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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 contrast their writings on community. Part of this analysis considered 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' is a *dispositif* or apparatus which welds together man's animality and his political being (Esposito 2012c, pp.19-23).[1] The person is

* Lecturer in Law, University of Leicester. I would like to thank Michael Lewis for his comments and feedback on earlier drafts of this article, and Shaneez Mithani for her help and assistance in conducting the research and providing feedback for this essay. A version of this essay was presented at 'Immunity, Health and the Body Politic', a symposium hosted by the Brighton and Sussex Medical School and the Centre for Applied Philosophy, Politics & Ethics (CAPPE) in April 2016. I am grateful for the comments of the other participants at the event, which improved the quality of the work.

[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

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 biopolitical apparatus to the project of immunizing 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 actualization of biology (Esposito 2008, p.117). Esposito states:

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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).

> 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 work come into contact. This will come as more of a surprise to Agambenian scholars than 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* – translate as obligation and office (and it is the later meaning which Agamben focuses in 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 his community is the 'impersonal', or the third person. This third 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 immunizing 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:

> [W]hat 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 at 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's work comes into contact 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 characterized 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 by 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

[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

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

IV. The Degeneration of Community

Immunity is a mechanism that functions 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 functions on a misunderstanding that leads to its relationship with community being distorted (Lewis 2015, p.222).

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).

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).

[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).

Political philosophy sees community as a wider subjectivity, 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 against Esposito's intertwining of finitude and community in his conception of *communitas* (Langford 2015, p.79). Hobbes simplifies the connection between finitude and community through its thematization 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 immunized relationships where the "purely negative right of each individual to exclude all others from using what is proper to him or her" characterizes our commonality (Esposito 2011, p.25). An affirmative biopolitics must affirm life and the gift of community. Community can only be recognized 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 at hand 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 conceptualize 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 is the very possibility of a genuine intertwining of self and other (Lewis 2015, p.224). This 'auto-tolerance' is opposed to autoimmunity (Esposito 2011, p.164). Esposito gives the example of pregnancy, and the immune tolerance of the mother's immune system to 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 the task of thinking open the possibility of a different philosophy of immunity (Esposito 2011, p.18). The immune system is 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, such as with 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 to 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 their 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.170-171).

V. The Person

Esposito traces the answer to these questions in the 'impersonal', the way forward from 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).

Depersonalisation 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, rather, were 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 that 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 objectivization (Esposito 2012c, p.21). Person makes a part of a body subject to another part; man is a person only if he masters the more properly animal part of his nature (Esposito 2012c, p.22).

The *dispositif* of the person therefore contains mechanisms for the exclusion and inclusion into the realm of personhood (Esposito 2010, p.126). 'Person' therefore becomes a technical term. To be a person is to be divided and make possible the subjugation of 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 each other:

> It isn't possible to personalize someone without depersonalizing 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 – 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 (Esposito 2010, p.130). Subjective rights belong with "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 Esposito states: "the essential failure of human rights, their inability to restore the broken connection between rights and life, does not take place in spite of the affirmation of ideology of the person but rather because of it" (Esposito 2012b, p.5). Justice, differently, 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).

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

The goal of this justice is to think about rights by shifting the emphasis from person to impersonal such that rights can make possible a co-immunity between individuals.

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 from deep within in the sense that we are the other, and each becomes an other in a chain of alterations that cannot be fixed in a new identity. This is enacted by the *munus*, occupying the position of the impersonal (see Esposito 2012d, pp.120-122; Esposito 2008, pp.191-194). 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 back to the very origin of Western politics in which the inclusion of bare life in the political realm is the original nucleus of sovereign power (Langford 2015, p.143). This becomes a divergence with Esposito concerning the conception of the thought 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:

> [T]he same categories of 'life', 'body' and 'birth'; and then of converting 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 that 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 charged that Esposito's rejection of political subjectivity leads his 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 minimum 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:

> The 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 as a "mobile border" within living man and operate as an apparatus or *dispositif* through which the decision of what is human and what is not human is 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 work (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 a 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 utilize the *dispositif* to construct a form of freedom which transcends the individual:

> I shall call an 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).

Therefore, Agamben proposes a massive (in his own words) 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, 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 has to do what he is: he is a being of command. In this way, being is transformed into having-to-be, which comes to define ethics (Agamben 2013a, pp.80-85).

Starting in the seventeenth century, 'officium and *munus*' becomes translated as 'duty'. 'Duty' underlies Kantian ethics (this is a position which both Esposito and Agamben share). *Munus* becomes coterminous with the idea 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.111-112). 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 speak positively of debt, but not in a Kantian sense of leading one to have to act 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), human have and feel a debt. Humans, in their potenitality 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 Agamben proposes start from the contention that there is nothing to "enact or realize" (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, thus not being able to be reduced to a subject (Agamben 2016, p.224). This forms the basis for Agamben's modal ontology. Agamben makes clear that 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).[6]

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.135-136). 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).

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

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.141-142). 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 its form, but also separable from every thing and every context (Agamben 2016, pp.232-233).

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 (a void of representation) to 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 writing 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 to be 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 to 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 medieval 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 to 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 the third person. 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 but to declare and show to the monks the obligations they had agreed to when they made their monastic vow on their entry to 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). Their 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 puts forth, reveals, and exposes 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 the dichotomy between life and rule "enter into a zone of indifference" (Agamben 2013b, p.71). The Franciscans legacy leaves us with the "undeferrable task":

> [H]ow 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 a being 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 lead by the Franciscan monk is 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*, such as in 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 "*realize 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.140-141). 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 by in contact with other forms-of-life, living a life of

contemplative use, that we deactivate the *dispositifs* that constantly divides and separates life, and being expresses itself in the singular body (Agamben 2016, p.233).

How, then, would Agamben see this singular life to be 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 for their changing. 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 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 comments in 2020 on the pandemic, we can see how both Esposito and Agamben see how governmental responses to the virus 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 is clear 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 on 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 immunization, 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 immunization. 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:

> [H]eavy 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-privatizing 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 deactivate it entirely. The epidemic has been invented (from very little) in order 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:

> [I]t 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 2020d). Lockdowns and social distancing are examples of governing through a "health terror" (Agamben

2020c), and that "the plague was already present" (Agamben 2020b). Lukas van den Berge has argued Agamben provides a critical voice which can prevent us from accepting emergency measures and biopolitical practice and policies as business as usual (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 from 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 characterized Agamben's work 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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