

CHAPTER 3

Politics in the Present

Roberto Esposito

Translated by Margaret Adams

Groesbeck and Adam Sitze

Explaining oneself in an interview, a dialogue, or a conversation is so difficult.¹ The questions, like their answers, are faked. They're constructed, only to be rewritten in new combinations that take off from the problems they're supposed to confront and that, mysteriously, they cleverly manage to evade. What counts therefore is the problem. And the problem directly interrogates the present as well as the interlocutors who live in the present. As such, we've decided to renounce the binary form that privileges the exchange between two but excludes other eventual addressees, preferring instead what has been defined in philosophy as the art of constructing problems. We take as our point of departure the unwinding of the thread of Roberto Esposito's thirty-year meditation on philosophy and on politics. But this starting point is more convention than dialogic standard. Whether undertaken alone, shared with one other or many others, this reflection is necessary but not entirely satisfying when what's in play is a politics that has declined to the present. We must instead restore to this reflection the movement that carries us to the problem, a movement in which past and future become contemporary with respect to the position reality has assumed. Here we deal with a convention—one we've respected—that mirrors footnotes at the bottom of a page and, more generally, the literary form of an intellectual biography written in the first person. This convention itself is revealed to be useful as a genealogical lens focused on the present. This same form, after all, is born in the moment suspended between the actual questioning and the virtual present in which we live. The conventional schema of this essay is based on four categories: the impolitical,

immunitas/communitas, biopolitics, and the impersonal. This schema will develop itself in the style of free indirect discourse, which will not shut off the flow of the reflection by preexisting stylistic modalities. And if the flow were about to be curtailed, it would show up right away: free indirect discourse aims to restore thought from its start in the immanence between language and the problem it confronts, that it intends to express and that it wants to delimit and reintroduce. This style constitutes a heterogeneous approach to interrogation, a meditation precisely on the present, its development and its state of permanent imbalance, its continual variation, open to the outside. In literature, free indirect style has created an alliance among the writer, the protagonist, and the reader. In philosophy, this style intends to carry the multiplicity of the problem, the plurality of voices, into the logocentric heart of the thought. It's as if you're jumping up on a trampoline, hanging suspended up in the air, before you flip and plunge back down.

—R. E., R. C.

Impolitical

Reflection on the impolitical was born in a phase in which the crisis of political action was one with a renewed vitality of thought on politics. Throughout the West, the crisis of the political apparatus, the crisis of the social state, combined to transform the historical meaning of the concept of government. I'd like to reflect on why, at the beginning of the 1980s, one political cycle that lasted for at least thirty years appeared to end, while another cycle of reflection on politics opened, one that still continues to this day. Between 1981 and 1986, with various thinkers such as Biagio de Giovanni, Bruno Accarino, Remo Bodei, Massimo Cacciari, Umberto Curi, Giuseppe Duso, Giacomo Marramao, Roberto Racinaro, and Maurizio Zanardi, I took part in the publication of *Centauro*, a significant journal for so many reasons. In those years, in Italy, there emerged a consciousness of the radical crisis of one of the *topoi* of the political culture of the left and, more generally, of the modern conception of politics.² By then the dialectic, based on contradiction and on its recomposition in a higher unity, that joined class to party, movement to state, was shattered. Against this background of this new consciousness emerged an irreducible distance that separated a new reality from subjects of politics who were inspired by modern categories of sovereignty, state, popu-

lation, and nation. That new reality no longer enjoyed the transcendental guarantee of political order. The prerogative of an international equilibrium described by Carl Schmitt in *The Nomos of the Earth* as having been in place in Europe since the peace of Westphalia failed—and failed forever.

The intellectuals who took part in the experience of *Centauro* demonstrated a keen awareness of this change. They interpreted it in terms of a crisis of modernity and positioned themselves at its very limit. On one hand, this formula echoed the emerging debate about the end of the great modern narratives about politics, history, and philosophy launched in 1979 by Jean-François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition*. This debate, soon expanded to a dimension unforeseen by even its promoter, extended the so-called end of history and the unrepresentability of social conflict. A model of rationality in interpretation of the modernization of politics and economics was no longer credible. On the other hand, the crisis of modernity radically placed in dispute modern politics' capacity to represent a reality whose own exclusively national consistency had been undermined and whose subjects had difficulty recognizing the unique and irreplaceable role of the sovereign. The sphere of the political could no longer be separated from the social, anthropological, and ontological forms it had tried to dominate, transform—even create from nothing—during the long adventure of modernity. Drawing my inspiration from the pages of Machiavelli's *Prince*, I proposed the concept-symbol of a centaur as the title of the journal, in order to take up once again this tragic coexistence of contraries. Politics could no longer trust itself to general subjects capable of mediating conflict, given that conflict was inscribed in politics' very reason for being. To politics fell the unfortunate assignment of holding together force and order, Machiavelli's fox and lion, life and forms. But so much indicated that this last attempt at recomposition would have to be the last.

The philosophical juncture at which this reflection occurred was characterized by a *koimè* that permitted diverse groups of intellectuals to come together to shape a horizon of common research. Since then, it has no longer been possible to create a collective journal with a sense comparable to *Centauro* in Italy because there is no longer a stable relationship between life and political forms, between theory and practice, between philosophy and politics, no matter how relocated and instrumental the relationship may be. And because of this, the philosophical alternatives present in *Centauro* split apart and have offered up radically different perspectives in the course of the last twenty years. It is with this awareness that I would reread the texts

and opinions of those who, in various ways, anticipated the passage we were living through at the beginning of the 1980s. While the journal *Mondoperaio* advanced a fiery revisionist polemic against the Marxist tradition and Lucio Colletti had confirmed the crisis of Marxism (even Italian Marxism) with his *Intervista politico-filosofica*, space for a renewal of themes and authors was opened up in the postmarxist *Intelligenza*. In *Krisis* there was the thought of Massimo Cacciari, who first formulated the concept of the impolitical, by means of which the categories of sovereignty, representation, party, and power were more and more depoliticized. This concept tore open the theological-political fold that had kept these categories pinched together up to that moment and incorporated a technical modality destined to render meaningless the representative assumptions about modern politics. In relation to this entropic fate of politics, the only possible discourse seemed to be expressed by an impolitical decision.³ For some time, in an attempt to find a dialectical solution capable of giving form to conflicts, authors like Massimo Marramao and Angelo Bolaffi had reflected on the “Weimar laboratory,” expanding on the debate in Germany of the 1920s between Carl Schmitt and the social-democratic jurists Kirchheimer, Neumann, Fraenkel, and Heller.⁴

It would be impossible to describe with just a few strokes the theoretical richness of Italian thought on this crisis.

I'll confine myself to pointing out in schematic terms the alternatives in play in those years. The first was negative thought, variously interpreted by Cacciari and Tronti. It engaged crisis as an originary dimension of the political, from which the political, in turn, drew the ability to create new forms of order through the force of its own decision-making power. A second interpretive line accepted the extinction of the subject to which negative thought still attributed representability, even though this representability was no longer based on work as traditional Marxism had held. In this way there emerged various and even diverging geopolitical trajectories: while one reassessed the authors of the so-called conservative revolution, Carl Schmitt, and then Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein, the second—the one in which I mostly see myself today—docked on the French shore where Derrida, but above all Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, understood the crisis of the modern political subject as resistance to the pretension of imposing a sovereign form on the life of individuals. What these trajectories had in common then was the consciousness of the failure of the autonomy of politics and therefore the necessity of articulating a different response to the crisis. But where to start? And where did criticism find a place? We can say

that there were three different hypotheses in place, even though they were not entirely disconnected from one another. For some, like de Giovanni, the crisis still positioned us in the modern, even if in a problematic way. Others like Bodei and Marramao landed on its margin, in a sort of hypermodern drawing out of modernity.⁵ Finally for others—first for Cacciari and for me as well—that point cast us outside, to the impolitical reversal. In one area, even among thinkers who were far from the experience of *Centauro*, one discussion acquired real importance. It focused on the three principal authors of early modernity: Descartes, Hobbes, and Spinoza. In this debate, hypotheses that were not only philosophical but also political came into play. On one side was Mario Tronti, who worked on the autonomy of the political—in a theoretical frame in which the reflection on Hobbes took precedence. On the other side stood Toni Negri, who insisted instead on the break between Hobbes and Spinoza, in light of the revolutionary rupture with modern political theology.⁶ Last but not least, de Giovanni chose a line of problematization that held Hobbes and Spinoza together against Descartes. He wanted to differentiate, within the modern tradition, the Cartesian perspective centered on the conscious subject from another, espoused by Spinoza and Vico, that ties life to forms in a new hypothesis of restoring the vitality of politics.⁷

We can't say that, in general, this debate was made up of political referents around which that varied philosophical *koinè* turned. Looking back, I consider it the most evident proof of the rupture of the bond between theory and practice, between reflection on politics and politics itself. In Italy this link had been embodied in an organic intellectual—that is, an intellectual specialist in the humanities or social sciences who interpreted his own role as a political leader, especially in the Communist Party. I am not surprised by the conclusion de Giovanni, who was editor of *Centauro*, drew later on.⁸ The Communist Party did not understand the meaning of questioning ourselves about the crisis of modernity. Leaders like Gerardo Chiaromonte, Alfred Reichlin, and Giorgio Napolitano stepped in to keep the *Centauro* group from allying itself with the group coordinated by Mario Tronti, who edited *Laboratorio politico* in those years. A whole season of Italian intellectual life drew to a close—and with it the idea that journals about philosophical-political culture constituted, in a certain sense, the laboratory in which categories were created that politics would put into practice. Those first years of the 1980s were culturally lively despite recurring signs of the end of a political cycle. Then there started to assert itself a style of analysis stamped with

the extreme personalization of theoretical apparatus and with the sophisticated, conceptual articulation that radically changed the rapport between philosophy and politics. Let me note that the years in which *Centauro* ended witnessed the birth of a new journal, *Filosofia politica*, founded by Nicola Matteucci, whose editorship I shared with Carlo Galli and Giuseppe Duso. Both of them were engaged in significant interpretation of modern political categories that constitute for me a site of continual confrontation. But here we deal with an academic journal—in the best sense of the word—no longer one that represents a tendency. *Filosofia politica* is entirely separate from politics in action.

The fact that the rapport between philosophy and politics has never been mended, not even within the paradigm of the “crisis of the political,” proves that one stage has given way to another. In *Categorie dell’impolitico* I intended to distance myself from this paradigm, on one hand converging with, and on the other detaching myself from Cacciari’s interpretation of the impolitical.⁹ As I later understood, at that time, despite any precautions, I ran the risk of providing a somewhat gnostic—that is, constitutively negative—reading of the impolitical. Despite my having refused to talk about any other or different view of the political—but rather about its limits and its reversal—the category of the impolitical could be understood in an implicitly dualistic key. In reality the impolitical is the unforeseen margin, the silent heart, the empty point—certainly not a feasible alternative—of politics. It’s not a political philosophy precisely because it refuses to establish an instrumental relation between philosophy and politics; it’s not a political theology because it excludes any representation of good, any dialectical relationship between politics and good; and it isn’t even a political ideology because it deconstructs the traditional bipolarities, starting with the one between right and left. In a strict sense, the impolitical is nothing but the determination of the political, in that the impolitical is that which defines the limits of the political. It’s the political imagined departing from its confines—without which there’s nothing but the conflict of power and interests. But insisting on the inevitability of conflict, that category wanted to sanction even failure, or the constitutive antinomy, of modern political philosophy that is always, no matter how, a thought about order. From the moment that political philosophy resists thinking about a conflict neither ordered nor representable, the impolitical is exactly what bursts forth from its representation as well as what by its very being annuls it. Political philosophy, understood as the foundation of modern political science, was born with this dramatically neutralizing meaning.

Machiavelli shows us the reason why Italian philosophy today seems to have a different fate from that of other European philosophies. Machiavelli alone maintains not only the impossibility of canceling out conflict but even its productivity. His problem lies in being able to imagine a conflict that heads neither toward civil war nor toward total incorporation within order. We can say that in modernity this theoretical possibility has never been realized historically. It has remained silent, imprisoned in the impolitical heart of politics, even though it has maintained within itself the unexpressed possibility of nonneutralizable conflict.

The impolitical therefore falls within a genealogical work on the modern political *episteme*, which cannot be considered as a single block but rather as a set of tensions in which, at least theoretically, more than one possibility in relationship to actual history opens up. Essays in *Centauro* had already established the modern as a horizon from which lines may diverge—or at least project—from that dominant one that runs from Hobbes to Hegel. In this sense, we must rethink cues and problems such as the antagonism between order and conflict in Machiavelli, the thought of immanence in Spinoza, the theme of plasticity of humankind in Pico, Giordano Bruno's opening on the infinity of worlds, Vico's idea of catastrophic cycles of history. From this point of view, my work on the impolitical has an element in common with my earlier reading of humanism.¹⁰ Within this frame, at their extremes, the categories of the impolitical and of conflict tend toward each other. We're dealing with the same overall meaning viewed from different angles. Their symmetry, or contiguity, springs from a common laterality in relationship to the prevalent tradition of the modern based on the agreed-upon neutralization of conflict springing from the constitutive relationship between the individual and sovereign order.

Communitas/Immunitas

In relation to the impolitical, the diptych *Communitas: Origine e destino della comunità* and *Immunitas: Protezione e negazione della vita* is no longer projected against the backdrop of the crisis of modernity or the crisis of the political. Starting in the mid-1990s, I turned to what Michel Foucault defined as the “ontology of the present.”¹¹ I ascribe a special importance to this definition since it reverses the general significance of the interrogation of the crisis of modernity up to that moment. I'd given an interpretation of certain historical-conceptual meanings of that crisis. I'd singled out a field—

impolitical, conflict—that couldn't reenter the modern semantic, either as a negative implication or as a presupposition of its concepts. The interrogation of the current moment, on the other hand, freely permits a genealogical gaze at not only the history of concepts but also all knowledge that cast the present in its current form—as this present appears to one who questions it and lives in it as well.¹²

This saggital gaze on the present allows assessment not only of its genealogical depth but also of the political and epistemic alternatives it contains. Within this frame the (nondialectical) relation between *communitas* and *immunitas* represents the first modality of a reflection that carried me from interrogating the impolitical to examining the biopolitical. The impolitical was an analytic of finitude declined in negative terms—in this sense, something not very far from a transcendental category of a Kantian type. When I wrote the introduction for the new edition of *Categorie dell'impolitico* in 1998, I already felt myself within the horizon of ontology. It was the beginning of a new laboratory that retained some elements of the impolitical perspective but pushed the analytic of finitude in the direction of an ontology of relation and change. Though rejecting every reference to values, every subjectivist presupposition, the impolitical still had an ethical imprint, attitude, tonality. The theorization of community, by contrast, has a clear ontological inclination. During this transition, I realized that the philosophy of the impolitical was perhaps the last pledge paid out to the idea of a crisis of modernity that tries to overcome itself, but, for this very reason, remains all the same. This feeling, this possible interpretation, left me at least partially dissatisfied. The impolitical was a reactive and dissenting category that remained entangled in the crisis of modernity. Still, the impolitical posed an important question: what is the structural, constitutive reason for the defective being of modernity, of this impossibility of filling its initial void? At a certain point I started to answer that modernity may have immunized itself against this originary deficiency. To be exact, we can talk about modernity as a determined, historical-categorical apparatus, when a politics directly concentrating on the survival and reproduction of life was invented.

In the transition from an ethical interrogation to an ontological one, we see determined a repositioning of the historical-political reading of modernity as well: modernity doesn't simply start with the institution of a sovereign power, as Hobbes posited, one with the intention of neutralizing—or immunizing—a conflict identified with a state of civil war that precedes politics. Rather, that very modernity, understood as affirmation of sover-

eignty, is the product of this conflict. The relation between community and immunity gives voice to this inversion of perspective. When individuals in a community submit to sovereign power because they realize they can no longer sustain the threats that community poses to itself, we can say that such a community has been immunized. Of course such immunization is hardly definitive because, given the equality of strengths and weaknesses, the conflict starts up again soon enough. This is the fundamental condition for instituting the sovereign pact—but also the principal cause of its destabilization. This conflict is inscribed on the dark heart of the community: it reflects back to a gift—the *munus*—that continually passes from one person to another and belongs to no one permanently. The foundation of *communitas* starts with the ontological debt that constitutes the originary defect, the lack of being, of those who are part of it. The members of the community are all equally at fault. They fail themselves—in the sense that they commit a crime—as all the foundational stories start their narratives with a murder, often between brothers. Under these conditions, the community identity of whoever receives the gift is destabilized and fractured from its origin. Now the sovereign immunizes the community from its own community excess, but he is also the principal actor in this excess.

Community and immunity therefore cannot be considered in two opposing and alternative semantic structures but rather in an ontology of co-involvement and change. Immunization is always relative to community. Like everything else an individual takes part in, community is always immunized in various ways. This involvement between the two concepts isn't a kind of dialectic, because it can't be understood as a relation between two different poles. Therefore it never reaches a definitive synthesis. Immunity and community are the same thing seen from two opposing sides, as a double possibility that is also—always—a double necessity. If community is at least partially immunized in all its historical forms, immunity also has a community side, or tangency. Autoimmunity—that is, the destructive force in the face of an organism that means to protect itself—is only one of the latent possibilities in immunitary practice. In fact, on a biological plane, the immunitary system does not have only a defensive or aggressive capacity. It is also that filter that permits organ transplants as well as birth itself through so-called immune tolerance. Just as one can infer from the sphere of biology the possibility that life, understood in its singularity, may not be exclusively a product of either defense or offense in relation to external agents, so one can also see that life may be the result of self-regulation established by the

immanent norms that govern its development. Still, it would be an error to fix on a symmetry that immediately associates the biological and political horizons in a single plane: politics can't be reduced to the biological measure of life, for fear of its transformation into a thanatopolitical form. In the same way, life can't be completely incorporated into politics to avoid falling into a form of totalitarianism. I would rather consider the coinvolvement of this process in their constitutive asymmetry, oriented toward the constitution of life—whether individual or common—that tries to escape from autoimmunitary logic.

To question modernity genealogically beginning from the ties between community and immunity means, in the end, to bring to light that fundamental ambiguity or aporia, established as fundamental in the rapport between power and life, between biology and politics, that Foucault has described as “the acquisition of power over man insofar as man is a living being,” his claim “that the biological came under State control, that there was at least a certain tendency that leads to what might be termed State control of the biological.”¹³ As I showed in the last section of *Immunitas* and more completely in *Bíos*, Foucault never succeeds in integrating these two perspectives—you see it in the never well-defined rapport between sovereignty and biopolitics. We're in the center of the antinomy of modernity, which I had already identified—albeit in a different way—in my book on the impolitical. My thesis is that in Foucault exists an irresolvable contradiction, because Foucault tends to view the rapport between politics and life as one between two entities already constituted in themselves. He does not interpret it instead as a relation of reciprocal immanence in which one is constitutive of the other. When you think of biopolitics as a relation between two preconstituted entities, you end up overlaying one on the other relation in which one is necessarily the subject and the other subjugated. Here necessity dictates that one leads to a sort of thanatopolitics or in what we might define very nearly as totalitarianism. I think that looking through a genealogical lens, biopolitics may be considered older than the modern, dating back to a coincidence with the birth of the political understood in its valence marked by conflict. But biopolitics finds in the modern paradigm of immunization a fundamental shift that gives it something more and different from Foucault's formulation. Immunity is the power to conserve life. With this paradigm, there is finally a full articulation of the two elements. From this point of view, in modernity biopolitics experiences an intensification—and also a semantic mutation—that renders it radically different from ancient

biopolitics. In Greek sanitary politics and Roman agrarian politics, for example, biopolitics has a partially community structure, turned toward the ties between polis and *civitas*. The modern epoch, by contrast, determines an immunitary impulse that first passes through Hobbes's project of individual salvation but that, following a dramatically discontinuous course, reaches an obsessive syndrome of a thanatopolitical type. This stage provides that the life of one group seems protected by the violent elimination of another, as generally happens with racism or, in an infinitely more violent way, with Nazism. Here I don't want to give the impression that thanatopolitics casts its shadow over the entire spectrum of modernity—as if it were possible to reconceive modernity in a nonhistoricizable ontology in which, from its very beginning, life gets caught up in the mesh of power and crushed. On the contrary, when I speak of the ontological shift from the perspective of the impolitical to that of the biopolitical, I do intend to historicize the political, juridical, and anthropological dispositif of the mutual entanglement of life and politics in the face of very precise historical conditions—even including ruptures between them. In the light of these ruptures, one can argue the differences between the concepts of life and politics in modernity and those of antiquity. But differences also exist within modernity itself, and so we can avoid characterizing all of biopolitics in necessarily negative or thanatopolitical terms. In fact, what interests me is to bring to light the dispositif of coinvolvement and reciprocal change between *communitas* and *immunitas* that is at the foundation of biopolitics. The ontology I'm talking about is a historical ontology, which Foucault defined as “the ontology of the present,” an ontology that doesn't get considered in traditional terms of history of being. It's cast instead in terms of history of the present—or, in other words, of genealogy.

Jacques Derrida's interpretation of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, on New York is one example of the ontology of the present. This event created a crisis—really an explosion—of immunitary defenses of Western political systems. I share the presupposition of this analysis, even though indulging in it may draw out the equivocation of assuming inevitable immunization of a body in relation to autoimmunization, with which, under certain circumstances, this same body might experiment with destructive results. In the analysis of September 11, we run the risk of assigning features of autoimmunization to an entire political regime—in this case, democracy. In this way we would fall into an antinomy analogous to Foucault's analysis of biopolitics, when he superimposes politics on its possible—but never

discounted—thanatopolitical outcomes. In New York, and in London in 2005, liberal democracies recognized a new, tremendous problem: the terrorists aren't aliens; they're citizens educated in Western schools; they speak the same language; they share the same culture, carrying to its extreme the death drive that passes through the community in an excessive, self-sacrificial suicide. In turn, this autoimmunitary crisis of democracy has produced political decisions, such as the preventive war against terrorism and a series of exceptional juridical dispositifs that have partially deprived democratic laws of any national or international authority. Derrida has related this autoimmune disorder of contemporary democracy to a fate that seems to impose suicide on democracy, keeping it from realizing its potential. But if democracy has been autoimmunitary from its beginning, then it is impossible to discount any form that, from time to time, democracy may assume.

Now this shift from ontology to politics conflates a political and juridical dispositif with a thanatopolitical fate of democracy. This consolidation has been going on for centuries but has its own significance in the present. Clearly, we can explain the actual autoimmunitary crisis by citing the weakening of national sovereignties and the spectral return of religion to the heart of political decisions. These decisions deny the life of some while protecting the life of others. But this doesn't demonstrate that the process of autoimmunization always degenerates into an autoimmunitary, suicidal crisis. What counts, even more than analogies, are distinctions. For example, always following Foucault's line of reasoning, we certainly can say that today we live in liberal biopolitical regimes that no longer fit into the frame of what's traditionally understood to be democracy. That is, if we understand democracy as something like equality of subjects—or at least as a theory of subjectivity based on equality—then today we can no longer say that such a regime is real. Whether in a negative or positive sense, contemporary biopolitics is centered more on difference than on equality—as always happens when we deal with live bodies and not abstract subjects of the law.

In a certain sense, this outcome had already been established—even though for other aims—by Carl Schmitt in his important essay about democracy and parliamentarianism in the 1920s.¹⁴ Today we live in liberal regimes of various natures that have little to do with democracy—far removed, at least, from Rousseau's original concept. Even before September 11, we could recognize that immunitary democracy no longer resembled that concept. Naturally I'm not thinking of a totally community regime as an alternative, if we imagine as the alternative the concept of *communitas* in its radical form

of global contamination; in that case it would necessarily be given over to self-destruction. But democracy cannot even be a totally immunized regime, because then the excess of security would lead to a total block and therefore implosion. If, on a conceptual plane, the two alternatives counter one another in their differential clarity, on a historical plane we've always had some form of commingling of the two. We can imagine a democracy with a low immunitary intensity that may offer absolute safety from the risk of the *mumms*. And, in the reverse, we could have a democracy of low community intensity that may give protection from the risk of a suicidal autoimmunization. Securitized—or liberal—democracy functions in just this way: it produces one liberty, destroying another; it protects one part of life, abandoning another to whatever fate. Foucault theorized all this, even though he didn't succeed in pointing out the various paths to this short circuit that brings biopolitics back to its originary antinomy.

Biopolitics

To talk about biopolitics, I'll start from its most complex apex, from what I've defined as affirmative biopolitics. And I'll lay it out in relation to the problem of democracy. To understand the meaning of an expression like "affirmative biopolitics," we must start out from an alternative paradigm that clarifies the philosophical matrix in which it ripened. The affirmative qualities of biopolitics can be understood only by departing from the divergence experienced—not only in the sphere of political philosophy—between an interpretation of processes based on a transcendent approach and another interpretation focusing on immanence. The transcendent—or even the transcendental—perspective always makes reference to an external and superior point of view vis-à-vis the constitution of subjectivity—whether it be of sovereign, state, or party. The division between government and governed remains irreducible in this view. On the other hand, there opens up the possibility of an immanent reading—one that does not accept the idea of a sovereign power that regulates life from the outside. This reading is the only one that conceives the political according to a modality that does not consider philosophy a mere support of practice. Reconsidering the perspective of the impolitical today, I draw a double conclusion. The first is that philosophy can—and should—no longer have a metaphorical and instrumental rapport with politics. Second, today the space of political action falls outside its traditional confines—and lies precisely in the terrain that

has been defined impolitical in various ways. When at last we overcome the barrier that modernity has created between philosophy and politics, and thought recognizes itself radically immersed within a biopolitical horizon, then philosophical reflection acquires a weighty political significance that it did not have before.

I consider this double evaluation the ultimate landing site of my reflection started twenty years ago. At that time, I tended to give the impolitical a predominantly negative representation—as the reverse of modern politics. In the meantime, it became clearer and clearer that the negative of the impolitical had been filled with that object apparently alien to politics—life. The impolitical had been from the beginning a paradigm critical of power—never apologetic or legitimating. But that discourse, justifiably critical of what exists, assumed a potentially affirmative modality when it turned to interrogate the importance assumed today by the dimension of biological life.

By now we've determined a relation of reciprocal immanence and involvement between politics and life that's no longer subject to interpretation by the transcendental philosophy that runs, in various forms, from Kant to Heidegger; instead the line, even though sometimes discontinuous, in its own way, must join Spinoza to Nietzsche. This shift in the axis of categories responds to the clearly visible circumstance that all great questions that have opened up from the 1980s to today arose within the crisis of the state form—questions about sexual difference, immigration, new forms of war, terrorism, and biotechnologies. These questions demonstrate that politics no longer depends on the transcendence of an order governed from above or from outside; rather, they directly address every person's life in its immanent measure. Now that state politics and its principal paradigm—sovereignty—have been placed in serious discussion, the immanence of life is the only dimension in which contemporary politics finds its most essential meaning.

We can understand in this sense Foucault's assertion that politics is always a form of government in confrontation with life. It shouldn't make us think exclusively about power's decisions about life but also about a possible form of self-governing of individuals' own lives. Certainly politics can do nothing but stay within life—this is what *immanence* means.¹⁵ It isn't possible to think of politics and life outside their rapport with one another. That great transformation I have been describing has been generated by the yielding of dialectic categories of mediation and recomposition that have structured politics since the dawn of modernity. Government, organization, and form are nothing but articulations of the plane of immanence, along which life

enters into rapport with politics. In this sense, philosophy itself becomes a form of the political, a practice. If the impolitical inaugurated a season in which philosophy took on itself the task of making politics, albeit in a negative sense, biopolitics affirms that there exists a politics of philosophy. To make politics of—or in—philosophy is exactly the contrary of vindicating the role of political philosophy.

When I proposed the definition of affirmative biopolitics in *Bíos*, I intended to point out a possible way of overcoming Foucault's antinomy between politics of life and thanatopolitics; I turned toward another horizon of thought at whose center was an idea of porous democracy, facing its external limits. This would be a democracy with low immunitary intensity, whose forms might always be objects of innovation and self-control. I am thinking about institutional modalities that not only support but may actually be produced by politics *of* life rather than politics *on* life. With this formula I intended to root Foucault's conflict between biopower and biopolitics within life—that is, within that immanent horizon in which *communitas* and *immunitas* are always intertwined. In the category of affirmative biopolitics this coinvolvement gets read from another angle: that of the relation between life and norm, individuality and community, institutions and liberty—paying strict attention to avoid considering these terms as opposing polarities but as elements that interact in the same immanent process with political forms.

When we speak of the affirmative qualities of biopolitics, we situate politics in a horizon of innovation and production—not different from what Machiavelli did in his own way. From this point of view, I maintain we may imagine an immunity—one labeled positive—that would, on one hand, deliver life from the mortal dangers that lie in wait for it and, on the other, push it in a direction different from destructive results toward which its own autoimmunitary tendencies—and temptation—drag it. It's not a given that conflict, which is at the basis of every definition of politics, may be assimilated into a generalized state of war, into a state of permanent exception, and may, on its own account, impede the realization of democracy. Conflict can also be productive of new possibilities and horizons for democracy. To theorize this possibility, we must enter into the logic of the conflict itself—in the sense that we must deconstruct the thanatopolitical dispositifs in action, pointing out their genealogical relations with the structure they derive from. But we cannot delude ourselves that a dialectic reversal from negative to positive immunity can resolve the problems. In the ontology of the present

I'm trying to think, the dimension of conflict is not canceled out; rather it's transported to a productive, not self-destructive, ground.

In *Communitas* and *Immunitas* the discourse was still focused on an idea of community understood to depart from its constitutive deficiency. It was the final outcome of a deconstruction of modern concepts that tried to determine an outside of politics, representing this outside as a kind of line, or even an empty center, understood as individual—or even collective—nonbeing in the relation. With *Bíos*, by contrast, my objective was to demonstrate that this emptiness, this outside of politics, is not necessarily subject to the thanatopolitical outcomes of immunization. It's instead rich in affirmative possibilities; it's rooted in life according to the immanent declension that first Nietzsche and then, in other ways, Foucault and Deleuze gave it. The background against which this last transition took place was the interrogation of thanatopolitics—especially the Nazi version, which was the most radically negative expression of immunization. My intention was to open up a series of passages into the historical dispositifs that had pushed biopolitics to such lethal results until I could think of *bios* as form of life in common, knowing that meant rethinking democracy itself in the end.

In *Bíos* I articulated this form of common life in terms of birth, individuation, and constituent power. The category of birth should be understood not only as the origin of a living being but also as the capacity of life itself to continually start over from itself, producing new forms—whether in individuals or in multiplicity. As first formulated by Georges Canguilhem and then by Gilbert Simondon, the theory of individuation can be tied to that theory of event that links Bergson to Deleuze in the sphere of thought on immanence. The question of constituent power must ultimately be considered in light of the fact that today—in contrast to what happened in the epoch of modern politics—we're not dealing with establishing states or peoples. Today what politics constitutes—being in its turn constituted out of it—is life, in the sense that life is what produces conflicts and institutions. Its field of action is political, economic, and technical individuation on an individual or collective level. From a strictly philosophical point of view, this idea of form of life in common breaks with the paradigm of historicity or destiny, established by Heidegger with the second part of *Being and Time*. I will limit the term *destiny* (*Geschick*) to *Being and Time*, even though in succeeding works, *Geschick* and *Schicksal*, destiny takes on a wider meaning. Heidegger designates destiny as “*Dasein*'s primordial historizing, which lies in authen-

tic resoluteness.”¹⁶ This decision permits *Dasein* to historicize itself in the sense that it rejoins its destiny—death—and, in this way, it “*bands itself down* to itself, free for death, in a possibility which it has inherited and yet has chosen.”¹⁷ This complicated game of destination of being-toward-death and of repetition, or transmission of death in the moment when *Dasein* decides for its own existence, imposes a paradigm of presupposition according to which every opening to the future can exist as such only if it roots itself in a form of inheritance of the past. In this way, the future is made possible only by a hereditary transmission of what is contained in the origin—even if this transmission is subsequently thought about in the form of absence or withdrawal. What stays unchanged is the political declension of this paradigm of the presupposition by which the paradigm is thought—whether it be individual destiny or common destiny of the German people. In this case, life takes the form of repetition of an origin that signals in advance the destiny of a community of people. So the glorious future of Germany is conditioned by an elaboration of an inheritance—originally descended from Greece—passed down from an immemorial past.

In contrast to this philosophical declension of life in common in whatever common destiny or community of people, I believe that affirmative biopolitics goes in exactly the opposite direction: one that breaks the historicizing chain whose premise dictates that the future is shaped by beginning from its originary supposition. Repetition does not realize a common destiny for a people but rather the singularity of everyone’s life. That implies that life in common must be thought of outside the modern presupposition of its origin, just as democracy must renounce the idea of bringing up to date a transcendental order. Placing the problem of order before democracy means reaffirming the Hobbesian canon according to which politics is only conceivable from the starting point of security. So to pose the problem of origin to singularity of life means to reaffirm that what comes first—and remains the same forever—is the common destiny of a people with respect to who lives in the present and for the present. This reasoning has an immediate effect on politics: the overturning of the historical plane on which Heidegger constructed the immanence of life permits us to think about a democracy that’s not presupposed but rather opened up to continual innovation. There could be a democracy imagined on the basis of the affirmation of birth and not the repetition of death. Life is no longer what repeats the destiny of man, which is death, but instead what affirms the event of birth in its singularity.

Here stands the difference between affirmative biopolitics and thanatopolitics: the latter is constructed around the obsessive requirement to safeguard life from the death to which it is promised. Thinking about politics starting from the idea of birth means not going back to origin; on the contrary, it establishes a dimension of event renewed from time to time, uprooted from every presupposed antecedent. In the same way, thinking about conflict and democracy together signifies freeing the dimension of conflict from the modern supposition about order. If anything, it's order that is realized as the basis of the emergencies that crop up in life from time to time.

The reference to the element of birth and individuation—to life's capacity to be reborn and renewed—can't be carried through to a new theory of human or subjective rights. Rather the perspective of affirmative biopolitics involves a deconstruction of the idea of a subject of law and even of law as such. The juridical *dispositif* is always a *dispositif* of parts—partial—so law is always in a certain sense private—and privative—even if we are dealing with what we call public law. It inevitably implies a dividing and excluding line between who has rights and who, instead, is deprived of them. We deal with an essentially separating *dispositif*. This is much more so with respect to individual rights. The theory of individuation, on the other hand, is not reconcilable with the concept of individual as predefined entity. Simondon, Canguilhem, and Deleuze have quarreled with the idea of an individual closed in himself and ontologically separated from others. That attitude opens a compelling interrogative of the category of individual rights as they are thought about in the liberal tradition. Luhmann defines these rights as the immunitary system of social systems. These rights must be rethought beginning with a philosophy of justice in whose center stands the idea of relation. This idea allows us to imagine the coinvolvement of birth, individuation, and constitutive power of life within the form of the common. The theory of individuation is what ultimately characterizes biopolitics in an affirmative light and places the political forms of democracy in relation to the living being, to the immunitary apparatus, and to the community. In other words, affirmative biopolitics turns to a form of life that places in tension—even in conflict—these diverse dimensions of individuation of life in its communal force. Here conflict is not synonymous with violence—but instead with the production of structural transformations.

Impersonal

All I've discussed requires a radical rethinking of the political categories that we have at our disposal. Through this lens, another, analogous concept—sovereignty—should be subjected to the same critical inquiry to which I subjected the concept of person in *Terza persona*. And the same discourse should be applied to the category of representation. In short, to maintain that the entire political lexicon of modernity must be rethought is no formula like any other. Instead it responds to an exigency hidden from the twentieth century up to now—which, from Schmitt to Heidegger on, has seen technology as the ultimate dimension of politics, as the very thing that has caught up modernity in a horizon of catastrophe. Unlike the philosophy of immanence, this philosophy does not understand that, beyond technology, there is the exigency of life, which becomes the new central reference point that includes technology. Today, from a political point of view, there is no discussion of the distribution and balance of power—in other words, the idea of representation. The dialectic between liberty and authority is not even in play. What's in play is the definition of what life is on an individual or collective plane. The same ruling groups who have organized the politics of what we call empire have understood this well. Even leaving out the often thanatopolitical modes with which these groups express this exigency, the principal question remains for them the survival of life and the security of the population. Today what strikes me as completely out of the game is continuing to press politics on the question of representation. All that is truly over.

On a not merely categorical plane, affirmative biopolitics necessarily passes through a deconstruction of biopolitical categories in action. In its most radical meaning, deconstruction is politics of philosophy, or philosophical practice, that serves to define the genealogy of the present. In this case, it passes through a reversal of thanatopolitical categories carried to their extreme by Nazism. In *Bíos*, this hypernegative referent served to give me a necessary point of contrast because Nazism, unlike liberal-democratic regimes, had thought through the rapport between life and politics. Fifty years after Nietzsche, Nazism had theorized that politics isn't thinkable, and operable, outside of life. Today this element is being taken up again and overturned. In *Bíos*, affirmative biopolitics must be thought within the reversal of three major political paradigms of Nazism: the enclosure of life in the organic body is opposed by the postphenomenological—but also post-Christian—

concept of flesh; the reduction of life under the domination of a single transcendent norm opposed by an immanent normativization of life that dates back to Spinoza; the anticipated suppression of birth by means of negative eugenics opposed by a politics of birth already foreshadowed in some ways by Hannah Arendt.

The discourse on the impersonal that, for now, brings to a close the journey of my reflection implicitly reenters this horizon. From its origin, negative biopolitics is founded on the separation between life and body. The notion of person expresses this separation to the degree that it distinguishes juridical subjectivity from the body, thus dividing within *bios* one privileged zone from the other, subjugated zone of life. The critique of the idea of person that moves in the direction of the impersonal is one of the most powerful openings for discourse on affirmative biopolitics; it places in discussion the paradigmatic axis on which modern politics is founded, starting from its deepest classical roots. This does not mean that the impersonal may show in a normative way what affirmative biopolitics is. We're dealing here with an open horizon. Moreover, if I were to provide a normative version of affirmative biopolitics, I'd return to situating biopolitics in a transcendental dimension. That politics inscribes itself into a genealogy of immanence means that it can no longer be normative in the abstract. Immanence does in fact reveal itself from time to time—and always in a different way—departing from the situation in which it's realized, never from norms that apply. For example, saying that the immunitary system isn't always—and only—negative, even if it often ends up that way, means that we undo the presumed superimposition of biopolitics and thanatopolitics.

All this, anticipated in *Immunitas*, stands at the center of *Bíos*. In relation to them, *Terza persona* positions itself within the same problematic orbit. *Terza persona* manages a double step ahead, or to one side: on one hand, in relation to the question of subjectivity—or, better still, the processes of subjectivization—and, on the other hand, to the problem of historicity and, especially, to the antinomic relationship between continuity and discontinuity. The first point has to do with seeing the performative concept of *dispositif*. The *dispositif* of *person* is neither a concept nor even a category; it's a *dispositif* that produces real effects. The first of these is to hide its effects in the personalistic rhetoric that today is reaching its apex. Let's be clear: my book does not contest the various discourses focusing on emancipation that have brought back the value, dignity, and individuality of the human person since the Second World War—and today more than ever. But it does contest

this semantic connection between person and man. In reality, I go back to the double genealogy of the term *person*—the Roman juridical model and the Christian of a theological brand. I've tried to prove that its dispositif unifies the subject furnished with personal quality and the living being in which it's installed—but always within the form of their presupposed separation. And that the original performance—whether theological or juridical—of the dispositif of person lies exactly in the capacity to define the threshold of division and exclusion within *bios* between the fully human life—endowed with rational and moral signs of the person—and a life of bestial nature subjugated to it.

Despite their enormous historical, categorical, and semantic distance from one another, Roman and even modern law give, consciously or unconsciously, meaning to the notion of person with this result of separation—a result that renders the practice of something like human rights unthinkable today because it is structurally aporetic. Moreover, the Christian conception of the Incarnation, Christianity's most extraordinary legacy, implies the simultaneous presence in Christ of two natures—one divine, the other human. These two natures aren't only structurally different but also furnished with different value. Within each human being, the immortal soul and the mortal body subjected and subordinated to it are similarly different and given disparate value. If we return to the insoluble relation between subjectification and subjugation as theorized by Foucault during the 1970s, we recognize the exact role played by the dispositif of the person: it's to create subjectivity—even juridical subjectivity—through a practice of subjectification, or objectification, of one zone against the other within each living being, and therefore also between men capable of governing their own bodies, on the one hand, and, on the other, those considered incapable of doing so, and who thus are cast into the sphere of animals.

This double, intersecting process of subjectification and animalization is reconstructed through the contamination of various languages—from philosophy to anthropology to linguistics and finally, naturally, to law and politics. That calls into question the way in which the apparatus of the humanities performs. These fields themselves can't be understood as neutral disciplines. Rather, they're sites for the production of a concept of humanity that's tied to specific logics of power and, better still, biopower, along the naturally broken line that runs from the great biologist Bichat to contemporary bioethics. Naturally, the construction of discourse runs not only on a diverse disciplinary course but also along a quite profound diachronic axis; it

imposes a fine-tuning of a so-called methodological character, relative to the question of continuity and discontinuity. My effort has been to superimpose them—placing them in tension with one another—within a single gaze capable of taking in each within the other. That implies a conception of history of a stratified type that may see within itself the simultaneous presence of different times. Without forgetting the “future past” Reinhardt Koselleck talks about, this reference turns above all to the genealogy of Nietzsche and to the archaeological method of Benjamin when, especially in *The Arcades Project*, he goes researching the originary fragments fixed in the heart of modernity.¹⁸ Naturally the antinomic connection singled out by Freud between *familiar* and *foreign* lies in this constellation of thought. It’s especially important in relation to the circumstance in which the past—especially a denied or repressed past—returns in the present with a phantasmic or spectral force that carries us back to Foucault’s connection between bio- and thanatopolitics. It’s precisely in this anachronic and anachronistic way the archaic dispositif of the person returns to the center of contemporary experience with power to separate and exclude. Naturally, if we want to pick up on its exigency, we have to cast an oblique, sagittal gaze capable of singling out, from time to time, the nonhistorical, or hyperhistorical, elements that run through and unhinge history.

And so it is that I come to the latest part of my work, which is still being fully developed: in opposition to the categorical and hierarchical effect of the dispositif of the person, I’ve proposed a philosophy of the impersonal, as much as it is possible to draw out the impersonal from the most advanced experiences of contemporary reflection (but of art as well). I’ve substantially created it along three paths, within three semantic horizons. These are themselves anything but internally homogeneous, but all refer in some way to that third person which Émile Benveniste already defines as the nonpersonal—exactly impersonal—of the person. The first leads off with the idea of justice. Already in his *Outline of a Phenomenology of Right*, Alexandre Kojève alludes to justice as the only sphere in which the third—understood as an exteriority that cuts off every personal interest—won’t be only the judge, but so will anyone else who casts a glance toward a post-historical condition in which humankind will rediscover its original, animal dimension. But it’s Simone Weil who makes the impersonal a sacred point of view that, through radical deconstruction, recognizes the separating power of the person. It’s further testimony to the intrahistorical connection between the ancient and the contemporary, as well as to the violent resurgence of the

original in modern times, that Weil singles out, with absolute lucidity, Roman juridical culture at the beginning of that excluding dispositif implicit in the personalistic declension of modern law. From this point of view, I find a thread of discourse that, starting from *Categorie dell'impolitico*, runs through the intersection of *communitas* and *immunitas* and arrives at my most recent texts: for her to support the primacy of justice over the law means not only to look at the modern political from its impolitical side; it also proposes a communal (*comuniale*)—because neither immunitary nor immunizing—conception of the relation among men.

The second vector of meaning in the philosophy of the impersonal came to me from a series of authors—from Robert Musil on—who had practiced a neutral approach to writing, as it delves into that dialogic word which, in current speech, ties the first and second person in a rapport of interlocution. In twentieth-century philosophy, Maurice Blanchot cast himself as witness to such a lateral passage that decentered the narrative voice, espousing literary work continually in exile from itself. With Blanchot, we're by now far from the mystical result of Weil's experiment; we're instead handed over to a movement of depersonalization that, before any consideration of community, looks at language in its constitutive relationship with silence—not only with the end of the identification of the subjects of action with themselves but also with the aphony of narrative voice covered over by the anonymous murmuring of events. In political interventions of the 1950s and 1960s, Blanchot practiced within his work collective an anonymous form of protest in which all individuals' voices were inextricably mixed with the voices of all others up to the point of losing all proper names. In political action, as in writing, what counts is the impersonality of an event shared by all but belonging to no one. This happens when “it rains” (*piove*) or “one dies” (*si muore*).

Above all, Blanchot thinks about the impersonal from the point of view of death, in a form that lies in some ways within the Heideggerian horizon. Foucault and Deleuze bring the impersonal back to the form of life. The reverse of “one dies,” thought from the perspective of whatever transcends us in whatever way, is “one lives” (*si vive*), the central—but also decentered—place from which we'd taken off. This is the ultimate and definitive deviation in relation from the thought of ontological difference still present in authors, like Derrida, who have still thought after Heidegger. We've already seen what may be the role of life within the conception of Foucault—even in life's

rapport with politics. It's simultaneously the site of the exercise of sovereign power—but also the site of ultimate resistance to it. It's precisely where we may recognize the impersonal dimension as opposed to the juridical form, which, at the origin of the modern, Hobbes had tied to the sovereign person capable of representing all who transferred their own rights to him in exchange for his protection. How clearly, then, can we say to Deleuze that his essential service to philosophy may be exactly in the deconstruction of the category, or dispositif, of the person in every sphere—psychoanalytic, literary, political. His call to “become animal” constitutes the most intense way to cut the knot that inextricably ties the figure of the person to the practice of subordination and exclusion of those who place themselves, or get placed, outside its limits. In a theological, philosophical, and juridical tradition that has always thrust one part of humanity into the dimension of bestiality, the revindication of animal nature as the most intimate nature of every man shatters the interdiction that has always governed us. Such a vindication of the impersonal in, or of, the person may be the point at which the philosophy of immanence becomes one with the shift from philosophy meditating on death to philosophy reflecting on life already under way with Spinoza and followed by Nietzsche. But how the impersonal may be able to see itself in a new form of biopolitical democracy—or of affirmative biopolitics—is a question that concerns not only my future work but all contemporary thought.

Notes

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- 1 Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues*.
- 2 See Gentili, *La crisi del politico*.
- 3 Cacciari, *Krisis*; Cacciari, *Pensiero negativo e razionalizzazione*. See also Cacciari, *Sull'autonomia del politico*; and Cacciari, “Law and Justice,” 173–98.
- 4 See Fraenkel, Arrigo, and Vardaro, *Laboratorio Weimar*; Marramao, “Teoria della crisi e problema dello Stato”; Marramao, “Technica sociale”; Marramao, *Tecnologia e potere nelle società post-liberali*; Duso, *La politica oltre lo stato*; Galli, *Genealogia della politica*; Bolaffi, *Il crepuscolo della sovranità*.

- 5 See Bodei, Borso, and Tronti, *Società politica e Stato in Hegel, Marx e Gramsci*; Duso, *Weber*; and Bodei, *Geometria delle passioni*.
- 6 See Negri, *Spinoza*; Negri, *Subversive Spinoza*; and Negri, *The Savage Anomaly*.
- 7 See De Giovanni, Esposito, and Zarone, *Divenire della ragione moderna*; and De Giovanni, “‘Politica’ dopo Cartesio,” in Gentili, *La crisi del politico*.
- 8 See Biagio De Giovanni, “Al tempo de ‘il Centauro,’” in Gentili, *La crisi del politico*.
- 9 Esposito, *Categorie dell’impolitico*.
- 10 See Esposito, *La politica e la storia*; and Esposito, *Ordine e conflitto*.
- 11 Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, 95.
- 12 Foucault has defined philosophy as “the problematization of a present [*attualità*], and as the questioning by the philosopher of this present to which he belongs and in relation to which he has to situate himself.” In this “ontology of the present [*attualità*],” or of “the present,” philosophy is “the discourse of modernity on modernity.” See Foucault, “The Art of Telling the Truth,” 88. The first Italian translation of this important intervention was published, under the editorship of Giacomo Marramao, with the title “Che cos’è l’illuminismo? Che cos’è la rivoluzione?” On the relation between the ontology of the present, on the one hand, and, on the other, the exercise of the critique of the governance of our life in the present, see Foucault, “The Subject and Power.” See also Foucault, “Illuminismo e critica.”
- 13 Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*,” 239–40.
- 14 Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*.
- 15 See Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life.” On the genealogy of immanence, see Ciccarelli, *Immanenza*.
- 16 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 435.
- 17 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, emphasis in original.
- 18 Koselleck, *Futures Past*; Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*.