutes the *essence* of technology, for Heidegger, a tele-technology without which it seems difficult to imagine the enclosure could even have been envisaged.[39] This global

[37] This transformation of the sense of 'essence' would figure prominently within a more general consideration of the corruption of language that has gone hand in hand with the promotion of repression over the last two years: this other sense of *logos* will remain largely in the background here, as our attention is focused more on the logic of the affair, but it remains a crucial philosophical task for the future.

[38] Slavoj Žižek, in his generally confused contributions, has at least insisted upon this point from very early on (Žižek, *Pan(dem)ic! Covid-19 Shakes the World* (London: Polity, 2020), 26, cf. 122). Working at home was always a middle-class prerogative, if not a luxury devoutly to be wished at any other time by those lucky enough to have gardens and space and quiet, and this allowed a group whose voice was already heard more readily than others to embrace the transvaluation of values that occurred in almost every aspect of our relations to our fellow man in a way that the working class could not. Middle class radicals and Marxists showed themselves particularly insensitive to the exclusion of the working class, in their fanatical commitment to lockdowns, of which the *Guardian* newspaper now stands as a perversely proud monument.

[39] 'Digital devices have for quite some time accustomed us to distant, virtual relations. The epidemic and technology are here inseparably intertwined' (Agamben, *Where are we now?* 62, translation slightly modified). On the role of technology in lockdowns from a slightly different, Heideggerian perspective, cf. Mark Sinclair, 'How the Rise of Digital Technology Facilitated Lockdown', The Critic https://thecritic.co.uk/how-the-rise-of-digital-technology-facilitated-

framework, something which does indeed lock down human beings and cultures in spite of their differences and their uniqueness, has introduced desperately deleterious — and differential — effects, even on the very physical health that it was supposed to be protecting, but these have been, like so much else, thrust into invisibility, or to the relative visibility of a margin where they may exist as useful objects of ridicule and contempt, or as markers of the nobility of the sacrifice (the 'difficult decision') made in the name of something higher ('life', always and in every case to be 'saved'), thus shoring up the hegemony of the dominant narrative.[40]

The essence of a lockdown is that of something which *cannot* be total: it destroys itself if it is, for the confinement of the working class would render life impossible to sustain; and yet it is something which must *present* itself as total, for any acknowledgement of an alternative strategy risks undermining its observance by those who can. In this sense we can say that the lockdown did exist, still does exist, and yet never could. It sustains itself by means of its own impossibility.

The Time of Lockdowns

The strange totality of the lockdown also has a temporal aspect. These restrictions could be embarked upon only if an implicit promise was made that they would eventually come to an end. This was the moment at which non-pharmaceutical interventions could give way to the pharmaceutical: the arrival of the Vaccine. And as must happen when such a role is assigned to an advent, the apparent arrival of the Messiah in actuality has introduced problems of its own, since the question must arise as to whether *this* messiah is true or false, effective or not, lasting in its effects or only fleeting, more or less dangerous than the disease it palliates, and for which types of people? But irrespective of its quality and its effects, given the function that it serves in bringing with it the promised end, it is urged — and even forced — upon adult and child, with a tireless coercive aggression, still further inserting wedges between human beings, often dividing the social body in new ways, across new lines, whilst still imagining it can present a united front.[41] The vaccines

lockdown/, 8th January 2021. On the patently non-egalitarian distribution of such technology in any case, cf. Mark Wong, Ch. 11 in *Time for Debate*. It was, yet again, the preserve of the middle classes.

[40] On the impact of the police-response on the 'third world', cf. Green, *The Covid Consensus,* esp. Ch. 3; cf. Alex Broadbent, 'Lockdown is Wrong for Africa'. And in relation to the differential effects of a single action when it comes to sex, race and immigration, cf. Angela Mitropoulos, *Pandemonium: Proliferating Borders of Capital and the Pandemic Swerve* (London: Pluto Press, 2020), Introduction (e-book, n.p), Tina Chanter's forthcoming text on the topic, and that of Lambros Fatsis and Melayna Lamb, *Policing the Pandemic: How Public Health Becomes Public Order* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2022).

[41] Already, in England, not by any means the least liberal country in this respect, one will simply be excluded from various parts of social and cultural life, and at least several types of employment, if one has not accepted it. We have also witnessed the remarkable pronouncement that children were to be vaccinated for the sake of their *mental* health, and earlier on that despite the existence of studies demonstrating the danger of the virus to be so minute that the risk of side-effects in children of this age outweighed the benefits of the vaccine, and despite the

are in this sense by no means a purely medical matter: they embody the price that must be paid if one is to re-enter human community following its closure, along with the concealment of the face and all that entails.[42] Their function is not simply – perhaps not even primarily – to eradicate the disease, but to restore normality, or at least to reiterate the promise of it, or to render that promise more concrete (even as it perhaps infinitely recedes), and so to coax the frightened back into social life and to restore a functioning economy.[43]

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government's own advisory panel recommending against it, vaccinations of the young were urged for 'broader reasons', and most recently, in a patent contradiction, in response to a 'variant' which was deemed newsworthy precisely because it seemed possible that it resisted the effects of the injections administered, a still further and more intensive distribution was promulgated, and a debate as to its potentially compulsory nature effectively initiated, whilst other countries in Europe had already set their sinister example. (At the time of writing (22nd January 2022), in England, almost all measures put in place in a hasty panic in face of this variant at the end of November 2021 have already been rescinded.)

[42] On the deterioration of political life that results from the concealment of the face, cf. Agamben, 'The Face and the Mask', *Where are we now?* 86ff. Much could be said about this gesture, which was the first condition that those in power discovered could be set as the price for a restoration of 'normality'. Then it was the vaccine. And since that has not been enough, a return to masks, and now the potential for an interminable set of further conditions, of which we have no reason to believe that endless 'boosters' will constitute the end.

Once one establishes conditions in the eyes of the law that differentiate between citizens in any way, rendering them unequal in that context, one has a literal apartheid, even if it is not a racial divide (although it has been pointed out that given the extremely high levels of caution displayed by certain historically persecuted racial groups in relation to inoculation, 'vaccine passports' will effectively be that in a still more literal sense). Thus the use of this word in contexts such as this is by no means always metaphorical, and is in no case hyperbolic.

[43] This is the role of certification, which in Italy has assumed the English title, *'green pass'*, assuming the most innocent interpretation of what is taking place (cf. Giorgio Agamben & Massimo Cacciari, 'A proposito del decreto sul *green pass'* (On the Green Pass Decree) https://www.iisf.it/index.php/progetti/diario-della-crisi/massimo-cacciari-giorgio-agamben-a-proposito-del-decreto-sul-green-pass.html?fbclid=IwAR1Xg_2HcbBe8zhjG4GsPUzn7x509r_c3hqqNqc5VwajtF-a1ugaTH8c9D8, 26th July 2021; & Agamben, 'Tessera verde' (Green Pass) https://www.quodlibet.it/giorgio-agamben-tessera-verde?fbclid=IwAR0Aiue5ZXKeT3jEzqp9c0Lrvets2klmmofG-oLZoFhCom5rzTwYbDfImdY, 19th July 2021 et al., included in the expanded version of *A che punto siamo?)*

To go beyond the most innocent interpretation, certification has been taken simply as a way in to the gathering of information that begins or develops with certification, while some explanations for the bewildering vigour that has characterised the promotion of these gene therapies even go so far as to whisper of 'depopulation'. The television series *Utopia,* in the original British version and its remarkably timed American remake, was just one among many cultural products which had capitalised upon this notion, demonstrating it to be very much abroad in the popular imagination. A reconsideration of *V for Vendetta* would also be illuminating at this level.

The Rhetoric of Civil War

Given their contradictory nature, their untested character, and the immense damage they were always certain to cause, how could lockdowns come to be accepted in such an apparently unanimous way? We have no space to deal with all of the strategies employed, through channels so numerous and with a single voice so deafening as to warrant the title 'totalitarian'.[44] But we might profitably investigate a certain pervasive rhetoric that has been used effectively to quell dissent and to ostracise doubters, thus restoring the impression of totality and consensus to the most eminently incomplete and disputable of measures – and that is the language of war. The particular character of this discourse may supply the clue that will lead us to the philosophical heart of Agamben's response to the epidemic itself.

The language of war seems to have proliferated in our culture more generally following the dissipation of the Cold War, which spelled the end of international war and marked the beginning of an era of 'civil wars' or internecine strife. In light of this, it became more natural for the language of war to be generalised and turned on the unity of the social body, so as to instigate a battle designed to exclude certain parts of it as (internal) 'enemies'. We can now wage war on crime, on drugs, on terror, on certain social attitudes, certain uses of language, and finally on the virus[45] – and by extension on those who appear to 'us' as its advocates, who would let it roam free rather than keeping it locked up and controlled, along with its potential bearers (and in play, ultimately, is indeed the brutish opposition between total control and total absence of control, as if things could ever be that simple when it came to immunity, let alone anything else). Thus the body politic is purified of immanent disorder.[46]

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[44] Cf. Dodsworth, *A State of Fear*, 94 et al. Agamben has been accused of exaggerating the connection between the now proven manufacturing of fear and true 'totalitarianism' (cf. Roberto Esposito, 'Cured to the Bitter End', Antinomie https://antinomie.it/index.php/2020/02/28/curati-a-oltranza/, trans. anon. at https://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/on-pandemics-nancy-esposito-nancy/, 28th February 2020), but this book, for all its journalistic limits, demonstrates that those charged by the British government with 'behavioural control' found themselves compelled to employ a similar vocabulary (cf. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/05/14/scientists-admit-totalitarian-use-fear-control-behaviour-covid/, 14th May 2021).

For an explanation of how lockdowns might have come to be accepted in the democratic West, cf. Carlo Caduff, 'What Went Wrong: Corona and the World after the Full Stop', Medical Anthropology Quarterly 34:4, pp. 467–87 (composed April 2020) & Byung-Chul Han, *Capitalism and the Death Drive*. Trans. D. Steuer (Cambridge: Polity, 2021), Ch.15.

[45] Along with Agamben (*Where are we now?* 28 et al.), Byung-Chul Han has written on the analogies between the 'war on terror' and the supposed war on the virus (Han, *The Palliative Society: Pain Today*. Trans. D. Steuer (Cambridge: Polity, 2021), 18).

[46] Agamben, following Carl Schmitt up to a certain point, speaks of a convergence of both global and civil war in the form of a 'global civil war': 'An epidemic, as is suggested by its etymological roots in the Greek term *demos* (which designates the people as a political body), is first and foremost a political concept. In Homer, *polemos epidemios* is the civil war. What we see today is that the epidemic is becoming the new terrain of politics, the battleground of a global civil war

As Cayley points out, the rhetoric of war immediately affirms that the situation is one of crisis, and that there are but two sides, friend and enemy, for and against, diametrically opposed, without any 'third' position available, according to an ancient law of logical discourse *(tertium non datur):* 'Wars create social solidarity and discourage dissent — those not showing the flag are apt to be shown the equivalent of the white feather'.[47] This patriotic language stirs and sways us by means of its emotional character, while it 'moralises' the entire situation: to be on the 'other side' is not simply to adopt a position which is false; it is to be guilty of disloyalty and immorality.[48] Even if dissent were grounded in something true, to give voice to it would be wrong.

The Logic of Immunity

A body can be at war with itself, and sometimes — it is said — a certain part of it must be sacrificed in order for that body to survive. This would be to restore the body to full health by 'immunising' it. The efficacy of the language of war together with its pervasive character may be explained by the fact that it reflects something of the tacit logic of lockdowns themselves: they demand for their efficacy a belief in their uniqueness and totality: it is necessary that they be thought to be the only possible response to the event in question, and that their reach, once imposed, be limitless.

Furthermore, the notion of sacrificing a part for a whole that is inherent in the justification for war may be found in the arguments given for lockdowns themselves by their proponents: certain aspects of human life had to be sacrificed if they were ever to be enjoyed again. Crucially, though, even if this promised future was indefinite, the promise had to be at least implicitly made, in order to ensure that the measures would appear temporary, for only on such a condition could they even be broached.[49]

Those capable of working 'from' home seemed able to mistake one sacrifice for the other, covering over the fact that half the population was not so capable.

In any case, the logic of these interventions demands that a certain portion of our humanity should be sacrificed, temporarily or in part, in order that our identity might be protected. This is a logic that Jacques Derrida was among the first to speak of by analogy not with sacrifice but with *immunisation.*[50] If one is fighting

— because a civil war is a war against an internal enemy, one which lives inside of ourselves' (*Where are we now?* 59–60).

[47] Cayley, 'Questions'.

[48] Cayley, 'Questions'.

[49] Toby Green, having shown that the damage to bare life caused by lockdowns outweighs the most extreme predictions of what might have been inflicted by the disease itself, understands this not as the sacrifice of the present to the future, but of the future to the present (Green, *Covid Consensus*, 28, 80).

[50] To spare the reader a long series of references, let us refer here to the present author's 'Of (Auto-) Immune Life: Derrida, Esposito, Agamben' in Darian Meacham (ed.), *Medicine and Society: New Perspectives in Continental Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015).

against an enemy – a disease, for example – by these means, one does not reject it altogether, but rather one introduces within oneself a milder form of that very disease. One does so in order to build up immunity with respect to any more acute version of the same thing, thus to impede its uncontrolled ingress, which in extreme cases would threaten our integrity. Generalising this logic, any notion which attempts radically to exclude its opposite from its own identity, from the very outset, blockading its borders with military force, can only fail to be what it is. An excess of one's self amounts to a loss of self, full self-identity to a falling short.

To render this abstract logic more concrete, we might appeal, as Derrida does, to democracy: democracy can never be *purely* democratic if it is to be democratic. The moments which demonstrate this most clearly are those in which a non-democratic party seems likely to be democratically elected, having promised, if elected, to abolish the democratic process. In order to avert this worse evil, democracies have to be prepared to suspend democracy temporarily in order to save it, and thus they are required by the very nature of democracy itself to act anti-democratically.

Analogously, contemporary advocates of 'non-pharmaceutical interventions' assume that to reduce human life temporarily to a subhuman life of isolation, distance, and facelessness is an acceptable price to pay for the survival *of* that human life. Indeed this is the only way to achieve an immunity that 'we' apparently do not yet possess – and once again, everything hinges on a totalising manner of thinking: there can be absolutely *no* pre-existing immunity of any kind, for anybody – which given the frequency of our exposure, from the youngest age, to other coronaviruses, is at the very least somewhat implausible. But the merest hint of such an immunity was vigorously excluded from the narrative set down by those in power, rendering our only saviours both a supposedly absolute lockdown enduring indefinitely and the unique pharmaceutical saviour awaiting us as its promised end. Thus the message sent was that we simply had to survive (in captivity), in order then – perhaps – later on, finally, to live more fully.[51]

[51] 'Today – waiting for a vaccine, that is, induced immunity – immunisation by distancing is the *only* line of resistance behind which we can, and must, barricade ourselves. At least until the threat subsides' (Roberto Esposito, 'The Twofold Face of Immunity', trans. Arbër Zaimi, Crisis and Critique 7:3 (2020) https://crisiscritique.org/uploads/24-11-2020/roberto-esposito.pdf, 24th November 2020, 77, emphasis added). Esposito pits his own position directly against Agamben in these terms: 'I personally believe that the defence of life is a value superior to any other – if only because it is presupposed by them [these other values]: in order to be free or to communicate with others, one must first be alive' (ibid., 78). This is precisely the position, with bare life standing as a 'presupposition' for all other forms of life, that we are about to challenge. That said, Esposito does nuance his position by way of the suggestion that even what is supposed to be 'bare' life ought to be understood in a way more akin to the understanding of *'Leben'* given by the life-philosophers from at least Wilhelm Dilthey onwards, a life that spontaneously creates meaning and value (cf. Esposito, 'Vitam instituere'. Trans. Emma Catherine Gainsforth. http://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/vitam-instituere/ (undated, c. March 2020) & *Istituzione*. Bologna: Mulino, 2021, English translation as *Institution* forthcoming from Rowman and

But such an immunising, sacrificial procedure is not without its risks, in two directions: either one resists the outside so rigorously that one becomes too much and therefore not sufficiently one's self; or one concedes so much to one's opposite that one ends up becoming that very thing. In both of these ways, the logic of immunity always risks slipping into an excessive version of itself that would amount to *auto*-immunity. In this state, the imbibing of the poison fails to function as it ought, due to excessive incursion or an adverse reaction *to* that ingress on the part of the organism's immune system that then closes it down altogether. Thus the measures taken to protect one's identity end up destroying it: democracy tips over into tyranny; the temporary suspension of human life becomes permanent; the exception becomes the rule, or, as they were so quick to begin saying, we enter into a 'new normal'. For Derrida, it seems, it is a question of 'measure' in another sense, perhaps even of 'judgement' (a faculty we have apparently lost over the last two years, perhaps mistaking one form of 'discrimination' (taste) for another).

Cancelling the Neighbour: Coincidence of Opposites, Community and Immunity

Here we begin to approach one of the great divergences between Agamben and his opponents. An extraordinary range of philosophers have allowed themselves to endorse the police-response to the virus on the presumption that this restriction of human community does not go so far as to become what Derrida identifies as a destruction of identity in the passage into its opposite. Either this state of auto-immunity has *not* been reached and we remain in a temporary phase during which a community of immune individuals can be sustained and is acceptable *as* a temporary measure; or these thinkers seem to go so far as to rule out this auto-immune excess even as a possibility, as if human community can endure as what it is *whatever* gets done to it; finally, they may even risk accepting what the dominant narrative sometimes dares to suggest, that this state is in fact to be infinitely prolonged, and that the entire future of human community must take an immune form: contact replaced by distance, visibility by concealment, protection taken to involve a passing on the other side, love to assume the form of spurning the other: a 'tele-' life.

What must be presupposed by any endorsement of measures as extraordinary as 'social distancing' is that community and immunity, proximity and

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Littlefield, 2022; cf. *Instituting Thought: Three Paradigms of Political Ontology*. Trans. M. W. Epstein. Cambridge: Polity, 2021).

For a representative but philosophically less interesting example of the same kind of critique, cf. Anastasia Berg, 'Giorgio Agamben's Coronavirus Cluelessness', The Chronicle of Higher Education, https://www.chronicle.com/article/giorgio-agambens-coronavirus-cluelessness/?bc_nonce=pb1u7aangzpjor9revr5wp&cid=reg_wall_signup, 23rd March 2020. We shall address these critiques at some length, particularly Esposito's, in the book version of the current text. Some hints as to the direction we might take may be found in the two essays devoted to these thinkers in the present volume.

distance are not *essentially* incompatible.[52] Roberto Esposito speaks here of the

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[52] Jean-Luc Nancy and Slavoj Žižek may both be seen to approve of this 'paradoxical' notion (Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Communovirus', Libération, 24th March 2020. Trans. David Fernbach http://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/communovirus-english-and-french-text/, 22nd April 2020. This becomes Chapter 2 of Nancy, *Un trop humain virus.* Paris: Bayard, 2020; & Žižek, *Pan(dem)ic!* 77).

Catherine Malabou has a more nuanced take on the affair which attempts to take a distance from the collective of those in quarantine as a result of the virus (or rather the command to quarantine one's self even if one has never encountered such a thing) and considers the isolation as bracketing the social in such a way as to allow us all the better to examine it and to open up a relation to those beyond this collective and one's own immediate circle of friends ('To Quarantine from Quarantine: Rousseau, Robinson Crusoe, and "I"', Critical Inquiry, https://critinq.wordpress.com/2020/03/23/to-quarantine-from-quarantine-rousseau-robinson-crusoe-and-i/, 23rd March 2020). (The notion of bracketing in the Husserlian sense has often arisen in philosophical accounts of the transformation of human community over the past two years, and while there is unquestionably some truth in the idea that we have been allowed to re-examine human community as a result of its cessation, this presupposes both the temporary character of this 'suspension' and concedes too much to a universalising way of thinking that we have here set ourselves to resist.)

Oxana Timofeeva has in a number of texts broached the possibility of identifying not with our (healthy, pure, isolated, immunised) human others but with infectious life-forms themselves, both human and non-human, in a solidary mass (Timofeeva, 'Do Not Offend the Flies', trans. Andrej Jovanchevski, Identities https://identitiesjournal.edu.mk/index.php/IJPGC/announcement/view/27?fbclid=IwAR3xYI0G644y_UJWJVxIjmiuWOxFELjcf76GCKGVtEGRDqoKRnQkOtWpbmI, 6th April 2020. First published in Russian on the very same day as Malabou's intervention at https://syg.ma/@oksana-timofieieva/nie-obizhaitie-mukh, 23rd March 2020; 'Georges Bataille: A Pandemic Read' https://tqw.at/the-moment-of-truth-george-bataille-and-the-pandemic-timofeeva/?fbclid=IwAR3mZSLFXrmqdHGjjJginmqAObFvZaP1lH0Oqx1ySlPWHRwxynGMXLMqpHU, 28th April 2020; 'For Sharing the Space' https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/332093/voices-towards-other-institutions-4-oxana-timofeeva/, 24th June 2020; 'From the Quarantine to the General Strike: On Bataille's Political Economy', Stasis 9:1 (2020); 'We Covid Ticks' http://artsoftheworkingclass.org/text/we-covid-ticks?fbclid=IwAR34Pv99e-7idoMNryFPU6HyKZK1PBDBSUNoumSOUNID2-2oMI5SJWDl7zM, 27th January 2021; 'Rathole: Beyond the Rituals of Handwashing', e-flux #119 (June 2021) https://www.e-flux.com/journal/119/400227/rathole-beyond-the-rituals-of-handwashing/).

Byung-Chul Han notes something else that we have allowed ourselves to assume in common with the virus as such: 'The fight for survival must be juxtaposed with an interest in the *good life*. A society that is gripped by the mania for survival is a society of the undead. We are too alive to die, and too dead to live. Our overriding concern with survival we have in common with the virus, this undead being which only proliferates, that is, survives without actually living' (Han, *The Palliative Society: Pain Today*. Trans. D. Steuer. Cambridge: Polity, 2021, 17; cf. *Capitalism and the Death Drive,* Ch. 1: 'Capitalism and the Death Drive', passim; cf. Catherine Malabou, 'Contagion: State of Exception or Erotic Excess? Agamben, Nancy, and Bataille', *Crisis and Critique* 7:3 (2020), 225).

In the all three cases, Timofeeva, Han, and Malabou in her later interventions, a crucial – and insidious – facet of the enforcement of lockdowns is revealed to us: the virus shares many traits with those who have suffered the most in Western countries, if not everywhere – the young,

opposition between *communitas* and *immunitas,* which even he seems to imagine, in this context, to be capable of coinciding without either part losing its identity.[53]

But for Agamben, especially given the regression in the understanding of immunity from the hospitable to the hostile demonstrated by figures like Esposito, this simply cannot happen, and once one immunises one's self against one's neighbour, the other is being treated first and foremost as an (enemy) agent of infection, before they are encountered as a human being.[54] The neighbour as such is abstractly negated: 'Others, whoever they are — even loved ones — must not be approached or touched. Instead, we should establish between them and ourselves a distance […]. Our neighbour has been abolished'.[55] Agamben repeatedly describes the situation as one in which the 'neighbour' — a highly determined figure in his thought — ceases to exist: 'Our neighbour has been cancelled'.[56]

It is crucial to underline the fact that the obligation so to cancel the Other is not ethical but legal, if we are to avoid a confusion that Agamben elsewhere denounces: 'the new element [of the current phase in the history of biopolitics] is that health is becoming a *juridical* obligation'.[57] Like Nancy and Žižek, Agamben also speaks of the situation we are presented with as a 'paradox', but here the word takes on a quite different tone: 'as soon as a threat to health is declared, people unresistingly consent to limitations on their freedom that they would never have

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healthy, and mobile (cf. Sinéad Murphy, 'Stay Safe: The Abuse and Neglect of Care', https://off-guardian.org/2020/07/19/stay-safe-the-abuse-and-neglect-of-care/, 19th July 2020, among many other contributions which have shed a stark light upon the immense harm done to the young in particular, and the state's barbaric indifference to it).

[53] Esposito, 'The Twofold Face of Immunity', 74, cf. 75–76. Both immunity and community are mutually necessary for Esposito, and what we have witnessed in the West in the 20th Century is a tendency towards an imbalance in favour of the immune, leading to what Esposito describes as an 'immunitary *syndrome'*, in which immunity and the protection of the individual (or the imposition of measures in the name of 'security', in response to manufactured threats) take priority. What remains unclear is how in the present situation he can, in some of his earlier interventions, apparently endorse the paradoxical coincidence of community and immunity, even if he insists that this must be temporary, when immunity itself does not undergo the careful rethinking that it does in Esposito's earlier work, which might have allowed this compatibility to be posited. Here the immunity is entirely hostile, and not at all hospitable (cf. Esposito, *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life.* Trans. Z. Hanafi. Cambridge: Polity, 2011 [2002], 16–17, 164ff et al; cf. the present author's other text in the current volume along with the Editorial).

[54] One is indeed *legally* compelled to adopt such an unethical attitude: 'the recent orders […] transform, in effect, every individual into a potential plague-spreader' (*Where are we now?* 15); Agamben urges us to 'remember[…] that our neighbour is not just an anointer and a possible agent of contagion, but first of all our fellow to whom we owe our love and support' (ibid., 20).

[55] *Where are we now?* 15–16.

[56] *Where are we now?* 18, cf. 29; 20; 36. Byung-Chul Han speaks in an eponymous book of the other's 'expulsion' (*The Expulsion of the Other: Society, Perception and Communication Today.* Trans. W. Hoban. Cambridge: Polity, 2018).

[57] *Where are we now?* 29, emphasis added. For similar worries about a fully immune community, legally mandated, cf. Donatella Di Cesare, *Immunodemocracy,* 63, 76–7.

accepted in the past. We are facing a paradox: the end of all social relations and political activity is presented as the exemplary form of civic participation'.[58] This remarkable *coincidentia oppositorum* has become possible in the late twentieth century thanks to the intermediation of digital technology, allowing contact to be both broken and yet maintained in another sense: 'wherever possible, machines can replace any contact — any contagion — among human beings'.[59] But this is precisely what is intolerable for Agamben, and the coincidence between immunising gestures of distantiation and community constitutes the abolition of the latter and the negation of humanity itself.[60] Our task now is to understand why this is the case.

Herd Immunity and the Question of Sacrifice

Let us ask ourselves: what if we were not to stand apart? What if we could not do otherwise on pain of sacrificing our very humanity? Would that be to sacrifice immunity in turn? In fact, such a contagious form of community need not be incompatible with immunity when the latter *is* given a different sense, no longer the separation of isolation but an immunity acquired by way of exposure, a (perhaps) regulated openness as opposed to an absolute closure. This is one aspect of what has gone by the name of 'natural immunity' or 'naturally acquired immunity'. These are immunities which pre-exist the incidence of a new virus, of the kind provided, for instance, by T-cells, carried over from previous exposure to the many other and older forms of coronavirus. These render it likely that a significant percentage of the population will already possess some form of natural immunity to any new form of coronavirus and has no need to wait upon the arrival of the artificial.[61] This in turn renders the threshold for herd immunity more readily attainable, to incur less of the 'sacrificial' that it is often taken to involve, and the necessity for large populations to flee exposure becomes less pressing.

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[58] *Where are we now?* 60. Agamben shows that already in 2013, Patrick Zylberman had identified this as one aspect of a political strategy: 'the total organisation of the body of citizens so as fully to reinforce adhesion to governmental institutions, producing a sort of superlative civicism wherein the imposed obligations are presented as proofs of altruism' (ibid., 56, cf. Zylberman, *Tempêtes microbiennes: Essai sur la politique de sécurité sanitaire dans le monde transatlantique.* Paris: Gallimard, 2013, 385–91 et al.).

[59] Agamben, *Where are we now?* 15–16.

[60] Byung-Chul Han adopts a similar position: 'The hysteria of survival makes society so inhumane. Your neighbour is a potential virus carrier, someone to stay away from. Older people have to die alone in their nursing homes because nobody is allowed to visit them because of the risk of infection. Is prolonging life by a few months better than dying alone? In our hysteria of survival, we completely forget what a good life is. For survival, we willingly sacrifice everything that makes life worth living: sociability, community and proximity. In view of the pandemic, the radical restriction of fundamental rights is uncritically accepted' (Han, *Capitalism and the Death Drive,* 120).

[61] Cf. Reiss and Bakhdi, *Corona: False Alarm?* 101ff.

But this alternative approach, along with any other, became almost immediately swallowed up in an opposition that was defined in terms of 'control'. 'Herd immunity' itself became one of the most vilified terms of the early debate for it was said that if we do not 'control' the virus, we simply lose control of it, and that would be effectively to sacrifice the vital in the name of this immunity of the flock or the group, a gesture that came to have its moral character almost irrecoverably blackened — until the advent of the vaccines, which immunised in a way that was said to avoid exposure to danger, while opening a path at the end of which the law of large numbers could be used to ensure that the greater part of an entire population could be subject to the surveillance allowed by digital certificates of immunity. The one kind of control (of the virus) immediately allows the other (of the population). It was said that herd immunity could not provide the former kind of control, but to even stage the debate in such terms allows one to imagine that its failure to provide the latter may also have been a significant factor in its fate.

The excommunication of those promoting herd immunity makes it all the more bizarre that an analogous logic should have been resuscitated for the sake of a campaign which urged vaccination on less and less vulnerable sections of the population, so as — it was said — to ensure a sufficiently high level of immunity (and still more implausibly a diminished capacity to 'transmit' the virus) *across a population*. Thus herd immunity was revived, but this time as if it could only be achieved synthetically. Any other way of acquiring immunity beyond the artificial was ruled inadmissible.

In the way that the calculation of risk and future predictions of the course of the epidemic were made, media and government seemed intent on suggesting that there was a kind of absolute and universal vulnerability, which depended upon a *total* absence of pre-existing immunity. This at least was how things ended up after the first few weeks of lockdown, when the media allowed itself a certain measure of the proper function of the Fourth Estate, which is to question and debate the decisions of those in power. Once the total control of police measures had been decided upon, it was as if the elision of any other possibility — specifically any differentiality or multiplicity within the social body — were necessary in order to ensure compliance on the part of those not at risk.

At the beginning, partly thanks to the overwhelming rhetoric of war that was employed by those in power to overwhelm any alternative responses and accounts of the event itself, one was either *for* the police-response, unprecedented in its (still so often unacknowledged) violence — largely if not altogether inefficacious, despite repeated attempts — or one was effectively a murderer, a Spencerian or Malthusian, an advocate of 'natural selection' in the social realm, 'social Darwinism' of a sort, in which the weak lost out for the sake of the strong. No one ever said 'Nietzschean', of course, and particularly not the Nietzscheans, who had forgotten their master's teachings on moral interpretations and started aggressively policing everyone else's moral probity, particularly in an academic setting.

The rhetoric of war demands that any traitorous desertion to the opposite side, or even its countenancing in the form of a rational discussion, be deemed entirely unthinkable. The alternative strategy of herd immunity, even in that more cautious form which did not advocate an undifferentiated, universal exposure but described its position in terms of 'focussed protection',[62] adopted in light of the astonishing discrepancies in the relative vulnerabilities of different demographics, had to be eradicated from respectable debate altogether. On the most charitable interpretation, this decision was taken so as to ensure compliance with the much more unheard-of police response, almost impossible to justify if a less repressive alternative were considered admissible.

One of the main strategies by which this approach to the incursion of a virus has been marginalised, at least among leftist intellectuals, has been simply to align it with neoliberal capitalism (another 'enemy'), that simply allows the same liberty to the virus as this politico-economic doctrine allows to the market. Such a strategy is thus aligned with the political Right, in the sense of a non-interventionist understanding of the State that lets the inherently truthful or logical forces of the market and – in this case – the virus unfold spontaneously according to their own logic: or, so this gesture was translated, they are 'let rip'; one loses 'control'.[63]

It thus came to be accepted that any doctrine espoused by one's (political) enemy could be considered a priori false, as if in their desperation and fear, the differentiated way of thinking beyond the opposition that post-Kantian philosophy has cultivated since at least Hegel, if not Heraclitus, had entirely slipped their minds. The consequence of this has been to translate the affirmed opposition in terms that Derrida made us familiar with in speaking of Levinas, Bataille, and Foucault: there is reason or speech (*logos*), and beyond that there is violence, the violence of that which has been silenced or of that which silences it: in both cases, war is waged. The other, the violent one, the illogical and immoral, must be excluded from all civilised debate, unheard or immediately closed down, forced to speak in an unnaturally strident tone caused by the strangulated discursive position from which it cries out.

Little has come to be more maligned than the idea of an alternative approach, but it cannot be denied that even for advocates of the police response, for whom we are already well beyond the question of principles and into that of their bending in the name of pragmatics, the question is one of thresholds: nothing like the strategy chosen in 2020 has ever seriously been attempted on a national scale for any previous virus; the British government's 'pandemic plan' which was already in place recommended nothing like it but was silently jettisoned early on. At what point and for what reasons, good or bad, is an approach which at least minimally respects constitutional and legal rights deposed?

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[62] As proposed by one of the spontaneous (scientific) organisations devoted to questioning the predominant response, whose position was expressed in the Great Barrington Declaration: https://gbdeclaration.org/.

[63] Žižek is one of the writers most given to this gesture (cf. *Pan(dem)ic!* 100–101, 120ff et al.)

Was it simply that one strategy seemed to allow for sacrifices, while — miraculously — the other could be made to seem as if it did not? Even a number of serious philosophers interpreted the strategy of herd immunity as involving 'sacrifice' — and so powerful had the biopolitical valorisation of 'life' become that even so much as a single life lost seemed unacceptable to them.[64] And yet the implicit logic of *their* favoured response is precisely a sacrificial one, in which a part of one's life, or more accurately, certain parts of the social body (including education and culture) are suspended, ruined, or otherwise killed, in order for the body to save itself in some other more 'streamlined' form. How has one strategy come to be seen as entirely devoid of sacrifice, whilst the other has been condemned for the very fact that it includes it?

Beyond reasserting a certain semblance of balance, one can go even further and ask whether herd immunity presupposes any sacrifice at all? If one accepts differential vulnerability, which among the very young rises to a near total or (on some accounts) total invulnerability, no sacrificial element at all is involved in their exposure. And if indeed a certain number of people die in the process, or in the meantime, more honesty would perhaps entail admitting that 'sacrifice', if it simply means 'people dying', will happen whatever strategy one chooses.

One of the great lessons of philosophy, not to say biology, is that death is inherent in finite entities, or at the very least in sexuated ones (just as viruses and any number of contagions and infections are an ineradicable companion of organic life).[65] The sanitising behaviour which has come to pervade our culture is one which scrubs the surface of the organism so clean and discourages contact with

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[64] But cf. Peter Sloterdijk, 'Co-immunism in the Age of Pandemics and Climate Change', Noema, https://www.noemamag.com/co-immunism-an-ethos-for-our-age-of-climate-change/, 12th June 2020. Sloterdijk's reactions to the virus and the police-response are collected in *Der Staat streift seine Samthandschuhe ab: Ausgewählte Gespräche und Beiträge 2020–2021* (*The State Removes its Kid Gloves*). Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2021 (cf. pp. 30ff for a German rendition of what appears to be an English original).

[65] This insight remains perhaps the principal merit of Simon Critchley's short text on the virus appended to his *Bald: 35 Philosophical Short Cuts,* ed. Peter Catapano (New Haven: Yale UP, 2021), 225ff. Otherwise the text is instructive as an emblem of the overwhelming majority of the responses made to the virus by philosophers, being devoted primarily to broadcasting its own (implicitly virtuous) fear, stressing the 'vulnerability' of 'all life', including theirs, and their (explicitly virtuous) concern for others. It begins with the telling first person plural, arrogating to itself the imaginary voice of everyone, in a manner that verges on the mawkish: 'We're scared' (ibid., 225).

Frankly, we are not, and a little less fear (whether of one's own overactive conscience, one's trade unionist reputation, or of death and debility) and somewhat more courage would have spared us more misery than these proudly fearful ones seem able to imagine.

For a less credulous reading of fear in this context, cf. both Dodsworth, *A State of Fear* and Agamben, *Where are we now?* 88ff for a contribution entitled 'What is Fear?'

If one must be frightened, why should one not be equally fearful of what is lost when a democratic population is placed under curfews and house arrests, as Frank Furedi suggests, albeit a little timidly (Furedi, *Democracy under Siege: Don't Let Them Lock it Down!* London: Zero, 5).

other organisms so hysterically that it seems possessed of such an inane ignorance of the actual functioning of immune systems as to be in the grip of a certain kind of death wish itself. Such was even recognised by the British government as a risk for the winter of 2021–22, with the absence of exposure to (other) pathogens resulting in a diminished ability to resist even relatively mild ones like influenza. This hostile-immunising response seems to embody the belief that dying (not to speak of becoming ill) as such could or should ideally not happen at all. This positing is at least something that is risked by the extreme character of the taboo on death in our culture. The absolute aversion to the public visibility of death and infirmity is a significant factor in at least the efficacy of the media strategy in bolstering the repressive 'solution' to this epidemic. By rendering it as visible as possible in all manner of tendentious and alarming images, one breaks the taboo and unleashes all manner of anxiousness and aversive behaviour.[66]

Such a repression of death has allowed it to return in an altogether distorted, confused and confusing form, diffused everywhere and over everyone as a generic threat. But we know this is not real: the only question we have to ask is which conclusion to draw from the differential vulnerability that is displayed with respect to this particular disease: 1) given that this susceptibility is virtually non-existent in anyone healthy and of working age, quite possibly absolutely non-existent in school children and infants, measures which disproportionately damage their development are at the very least harder to justify; 2) but this is precisely what allows those who manage to discern some moral gesture in the restrictions to construe their actions as absolutely altruistic, a 'sacrifice' (if altruism and sacrifice can or should ever be imposed on anyone, let alone those deemed too young or too impaired to decide for themselves) — if it did benefit themselves, it would not have the same value in terms of the accretion of self-worth. Hence we find so many appeals to a kind of sentimental altruism which likes to tell itself that it is acting for the sake of the others, the vulnerable, when really it is acting out its own disavowed and projected fear.

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[66] On the implicit ideal of 'immortality' that underlies a good deal of contemporary life and its oblivious attitude towards dying (as well as its avatars, including pain), Byung-Chul Han says the following: 'The virus is a mirror. It shows what society we live in. We live in a survival society that is ultimately based on fear of death. Today survival is absolute, as if we were in a permanent state of war. All the forces of life are being used to prolong life. A society of survival loses all sense of the good life. Enjoyment is also sacrificed for health, which, in turn, is raised to an end in itself. [...] The more life is one of survival, the more fear you have of death. The pandemic makes death, which we have carefully suppressed and outsourced, visible again. The constant presence of death in the mass media makes people nervous' (Han, *Capitalism and the Death Drive,* 120). 'The pain-free life of permanent happiness is not a human life. Life which tracks down and drives out its own negativity cancels itself out. Death and pain belong together. In pain, death is anticipated. If you seek to remove all pain, you will have also to abolish death. But life without death and pain is not human life; it is undead life. In order to survive, humans are abolishing themselves. They may succeed in becoming immortal, but only *at the expense of life itself'* (*The Palliative Society,* 60).

Against the Logic of Immunity

Both sides accuse each other of sacrificing something, whilst trying to rid themselves of such a stain: for Esposito and the opponents of herd immunity, anyone who refuses to constrict human community in the 'normal' sense is guilty of sacrificing life;[67] while for those of any other persuasion, the restrictions made are sacrificing something more valuable: freedom and many other facets of the very essence of the human.

Agamben tends to accept, in his own way, Aristotle's enduring definitions of the human being as the linguistic or rational animal (*zōon logon echon*) and the political animal (*zōon politikon*). The measures which separate human beings from one another — by means of physical walls, distance, or invisibility — have, on his account, stifled the very conditions for linguistic and political life.[68] Agamben has insisted upon something like an auto-immune or self-sacrificing loss of identity on the part of the political life of man: the scandal of churches closing their doors to the new lepers whom St. Francis embraced, the cancellation of funerals and marriage, the closure of educational establishments along with most institutions of human culture, the prohibition of love and friendship.

And yet, is this really a sacrifice in the strict sense? Let us recall that many of these measures have been either legally compulsory or normatively 'expected'. In either case, immense pressures of coercion have been exerted on all and sundry, the included and the 'exempt' alike. It has been legally or normatively *demanded* that human beings sacrifice crucial parts of their very humanity, right up to the very visibility of their faces, their ethical singularity of Levinassian account. Can a sacrifice that is demanded of another by a sovereign power really be called a sacrifice?

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[67] '[T]his choice [for herd immunity] is, honestly, a form of eugenics, and in some ways even thanatopolitical, because it entails the deaths of a considerable number of people who would otherwise live. For herd immunity to develop, many of the weakest people are destined to die, as Boris Johnson also admitted. [...] Let's say that my assessment of herd immunity is a rather negative one: it acts as a form of autoimmune disease, that is, it tries to protect life through the death of a part of the population. The only non-negative population-wide form of immunity – i.e. one not based on the sacrifice of innocent victims – depends on the discovery of a vaccine. That is, if we ever get one' (Esposito, 'The Biopolitics of Immunity in Times of COVID-19: An Interview with Roberto Esposito', https://antipodeonline.org/2020/06/16/interview-with-roberto-esposito/, 16th June 2020). '[A]t a time when we are doing all that is in our power to stay alive, as is understandable, we cannot renounce the second life – life with others, for others, through others. This is not, however, allowed, in fact it is, rightly and logically, forbidden. [/] To consider this sacrifice as unbearable, when there are those who are risking their lives in hospitals to save ours, is not only offensive, it is ridiculous' (Esposito, 'Vitam Instituere').

[68] *Where are we now?* Ch. 19; cf. 'The Face and Death' https://www.quodlibet.it/giorgio-agamben-il-volto-e-la-morte?fbclid=IwAR2jSwf_yQnm2CwDascKhLMQjds0dsZObO70ClEuIPfRmv0RUv8j3Dxoj7A, 3rd May 2021. First published as 'Il volto e la morte', Zurich Zeitung, 30th April 2021, and included in the expanded version of *A che punto siamo?*

Although Agamben himself does not put it in quite these terms, we might elucidate his opposition to the police-response by demonstrating how his own logic differs strikingly from the logic of immunity.[69] This will help us to elucidate such statements as the following, which in the writings on the epidemic taken in isolation Agamben tends to leave unexplained: 'The false logic is always the same: just as it was asserted in the face of terrorism that freedom should be abolished in order to defend freedom, now we are told that life has to be suspended in order to protect life',[70] and '[a] norm which affirms that we must renounce the good to save the good is as false and contradictory as that which, in order to protect freedom, imposes the renunciation of freedom'.[71]

It is not the case that an opposition can temporarily collapse itself in order to protect the identity of one of its poles in the long run. It seems that for Agamben auto-immunity is not simply a risk that the immune system runs but is effectively implied even in the most temporary of sacrifices or compromises: human community ought *never* to be reduced to immunity in the sense of distancing and hostility, for then – at least in light of the current state and aims of sovereign biopolitical power – one is *already* lost.[72]

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[69] This will perhaps casts a new light on Agamben's response to the vaccine and its promise of immunity, first of all in 'La nuda vita e il vaccino' (https://www.quodlibet.it/giorgio-agamben-la-nuda-vita-e-il-vaccino, 16th April 2021, like all of the following, reprinted in the expanded version of *A che punto siamo?)* which treats it solely in the context of the human being's status as bare life, before developing an increasing concern with regard to its safety ('Uomini e lemmings' ['Men and Lemmings'] https://www.quodlibet.it/giorgio-agamben-uomini-e-lemmings?fbclid=IwAR2yon-vSihGKn0tE0LUENgMmojSIMZ9oEml2Q8T5jpioHTRmx0FNkmxThw, 28th July 2021) and the way in which a certain coercion has replaced actual legislation that could simply render vaccinations legally compulsory but at the cost of rendering the state liable for the consequences, a liability that in Italy at least it was unwilling to accept, preferring, as with the gesture of asking its potential patients to 'protect the health service', to transfer responsibility from the state to the citizen ('Cittadini di seconda classe' ['Second Class Citizens'] https://www.quodlibet.it/giorgio-agamben-cittadini-di-seconda-classe?fbclid=IwAR3EyZ1PBQFb3qjdbeXIuzKxvhPPQhfSiNBaT0YHvyZ4i_WrKzy8i27_ApA, 16th July 2021; 'Tessera verde' ['Green Pass'] https://www.quodlibet.it/giorgio-agamben-tessera-verde?fbclid=IwAR0Aiue5ZXKeT3jEzqp9c0Lrvets2klmmofG-oLZoFhCom5rzTwYbDfImdY, 19th July 2021; along with a text in La Stampa, 30th July 2021), and culminating in two texts written with Massimo Cacciari, op. cit., inter alia.

[70] *Where are we now?* 28.

[71] Ibid. 37.

[72] 'Doubtless someone will rush to respond that what I am describing is a temporally limited condition, after which things will go back to how they were before. It is remarkable that anyone could say this in good faith, given that the very authorities that have proclaimed the emergency are endlessly reminding us that we will have to go on observing the same directives when this is all over, and that "social distancing" [...] will be society's new organising principle' (ibid., 36; cf. 39). For a similar reading of the situation cf. Han, *Capitalism and the Death Drive,* 121; *The Palliative Society*, pp.14ff; cf. ibid., p.62n1 for a direct reference to Agamben from this chapter.

To establish the falsity of the immunitary logic, which presumes otherwise, and tells itself that the compromise with one's opposite that always risks an auto-immune exacerbation is essential to the very nature of what it is protecting, provided it is only temporary, Agamben identifies a tacit presupposition on the part of the advocates of lockdown: that a particular form of life, like the human's, can be distinguished from the *un*qualified, *un*formed life, upon which it would be founded. This presupposition must be made by any argument that advocates the temporary reduction of a full human life to sheer survival — to constrain the same for the sake of the same. This diminished life will in some contexts be described by Agamben as 'bare life' (*nuda vita*), a life denuded of any form or potential that would evade the laws governing the public realm of the *polis* — and now, by extension, the *oikos* — or be protected by them. The sole potential of a life reduced to mere survival is that of dying, and even that terminal decision lies in the hands of the one who wields power in that particular setting: the 'sovereign', whether that be a single figure, as in monarchy, autocracy, or tyranny, a group of people, as in oligarchy and aristocracy, or the whole civilian body, as in a certain kind of democracy. It can even be a doctor, or a scientist; or Medicine or 'Science' as such.

Biopolitics

The manner in which the protection of life and health became not just a 'good' or a right but also a political and legal *obligation* is the subject of the meta-political philosophy of 'bio-politics'.[73] This is the doctrine according to which matters of life and death have become — or have always been — the concern of (political) power, rather than simply being private matters of the home and the family. For Agamben, biopolitics is much older than Michel Foucault, one of the progenitors of the theory, considers it to be: far from emerging towards the end of the eighteenth century, with the birth of the 'Modern Age', a certain sovereign power over life may be discerned from the very beginning of the history of the West. Life, along with its various capacities, from nutrition to reproduction, was not governed by the laws instituted by the sovereign in the Ancient Greek world to govern the public life of the city (*polis*); life was instead fostered privately in the home (*oikos*). Agamben demonstrates that this very fact of being excluded from the political sphere may be understood as an *act* of exclusion carried out *by* the sovereign ruler of the political sphere. Hence those confined to the home and to private physical life would have been consigned there, refused admission to full civic life, by sovereign power. Thus we can say that the very opposition between private and public life, home and city, and the distribution of different sets of living beings between the two, is effectively

[73] '[T]he citizen no longer has a right to health [...] but is instead forced by law to be healthy ("biosecurity")', to secure and protect health and the services which maintain it (Agamben, *Where are we now?* 56). Even the *potential* for unhealthiness is enough to warrant legally mandated confinement or curfew. For an account of a legally obligatory, fully immune community, in a similar vein, cf. Di Cesare, *Immunodemocracy,* 63, 76–7.

carried out by the sovereign itself, and thus *both* of its poles may be said to be subject to law and its power.

The private biological life of the home and the politico-linguistic life of the city might — at least in hindsight — be identified with the Greek terms *zōē* and *bios* respectively. Everything fundamental to Agamben's work hinges on a correct understanding of this distinction, and the exact perspective from which this distinction is made. The act of distinguishing between these two notions, that separates bare life from a fuller kind of life, presupposes that the one who makes the distinction wields a certain amount of power over *both* forms. This includes the life of the home and those associated with its upkeep — in the Greek world: women and slaves — for those confined to the home were thereby forcibly excluded from civic life, which alone counted as properly human. What these domestic animals amounted to was effectively decided upon by the sovereign, even if the laws he made were effectively null and void once one crossed the threshold.

For Agamben, what has changed in the Modern Age and even more so in the twentieth Century is that this distinction has altogether collapsed; the life that was included within the purview of the sovereign's power purely by means of exclusion is now quite explicitly within its remit. Power now devotes the greater part of its strategising to the conquest of 'mere life' — the health, life, and death of human beings understood in the statistical form of 'populations' or 'demographics'. What was once considered to be an external separation between two spheres (*polis* and *oikos*) and two distinct groups of human beings, has now become a division *internal* to each human being: one has one's properly human life, and distinct from that, absolutely subject to political power, one's anonymous bare life. Remarkably, it is also by virtue of this bare life that one participates in civil life, since in this way one falls within the dominion of the sovereign once again. This alone could allow one's very health to form part of one's 'civic duty'.

All of this is to say that the very separation between qualified human life and subhuman bare life is itself the deed of the sovereign, or at least the result of a certain history of this power's transfigurations, and an incontrovertible sign that sovereign power is in play. The distinction between *zōē* and *bios* — mistakenly criticised by many who do not see the perspective from which it is made, as if it were simply Agamben's own, or something he finds to be straightforwardly present in the Greek sources themselves — is the textual trace by which we can pursue this sovereign power to distinguish right back to the beginning of Western political thought. The very opposition itself, from its original form right up to its collapse into a troubling indistinction at the end of history, is the product of a sovereign form of power.

Speaking of the separation of life into 'a purely biological entity on the one hand, and a social, cultural, and political existence on the other', Agamben suggests

that, '[w]hat the virus has shown clearly is that people believe in this abstraction'.[74] And for good reason: (medical) technology has made such a separation effectively possible, with artificial respiration and other technologies capable of suspending the half-dead in a kind of undead life, a zone halfway between life and death or at the point of their overlap — thus embodying the cultural artefactual preconditions for the production of a life so denuded that even the existentialist freedom of suicide is beyond its reach. Such is the power of modern medicine and modern techno-science: they have created a new form of life.

But what is crucial for Agamben is that this separation — and the power that accrues to the doctors and scientists who were able to install it — be rigorously confined within the walls of the hospital and *not* allowed to roam freely around the city beyond.[75] And yet this is exactly what has happened over the last two years, if not throughout the whole of the last century, with the result that this type of life, held within the grip of the sovereign medico-scientific power, has become the model, legally mandated in many cases, for all social life: 'this body, artificially suspended between life and death, has become the new political paradigm by which citizens must regulate their behaviours'.[76]

On Agamben's account, any argument which appeals to this separation is effectively relying upon — and by extension accepting — both sovereign power and its attribution to medicine and science. Although we have no space adequately to discuss this matter here, we can say that Agamben's entire political philosophy has devoted itself to finding a way in which to *disable* this type of power structure once and for all and to seek out a new way in which communities can be bound together — beyond sovereign power, its law, and the separation of public and private life, or more precisely, today, beyond the *particular type of indistinction* which prevails between the two, and which has issued in the production of bare life. Thus we are seeking a politics that would forever rule out the emergence, *however temporary*, of such a life.

It can therefore be seen that Agamben's critics misunderstand his reproach to *them* when they protest that they are not solely valorising the survival of bare life over human life, but are rather merely protecting that bare life in order later to restore a fully human life.[77] Agamben's reproach is that this temporary suspension of human life amounts to an endorsement of a transcendent sovereign power and

[74] *Where are we now?* 63; cf. 'we have divided the unity of our vital experience — which is always and inseparably corporeal and spiritual — into a purely biological entity, on the one hand, and a social [sic, *affettiva,* affective, emotional] and cultural life, on the other' (ibid., 35).

[75] '[I]f this condition is extended beyond the spatial and temporal boundaries that pertain to it — as is presently being attempted — so that it becomes a sort of social behaviour principle, we may fall into contradictions from which there is no way out' (ibid., 35, translation modified).

[76] *Where are we now?* 64.

[77] Cf. Berg, op. cit.

a form of politics which has reached a certain point of exhaustion and is revealing ever more patently the danger of allowing such a machine to run on empty.[78]

This may be presumed to be one of the principal roots of Agamben's repeated assertions according to which the conditions imposed by isolation, distance, and invisibility cannot provide the model for a *new* community, as many of his fellow philosophers at least temporarily allowed themselves to believe: 'I do not believe that a community based on "social distancing" is humanly and politically liveable'.[79] Elsewhere he speaks of such a non-community as one subjected to that most renowned image of sovereign power, the Leviathan: 'only tyranny, only the monstrous Leviathan with his drawn sword, can be built upon the fear of losing one's life'.[80] These visions of an immune community, in which members of a flock fearfully flee all contact with their fellow living creature, are ultimately visions of a society under the sway of sovereign power. They allow us to remain entrapped within a theory and practice of political life that has long since passed its expiry date and thus hinder the conception of a new form of communal relation. They prolong the old in a distorted form that emphasises its most malign aspects, which show themselves to be becoming ever more inventive, whilst stifling the new.

[78] This is why we should not presume that Agamben himself is making the same separation that he accuses the current regime of insisting upon, and simply valorising the other (separated) half (qualified, supposedly fully human life). To demonstrate this and to explicate its meaning would take a much more extended reading of Agamben's *œuvre*, but it rules out the reciprocal accusation according to which sacrifices are taking place on both sides.

Here one would have to raise the whole question of what alternative 'solution' to the 'problem' of the epidemic we might be offering. We have confined ourselves as far as possible to a preliminary consideration that merely opens up the possibility of another strategy: we have attempted to dismantle the opposition between 'taking control' of the virus and 'losing control' altogether, an opposition which could only lead us down the path that we have already taken.

Perhaps this would indeed lead us to a more extended consideration of 'herd immunity' than we have been able to give here, limited as we are by space and indeed by simple expertise. Some such solution might be urged upon us by yet another false totality that has been put abroad in recent times, in which the differentiated susceptibility of the civilian body was elided so as to depict an almost entirely fabulous situation in which 'we' were 'all in it together', and in which everyone had to keep the other safe and to be kept safe in turn, such that every affront to human decency could be construed as an act of altruism. To acknowledge this differentiation is to allow the strategy effectively to draw near to that of '*focussed* protection' and to minimise or even eradicate altogether its supposedly 'sacrificial' character.

[79] *Where are we now?* 31.

[80] *Where are we now?* 24–25. On the connection between tyranny and fear, cf. Dodsworth, *A State of Fear*, 94 et al. In 'What is Fear?' in particular, Agamben has shown himself to be acutely attuned to the manipulations of the 'fears' of a population (all too openly assumed by politicians themselves, who frequently, as if confessing to a certain humanity, pronounce themselves 'worried' — or even, with a dreadful Americanism, 'spooked' (*Omicron* will have that effect...), or, in more patrician and paternalistic terms, 'concerned') (*Where are we now?* 88ff).

The Bareness of Life and 'Differential Vulnerability'

But it is possible to conceive our current state differently, and to affirm that bare life is not in fact so bare as all that? We might begin to draw this essay to a close by considering a potentially instructive alternative to Agamben's approach: certain other thinkers, relatively close to him and largely of a certain biopolitical affiliation, have suggested that the situation he analyses in terms of the sovereign separation of bare life is not as parlous as he imagines. In truth, life is not so indiscriminately naked, not so unqualified and lacking in stratification as all that. If this were true it would have repercussions for the way in which we might critically appraise the current state of affairs and even cause us to reconsider the attribution of responsibility to a thoroughly malign sovereign power. In this context, in which we are more or less confining ourselves to a certain set of Agamben's writings, we shall consider only those objections which have been raised in respect of the epidemic.

Daniele Lorenzini, scholar of Foucauldian rather than Agambenian biopolitics, points out that 'biopolitics is always a politics of *differential vulnerability'*. Some lives are more worthy of life than others, and some indeed are more bare than others, and since life has been taken into the political sphere, the decision upon this worthiness is taken by whoever or whatever wields power.[81] Thus one should not imagine that the life upon which power fastens is uniform in the way that Lorenzini takes Agamben to think.

To speak of vulnerability here: we are still making biopolitical distinctions, avowedly so: in terms of the health of a stratified population. And it would seem that, for Agamben, even beginning to think about such things is already to separate off a purely biological substrate from its cultural superstructure or 'form-of-life'.[82] To argue either that life deserves, as a matter of biological survival, to be lived interminably *or* that some lives are unworthy of being lived are both biopolitical alternatives to be avoided since they separate the substrate of biological life from what should, from Agamben's perspective, be considered the 'form of life'.

But at another level this differentiation is crucial when it comes to resisting the police-response, for the mass incarceration of the healthy took place under the auspices of a forgetting of this differentiation: Agamben identifies a kind of artificial equalisation, not on the part of the theorist, but on the part of the sovereign powers. Despite an inequality at the level of susceptibility (passivity), we are falsely equalised at the level of infectivity (activity). Whether or not we are *actually* at risk, ill or not,

[81] Daniele Lorenzini, 'Biopolitics in the Time of Coronavirus', Critical Inquiry https://critinq.wordpress.com/2020/04/02/biopolitics-in-the-time-of-coronavirus/?fbclid=IwAR0WVuinDavyow_7RCVjIYA650kD9-lvyyvWtMRUT6WoV5mSAC4DIX1_wuI, 2nd April 2020.

[82] Would this be the place to rehabilitate Judith Butler's suggestion according to which differentiality emerges more significantly at the level of the symbolic-cultural roles which people have been forced to adopt? 'The virus alone does not discriminate, but we humans surely do, formed and animated as we are by the interlocking powers of nationalism, racism, xenophobia, and capitalism' (Butler, 'Capitalism Has its Limits' https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4603-capitalism-has-its-limits, 30th March 2020).

we should act as if we are, because everyone, of any stratum, is equally a *potential* spreader of the plague.[83] What matters more than the actuality of our situation is its potential. On these grounds in particular we are told that it is right to cancel our neighbour.

The Question of the Other

Elettra Stimilli had already suggested that bare life as such should be understood as *vulnerable* life, a passive life that is *eo ipso* owed ethical duties. Human life is unable to fend for itself and so immediately opens, for the sake of its very *survival* and from the very first months of life until the very last, onto a relation with others.[84]

As Hannah Arendt was among the first to insist, as part of an attempt to distance herself from Heidegger and the supposed foundation of community in a mutually isolating death, this type of caring-for (after reproducing) vulnerable life is precisely what takes place in the *home*. For Stimilli, we can learn something of this domestic form of life, and transform our politics on the basis of it, thanks to the conditions of quarantine. We learn that bare life is never so solitary or simply bare: it immediately implies relation, sociality, community of a certain kind, and thus the immunity that allows survival is not distinct from the communal relations in which the individual life must be bound up in order to live.[85] Thus we encounter one final attempt — this time much more thoughtful and hence powerful — to assert the compatibility of immunity and community that Agamben's account has set itself against.

What is not clear on Stimilli's allusive account is how the prohibition of physical proximity can be reconciled with the taking care of vulnerable life, particularly at the beginning but also at the end of a life. We may nevertheless find the rudiments of an answer contained in the brief texts that Stimilli devotes to the epidemic: we have seen that the rhetoric of civil war has shaped public discourse over the last two years; for Stimilli, we must consider the matter differently, by

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[83] Cf. Agamben, *Where are we now?* 14ff; cf. 18. Although this is a 'fact' that remains at the level of science and thus subject to falsification and revision, the notion of the 'asymptomatic spreader' is among the most dubious put abroad mediatically and governmentally over the last two years, not least because it has had the most severe consequences for the healthy and for the normal course of life. It should have become clear by now that such a process of infection is at the very least comparatively rare, with the preponderance of infections taking place in confined spaces of 'care' or respite (cf. Reiss & Bhakdi, *Corona False Alarm?* 32f). But without the purported invisibility of the danger, the enforced yielding up of identity and the consequent power wielded over the life of the citizen, would likely not have been possible (Agamben, *Where are we now?* 15 & 35; 'Alcuni dati').

[84] Elettra Stimilli, 'Being in Common at a Distance', Trans. Greg Bird in Topia, https://www.utpjournals.press/journals/topia/being-in-common-at-a-distance?=&, March 9th 2020.

[85] Elettra Stimilli, 'The Italian Laboratory – Rethinking Debt in Viral Times'. Trans. Greg Bird http://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/the-italian-laboratory-rethinking-debt-in-viral-times1/ Original: https://antinomie.it/index.php/2020/03/29/il-laboratorio-italia-ripensare-il-debito-ai-tempi-del-virus/, 29th March 2020.

examining the non-bellicose language of the home. For her, we should occupy the level neither of global war nor of civil war, but rather remain inside the home: we must find a discourse other than that of the 'state of exception' — the rhetoric of (global or civil, or even Agamben's own global civil) war. On Stimilli's account, a renovated vocabulary of the domestic may then be transferred from the private to the political: 'Being in common at a distance is the practice that makes it possible to invent new words, new positions, new horizons. It instils something that is already occurring. But it is a practice which requires much patience. [/] A practice that countless women have experienced on their skin over the centuries, in their homes. [/] We will rediscover the centrality of the domestic condition. We have the opportunity finally to uncover the neglected political potentiality of a private sphere'.[86]

At this stage we might pause to note that, as with the shared ancestry in Arendt's work on the topic of reproductive life, this gesture is somewhat akin to the one which Agamben himself is ultimately pursuing. For him as well, the problem with the current situation resides on the threshold between home and city and an illegitimate form of its crossing on the part of biopower that must be replaced with a new understanding of the same transgression. Agamben wishes not to restore the opposition but to think its indifferentiation in a new way. But everything hangs on how one understands this collapse. Would Stimilli's Arendtian suggestion appeal to Agamben? The problem seems to be that her philosophy risks *naturalising* bare life, in the sense of taking it to be a natural kind with naturally occurring characteristics (vulnerability, and its differentiality or otherwise); not as a creation of sovereign power, but as a given. Then, in its attempt to rethink the political life of man, it simply takes the features of domestic and reproductive life, and renders them political without mediation. Thus it effectively transplants the private into the public — or perhaps we might say: falling victim to a common confusion between *zōē* and bare life, it bypasses those distortions, which we have just alluded to, that take place in the seizure of life by political power.

In fact, *pace* Stimilli, bare life is not a natural or naturalisable notion; rather, for Agamben, bare life is formed through an eminently *political* gesture of inclusive exclusion. The target of Stimilli's criticism seems to be a conception of bare life that takes it to be non-relational. But this risks embodying once again a conflation of *zōē* with bare life, for at the very least, in Agamben's thought, bare life enjoys some sort of relation with the political community, and certainly a relation with sovereign power itself which precisely institutes that relation of inclusive exclusion between the political realm and bare or naked life. And indeed, at the most extreme point, to which we have been pushed in recent years, if not for the whole of the last century, we are *all* such *'homines sacri'*.[87]

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[86] Cf. Elettra Stimilli, 'Being in Common at a Distance'.

[87] We would also propose that bare life is not altogether deprived of power, and that the task of constructing a 'positive' or 'affirmative biopolitics', if such a thing remains intelligible in Agamben's conceptual scheme, is precisely to demonstrate how the minimal human traits of

It is the transplantation of the life of the home into the political sphere that prevents Stimilli from resisting as fiercely as she might the fully immunised community that Agamben has shown to be complicit with biopolitical sovereign power, thus supplying us with the means to think against it.

Conclusion: The Closure of the *Logos*

An event may then have taken place, or what has occurred may merely have been taken as a pretext, but the effect of the response has been to exacerbate a sovereign biopolitical power to such an extent that it has assumed a form which has never been so explicitly affirmed and with so little shame. At the very least, a debate must be had over the lines to be drawn in terms of what can be justified by the event that is said to have taken place, and perhaps what concerns us most is the exclusion of dissenting voices from rational discourse, as if the slightest criticism constitutes an irrational negation of the kind one finds in the Freudian conception of 'denial', or the '-phobias' which these days are pinned upon any number of figures who dare to question a discourse that has become hegemonic. What each and every case seems to have in common is the way in which the gatekeepers of the prevalent view, or the view which it takes, often in very narrowly confined contexts, to be prevalent, share the same aim and the same strategy: to silence their opponents in advance, so the discursive field is neither threatened nor called upon to defend itself; the opponent, in *ad hominem* fashion, is then pathologised such that any negation they may propose with respect to the discourse in question is presented unambiguously as a *non-rational* negation (denialist, phobic, and so irrational or poorly understood by the one wielding it — ultimately it is indeed perceived as a weapon, capable of inflicting violence and so 'threatening' to the 'safety' of a 'safe-space').

In the case currently under consideration, we are speaking not of academic conventions but of a position backed up by the full weight of the law, and as a consequence the merest critical question — indeed a question of any kind — comes to be considered as a threat to law and order itself, a negation or a call to negate. But since when have philosophers felt obliged to submit their questions to the state beforehand? Or to its mediatic arm which aids it in coercing public opinion and consent? *Logos* itself, in whatever translation we might choose to give it today so as to render it intelligible ('rational debate', 'discussion', 'free thought', 'free speech'...) is in danger if we allow this state of affairs to persist, and, although public discourse itself seems unable to countenance any value beyond 'survival' and 'saving lives', perhaps one day, when a sufficient weight of discourse has built up in the wake of interventions like Giorgio Agamben's, some cracks in this discourse might be prised open such that this incarnation of *logos* becomes at least minimally amenable to the idea that once reason itself is silenced, the risks are far more acute than those which any virus could present.

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linguisticality and politicality may be derived or generated *from* bare life, and so restored thereunto in a new form. Perhaps in the end this will lead us to a *fourth* kind of life, beyond *zōē, bios,* and bare life, which from very early on went by the title — one amongst many — of *zōē aionios.*

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Website: http://research.ncl.ac.uk/italianphilosophy/
ISSN 2515-6039