

POINTS OF VIEW

A DOUBLE READING OF THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY TERMS: MEANING AND DIFFERENCE*

A DIALOGUE:
VIORELLA MANOLACHE** – IAN BROWNE***

Imposing the temptation of *(re)conferring a position upon* and *(re)analyzing the unexpected sense (meaning) of political philosophy*, this clarifying dialogue takes into consideration any establishing evidence serving to either confirm or negate the three main directions deduced from within an alloy of interrelating domains; *can philosophy still project a privileged direction? What is the degree of synchronization between the political (with all its inherent problems) and philosophy?* and *What is lost and what is gained from the mixture of two domains already placed inside a welding of political philosophy?*

Such a general frame of discussion will be pinpointed by differences/particularities arising from the direction of Esposito's *difference*, a trademark of Italian *thought/philosophy/political philosophy*, which, appropriating a contrasting position in regard to any blocking and exhausting continental analytical philosophy by including it in the segment of linguistic crossroads (exemplified by Heideggerian closures of exalted language, by rigorous rules belonging to Wittgenstein-ian language games or deconstructionist textualism) abandons the recurring typology of existing tradition, but still accepts any semantic commuters.

Roberto Esposito offers an urgent invigoration of philosophy from within linguistic grounds, by/from acknowledging the lexical flow which explains the actual sense of *political philosophy terms*, as a unifying and narrative way of historically explaining modern political events, as well as approaching the concept of history and the notion of specificity as applied to the present, or as an interference between *community, immunity and bio-politics*.

Hence the particular answer offered and synthesized by the *Angelaki* publication, offering on – file answers to fundamental questions, with positioning roles towards an external (outside Italian space – that is, English translations) reception

* The present dialogue is a part of a forthcoming volume authored by Viorella Manolache, approaching *Ecce Philosophia Politica. Roberto Esposito's "Difference"*.

** Scientific Researcher III, PhD, Institute of Political Sciences and International Relations "Ion I.C. Brătianu", Romanian Academy, Bucharest, Romania; vio_s13@yahoo.com; viorella.manolache@ispri.ro.

*** Researcher and Translator; studied at Churchill College, University of Cambridge and at St. Andrews University, Scotland; ianbrowne1311@gmail.com.

Pol. Sc. Int. Rel., XIII, 2, pp. 123–138, Bucharest, 2016.

of Esposito's concepts; *What type of politics can a philosopher offer? Is Esposito an artisan of philosophical – can political solutions sediment upon an apolitical soil, or upon post – political grounds?*

Following Esposito's own recommendation in *Living Thought: The Origins and Actuality of Italian Philosophy* (2012) in which he advocates offering increased importance to English language anthologies (edited and published in the last 25 years, with particular emphasis upon the last three years, starting from 2012) addressing Italian philosophy, the present dialogue – *centered* upon the terms of political philosophy and *laterally positioned* within a clarification of Espositian *terms* (via Italian – English – Romanian) – brings face-to-face, in a *double, Romanian – British interpretation*, both the common *terms* and the specific *idioms*, with direct stakes in the reception, use and explanation (be it identical or differing) of political *philosophy concepts*.

Viorella Manolache: What is the individualizing status, received from within the sense of *term/terms*, and related to the possible alternatives: *concept – category – argument?*

Ian Browne: From an analytic perspective, there is something strange about Esposito's enquiry into the ontological status of community. His conclusions are philosophical, as they relate to ontology, and the nature of what it is to be a community, but it proceeds in ways that are at odds with traditional analytical approaches.

Typically, proceeding in a Fregean manner, analytic approaches would look at the truth conditions of sentences about communities. Or, proceeding in a more Wittgenstein-ian manner, they would examine the way in which we actually talk about communities, trying to find similarities in how we use the word 'community', and trying to find "family resemblances" between words like 'community', 'in common', 'communal' and so on, sensitive to overlapping usages as well as to differences in usage. That all the words in the same "family" may have a common ancestor is not necessarily pertinent to how we use them now, to what 'community' means, and hence to what community is.

Esposito proceeds in a very different way. He adopts an etymological approach, trying to find the common ancestor that links all the words in the "family". In this sense, what Esposito is doing is not analyzing concepts, but examining the roots of concepts. But although he starts from an etymological position, his aim is not etymological – it is ontological. He isn't looking for historical roots or historical origins, but for non-historical origins found by examining semantic roots. What is revealed as an ontological truth about the *category* of community is established by an etymological enquiry into the *concept* of community.

In this way concept, category and argument function in Esposito's thought in different ways from how they function in analytic approaches. To appreciate the way Esposito's arguments function it is important to remember that his intentions are almost always ontological and not conceptual. He wants to know what it is *to be* a community, not what our concept of community refers to.

V.M. Esposito's score is reinvigorated by the (diachronically-synthetic) principle of creative polarization, and this *difference/particularity* serves to re-affix relationships between *origin – actuality* and *difference – normativity*. For Esposito, actuality/"today" represents a center of frontal confrontation between different (opposed) perspectives, placing thought processes upon *the mobile frontier* (please read this as *philosophy's own place* – a horizon impregnated by sense and its own contemporary destiny) delineating an inside and an outside; between *process* and *event*, between *real* and *possible*. The "Ontology of Actuality" guides us through a *different way of reading and deciphering reality*.

How can one define the terms *actual* and *actuality*?

I.B. For Esposito, the origin of community lies in conflict. And that conflict is transmitted from origin to all subsequent realizations of community, no matter what specific political form they may take. "The idea that conflict is constitutive of order... signals the emergence of an origin in history, of which it tends to seek – unsuccessfully – to rid itself. The origin cannot be eliminated by an order that... derives from conflict and that, indeed, continues incessantly to reproduce it"¹.

The immunitarian nature of society, a division into what is included and what is excluded, a Schmittian division of the world into friend and enemy has a conflictual logic built into it. The translator offers an explanation of the Italian term *attualità* which suggests that it means, amongst other things, a thought in action, a politically engaged thought, which is relevant to its time.

Because community is founded upon conflict, actuality therefore must incorporate conflict. Whether this conflict is affirmative or negative, energetic or entropic "depends on the relationship that the actuality establishes with its own original provenance. In the first case, when recognized as a vital potency, the origin shows its positive side; in the second, when rejected as such, it returns in a phantasmal form"².

So, for Esposito, actualism, engaging in examining the nature of community and its relation to the origin, means taking a normative view of the nature of society. The immunitary character of society is, for Esposito, inescapable. Contemporary problems arise when "modernity... imagined it could break the constitutive link with the origin – and move life into an area protected from its dangers and resources". That is to say, when modern political societies seek to protect those who fall into the Schmittian category of friend, and seek to immunize themselves from those who fall into the Schmittian category of enemy, which at its limit point represents the sort of thanatopolitics embodied by the Nazi regime.

V.M. Within the tri-phased registry of *conflict immanentization* – a *historicization of the non – historical* and a *mundanization of any subject*, Esposito argues that the non – historical, antagonism and non-subjectivity are external constructs in regard to the main philosophical body.

¹ Esposito, Roberto, *Living Thought – The Origins and Actuality of Italian Philosophy*, Trans. Zakiya Hanafi, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2012, p. 24.

² Esposito, *Living Thought*, p. 267.

Read in a post-humanist key, what is the specific difference between *non-historical*, *an-historical*, *de-historicization*?

I.B. Esposito is concerned with the relation between the origin of community and the history of societies. This raises the problem, not simply of the origins of community, but of the relationship between Esposito's conception of community and the philosophical justification for societies that have existed throughout history. But the historicisation of the non-historical relates specifically to the relation between the origin of community and human history.

Within philosophical thinking about the justification of society, there exists a long tradition of what Robert Nozick has described as "fact defective" accounts of the origins of society³. We are, as Jeremy Waldron points out, unlikely to regard the idea of an original social contract as a really valid historical hypothesis. No group of primitive people sat around, in the time before history began, debating how best to organize society and considering what acceptance and rejection of its newly- created rules might mean for social membership.

"To the extent that it is used at all, the social contract is understood as a purely hypothetical construction: not an assumption of fact but, as Kant described it, 'merely an *idea* of reason' that generates the basis of a normative standard for testing laws and social arrangements. We do not ask whether the arrangements were in fact agreed to; we ask instead whether they *could have been* agreed to by people working out the basis of a life together under conditions of initial freedom and equality"⁴.

The continued engagement with the relation between origin and history which Esposito discusses is a familiar one within philosophy. However, Esposito's approach is quite different to that adopted by philosophers examining the merits of social contract theories. Esposito is not interested in the justifications for society and for having one set of rules rather than another, such as provides the locus of the debate between Nozick and Rawls. Esposito wants to use the question of origin to offer a theory about the ontological status of community.

For Esposito, all communities, whatever their character, must arise out of a certain condition, which involves a reduction or loss of subjectivity, and that loss of subjectivity is carried from the origin into the history and nature of the communities that are the historical successors of this 'original community'. What underpin Esposito's approach is his conception of subjectivity and the inescapability of certain kinds of relationships in a community which must undermine subjectivity. This is the ontological fact that we can establish by considering the nature of the 'original community'.

Esposito considers that, since all communities must have this character, it is, as it were, a historical fact that the original community had this character. But we know nothing that counts as a historical or anthropological fact about this

³ Nozick, Robert, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, Wiley-Blackwell, New Ed edition, 2001.

⁴ Waldron, Jeremy, 'John Locke: social contract versus political anthropology', in Boucher, David and Kelly, Paul (eds.), *The Social Contract from Hobbes to Rawls*, Routledge, London, 1994.

originary period which is, as Esposito says, both historical and unhistorical. This originary element, an opaque, semi natural, historically intractable element⁵, “which is nonhistorical – and, given its purely living dimension, even incompatible with the process of historicisation – never completely fades away, but rather, moves in a covert fashion, so to speak, into history itself”⁶.

As for the variety of communities that are found in history, they arise in their turn from a variety of origins. Community “does not have a single origin”. The positing of a single origin is to engage in the ahistoricity of the origin, is to offer an account of devoid of historicisation, an account which fails to incorporate the specifics of historical events. While perhaps not entirely in accord with the sense in which Esposito uses the terms ‘non-historical’ and ‘ahistorical’, we could see Locke’s theory of the social contract as non-historical – something that postulates an origin for social rules, rules being something that any society must have in order to count as a society, that is not offered as a historical account; and we could see Locke’s theory of the origin of property as ahistorical – an account of something which posits a quasi-historical account, the ‘mixing’ of one’s labour with something, as a single origin for a complex set of evolving conceptions of what property is.

The historicisation of the non-historical should not be an attempt to transform the non-historical into the historical. In Esposito’s theory, a legitimate approach to the historicisation of the non-historical would be the attempt to show how the non-historical, while standing outside history, “moves in a covert fashion, so to speak, into history itself”⁷, thereby providing a way of understanding the relation between origin and history, between beginning and development.

V.M. Changing grammatical values but maintaining root values – with a particular interest in studying terms such as *subject – subjectivity – subjectification; individual – individuality – to individuate; immune – immunity – immunization*, only serves to *re-attract* terms from within the syntax of political philosophy *more towards philosophy than towards politics* – or does it merely offer a surfeit of its own particular sense?

I.B. What lies at the heart of Esposito’s argument is an account of the root values of the term ‘community’, with the idea of *munus*, gift, playing the central role in his account of community. This etymological enquiry provides the material for an account of the essential nature of community as involving a diminution or lack in the area of subjectivity. Using an account of the root values of ‘community’ Esposito moves from etymology to ontology, a move which permits him to offer a philosophical account of community. By ontology Esposito intends the question of what it is to be something – in this case what it is to be a community.

This differs from the traditional analytic approach which is concerned with conceptual analysis. Conceptual analysis is not concerned with the root value, *munus*, but with the question of what ‘community’ means – that is, establishing

⁵ *Living Thought*, p. 27.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of the term – a formula of the kind⁸:

x is a community if and only if x has properties $F_1 \dots F_n$

Where the traditional analytic approach is adopted, there is no reason why there should be any connection, in terms of meaning, between two terms which share the same root. So it's perfectly feasible that there may be two entirely different formulas for words with the same root, for example, 'community' and 'common':

(1) x is a community if and only if x has properties $F_1 \dots F_n$

(2) x is common if and only if x has properties $G_1 \dots G_n$

where the conditions of application that fill the gap $F_1 \dots F_n$ have no connection with the conditions of application that fill the gap $G_1 \dots G_n$.

So this sort of analytical approach looks for differences in meaning. It looks to disambiguate terms. For example, where Esposito's etymological approach looks for links between common, in the sense of vulgarity or lack of taste, and community, an analytical approach will look to disambiguate the former term in order to show that common in the sense of vulgarity or lack of taste has very different conditions of application from community – that there is no connection between $F_1 \dots F_n$ (community) and $G_1 \dots G_n$ (common).

In contrast to the analytical approach, Esposito is very clear about finding similarities between community and common in the sense of vulgarity or lack of taste: "It's useful here to consider that *communis* (always referring to its earliest meaning) meant in addition to "vulgar" and "of the people," also "impure": "dirty services" [*sordida munera*]... If the community belongs to us as our deepest and most proper root, we can, in fact we must, find it again or reproduce it, in line with its originary essence"⁹.

This difference in approach is related to the difference between analysis and ontology, both legitimate philosophical projects. However there is difference and it relates to the manner of engaging politically with the present. While an analytical approach lends itself to no particular ideological form of political engagement, as at the level of analysis it is neutral between political affiliations, it engages directly with existing forms of political organisation. Esposito's approach is normative, looking not so much at how terms are used but at how they should be used if we are to understand community correctly¹⁰.

⁸ Leaving aside the question what combination of conjunction, disjunction and negation might precede the properties which fill the space between F_1 and F_n .

⁹ Esposito, Roberto, *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*, Trans. Timothy C. Campbell, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2010, p. 16.

¹⁰ "The community isn't translatable into a political-philosophical lexicon except by completely distorting (or indeed perverting) it". Esposito, *Communitas*, p. 1.

V.M. Is there any sensible, noticeable difference between *the power of origin* and *the originating force*?

I.B. Esposito makes the assumption that we need an account of the origin of community. This is by no means obvious. For Aristotle, for example, there does not need to be any account of the origin of community. Man is a political animal and can only achieve his natural end in a community. For Aristotle, the existence of a goal, flourishing as the natural end of man, obviates the need for an account of origin. For Aristotle it would be the absence of community, not its existence which would need to be explained.

But Esposito's account of origin is neither political nor anthropological. The power of origin isn't the power to explain the structure of society, in the way that the phantasm of a historical account by the Marquis de Boulainvilliers offers an account of the origin of the community of the French¹¹. As always with Esposito, two ideas lie behind much of his thinking – ontology and subjectivity. So for Esposito, the nature of origin is ungraspable, it “is prehistoric” – situated prior to history – (and) must be understood in the literal sense that it is not representable by any of the historically formed languages. It always comes before the beginning¹². This origin “is not located in the founding will of a group of subjects; but rather, in the depths of an animal life that breaks through the confines of human consciousness, connecting it with something preceding it and going beyond it”¹³.

In this sense, which relates to ontology and subjectivity, the power of origin and the originating force relate to essentially the same idea, the idea of how community, “by separating life from the body, causes its original substance to be lost”¹⁴.

V.M. What about *own (personal) and ownership*?

I.B. One of the central ideas of Esposito's thought is subjectivity, and the diminution of subjectivity involved in entering into a community. “The subjects of community are united by an ‘obligation,’ in the sense that we say ‘I owe *you* something,’ but not ‘you owe *me* something.’ This is what makes them not less than the masters of themselves, and that more precisely expropriates them of their initial property (in part or completely), of the most proper property, namely, their very subjectivity”¹⁵.

Esposito asserts that one's “most proper property” is one's subjectivity, and that it ceases to be one's own when it is opened to others in relations constitutive of community¹⁶.

¹¹ Foucault, Michel, *Society Must Be Defended*: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-1976, trans. David Macey, London: Allen Lane.

¹² Esposito, *Living Thought*, p. 73.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 71.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 83.

¹⁵ Esposito, *Communitas*, pp. 6-7.

¹⁶ “According to the originary valence of the concept of community, *what* the members of a community share, based upon the complex and profound meaning of *munus*, is rather an expropriation of their own essence, which isn't limited to their “having” but one that involves and affects their own “being subjects”. Here

In the Liberal tradition, Locke starts from the assumption that one's most proper property is oneself. It forms the basis of his justification for private property. The argument runs as follows: one's body is one's own. The labor of one's body is one's own. So what one gains by the labor of one's body is one's own. Locke moves from what he takes to be unquestionably one's own, oneself, to what one owns, the products of one's labor. "Though the Earth...be common to all Men, yet every Man has a Property in his own Person. This no Body has any Right to but himself. The Labour of his Body, and the Work of his Hands, we may say, is properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his Labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his Property. It being by him removed from the common state Nature placed it in, it hath by this labour something annexed to it, that excludes the common right of other Men"¹⁷.

The distinction in operation here is between subjectivity and owning oneself – oneself as property. Property is something that exists within the rules of a society, and for Locke the purpose of society is to guarantee the security of property: "The reason why men enter into society is the preservation of their property; and the end while they choose and authorize a legislative is that there may be laws made, and rules set, as guards and fences to the properties of all the society, to limit the power and moderate the dominion of every part and member of the society"¹⁸. Property is what expands the capacity of individuals, rather than diminishing it, as it enables one to go beyond that initial property that one possesses, oneself, and to accumulate more property of one's own. And this expansion of oneself can take place only within a social framework, when there are "laws made, and rules set, as guards and fences to the properties of all the society". As Esposito puts it, this is a conception whereby "community is conceived of as a quality that is added to their nature as subjects"¹⁹. Community is what enables this addition to the property that someone has in his own person to the property one secures by the actions of one's own person.

For Esposito, one's person is not what one owns, but what one is – one's subjectivity. The possession of one's subjectivity is not dependent upon the existence of those "laws made, and rules set, as guards and fences to the properties of all the society, to limit the power and moderate the dominion of every part and member of the society". In his conception, one's most proper property, one's subjectivity, is what is expropriated by society, by being taken into a network of relations with others.

the discourse follows a crease that moves from the more traditional terrain of anthropology or of political philosophy to that more radical terrain of ontology: that the community isn't joined to an addition but to a subtraction of subjectivity, by which I mean that its members are no longer identical with themselves but are constitutively exposed to a propensity that forces them to open their own individual boundaries in order to appear as what is "outside" themselves". Esposito, *Communitas*, p. 138.

¹⁷ Locke, John, *Second Treatise of Civil Government*, Chapter V, section 27.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, Chapter XIX, section 222.

¹⁹ Esposito, *Communitas*, p. 2.

V.M. In the theoretically – analytical note Esposito offers, *communitas* is a concept which needs to be positioned (in a subjective, substantive sense) inside an organic model of the *Gemeinschaft* within the Habermasian articulation of communicational associations, as well as the British-American frame of a (neo)communitarian model. Each of these landmarks considers the *community* as a substance with nodal points inside the articulation of bio-political *concepts* (in the sense in which both the state and the individual become, again, two privileged spheres), recharged by the idea of an *affirmative liberty*, and following the desiderata of “detaching liberty from liberalism and community from communitarianism”. Neocommunitarianism’s sin would be, in Esposito’s acceptance, this very renewal of an association between the idea of community, belonging, identity and property, used as a risky gauge – form of identifying with one’s own ethnic group, one’s idea of a fatherland or a mother tongue; instead of attracting the immunitary towards the individual, communitarians restrict the concept to its sense of community

How would you comment upon such a correction of its sense?

I.B. Esposito is at pains to differentiate his conception of community, as being founded on a relation between subjects, from a conception that sees community as a property shared by its members. This latter conception he associates both with the history of political philosophy and with the contemporary manifestations of liberal individualism and communitarianism, which together seem to occupy most of contemporary political space.

In seeing both liberal individualism and communitarianism as sharing the same fundamental assumption, that community rests upon a property shared by its members, Esposito characterizes them both as sharing the same immunitarian character, albeit the realization of this immunitarian character may well differ between liberal individualist societies and communitarian societies. What this does is to blur the distinction between these political forms, and to close off a third possibility that has more affinities with Esposito’s conception, albeit from his point of view it will be a conception still sharing the underlying assumption that what binds a community together is a shared property.

In seeing liberty as the defining characteristic of liberalism, Esposito’s ontological approach is not concerned with the distinctions and incompatibilities that exist within liberalism. The kind of liberalism espoused by John Stuart Mill has, in terms of its conception of liberty as self-realization, its incompatibilities with the liberalism espoused by Hayek, with its conception of liberty as unrestricted free markets; which in its turn is incompatible with the liberalism espoused by Rawls, with its conception of liberty as social justice. To speak of *detaching liberty from liberalism* leaves the question of *which* conceptions of liberty and of *which* conceptions of liberalism unasked. Esposito is concerned with what all of them have in common, not with what makes them different from each other. Similarly, if one takes communitarianism as being characterized by what Alasdair MacIntyre identifies as a notion of community seen as an ongoing project, then

much is still undecided. Communitarians can be either on the left or the right, social democratic, conservative or totalitarian.

One thing that contemporary realizations of both liberal individual and communitarian conceptions share is a lineage to the idea of the nation state as the guarantor of individual rights while simultaneously providing a conception of the nation as an ongoing project. Robert Wokler traces this idea back to the French Revolution, and more specifically to Abbe Sieyès²⁰, noting that the definition of a nation as being based on the immunity logic of those included within its boundaries and those excluded (the friend/enemy distinction that Esposito raises in the context of examining Carl Schmitt's philosophy), means that "as Hannah Arendt rightly noted in her *Origins of Totalitarianism*, it has been a characteristic feature of the nation-state since the French Revolution that the rights of man and the rights of the citizen are the same"²¹. The idea that the state is both the guarantor of individual rights and the source of the nation as an ongoing project may have started to come apart²², but the underlying logic which joined these two ideas together does not have to be found in Esposito's ontological theory. There is a case for arguing that it can be found in the theorizing of Abbe Sieyès. So there are grounds for seeing the process by which liberty and community can come apart as being dependent upon what conception of community and what conception of liberty are involved.

There is similarly a case for arguing that the immunity logic of communitarianism is dependent upon the nation-state as conceived by Abbe Sieyès. As Wokler points out it was not the fulfillment of the Enlightenment but its betrayal in the form of the nation-state that grafted an immunity logic onto the cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment philosophers²³. This opens up the possibility of a communitarian position that is not linked to an immunity logic, and indeed Wokler suggests that such a position was envisaged during the Enlightenment, only for it to be betrayed by the French Revolution. In this Enlightenment sense, whilst not corresponding to Esposito's intention of "detaching liberty from liberalism and community from communitarianism", communitarianism can offer a richer array of possibility than Esposito envisages, and escape from an immunity division of the world into friend and enemy, what Esposito describes as *the world in common*: "The last step in a thought on community that seeks to assimilate itself to such a tradition would be to expand

²⁰ "It may be said that Sieyès is the father of the nation-state, standing to the whole of political modernity as does God to his Creation". Wokler, Robert, 'The Enlightenment Project As Betrayed By Modernity', *History of European Ideas*, Vol. 24, Nos. 4-5, pp. 301-313, 1998.

²¹ Wokler, *ibid.*, p. 311.

²² See for example, Roger Scruton, *England: an elegy*, Continuum, 2006.

²³ "Yet so far from putting into practice the universal rights of man long advocated by proponents of cosmopolitan enlightenment, the modern nation-state was to ensure that henceforth only persons comprising nations which formed states could have rights, and since the French Revolution the history of modernity has characteristically been marked by the abuse of human rights on the part of nation-states which alone have the authority to determine the scope of those rights and their validity". Wokler, Robert, 'The Enlightenment, the Nation-State and the Primal Patricide of Modernity', in (eds.) Geras, Norman and Wokler, Robert, *The Enlightenment and Modernity*, Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke, 2000.

the protective function of the immune system from the restricted sphere of the individual to the unlimited space of the entire world”²⁴.

V.M. In the case of terms such as *immune – immunity – immunization; community – in common – the community of the common* does a certain philosophical separation of sense still work, or could it be interpreted more as a political domain unification?

I.B. Immunity and community are the two key terms in Esposito’s account. Immunitarian processes are what gives shape to contemporary communities: “all civilizations past and present faced and in some way met the needs of their own immunization, but... only in the modern ones does immunization constitute its core element”²⁵. Immunity and community are not so much opposites as processes which stand in a constitutive relationship to each other. As discussed previously, the community of the nation-state is founded on an immunitary logic – the logic of the friend/enemy distinction.

However it is important to note that it is not the case that the only form available for the contemporary realization of community is communitarianism. As Esposito points out, models of contemporary political communities can be roughly divided into liberal individualism and communitarian models. I would suggest that this division within contemporary forms owes something to Esposito’s distinction between origin and goal.

Communitarian conceptions owe something to Alasdair MacIntyre’s vision of communitarian political forms as having at their heart a conception of the community as an ongoing project. Communitarian political forms may look backwards towards the idea of an origin, above all to the idea of origin returning in a phantasmal form²⁶, as we saw with the Nazi idea of the recovery of a purer racial past, of which the present represents a degenerate offspring. But there is no conceptual necessity that they should seek a validation in the past. Communitarians can sever the link with origin and create a new start, an ongoing project which rejects the past and begins to build a new world from nothing, such as the nightmare world of Cambodia Year Zero. The immunitarian/ communitarian logic of exclusion and exclusion, of friend and enemy can be provided by the idea of a mutual goal. However, in practice such logic, devoid of a notion of origin, may never have existed in the world, not even in Cambodia.

The liberal individual model also requires something to provide the unifying quality that enables the logic of inclusion and exclusion to function. To operate with such logic one must identify what it is that unifies those included in the community. Even in that most individualistic of nations, the USA, a shared conception of origin is what provides the locus of community identification, with

²⁴ Esposito, *Living Thought*, p. 262.

²⁵ Esposito, Roberto, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, Trans. Timothy Campbell, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008, p. 52.

²⁶ Esposito, *Living Thought*, p. 267.

the American Constitution as the founding document, providing the myth of origin that allows an inclusionary logic to take hold.

V.M. Can we talk about *an immunitarian project*?

I.B. For Esposito, the immunitarian project is linked to the hyper individualism that he finds in Hobbes and associates with modernity. “The ‘immunitarian’ project of modernity isn’t directed only against the specific *munera* (class obligations, ecclesial bonds, free services that weigh on men in the earlier phase) but against the very same law of their associated coexistence [*convivenza*]. The modern individual, who assigns to every service its specific price, can no longer bear the gratitude that the gift demands”²⁷.

It might be premature to think that this kind of individualism is the dominant model of modernity. Whilst the model of liberal individualism and the marketization of public services which has its most aggressive form in the US has not been uncontested. Not only has its economic basis proved to be less than compelling, it is also contrary to the social democratic structures which have found favour in Europe. There may be an immunitarian project in this sense, but it is a top down process, and it risks undermining the sort of social cohesion that makes any kind of society possible. It may perhaps be premature to say this, but it may be the case that, in those European countries with a strong democratic tradition and high levels of political participation, the modern US – inspired form of the immunitarian project will prove to contain the seeds of its own failure.

V.M. *Collectivity – generality – universality*. Can a philosophical – political synonymy operate in the case of this circuitry?

I.B. For Esposito the universal stands in relation to the particular, and above all the particularity of the singular person. He sees the category of *person* as being used, by Hannah Arendt for example, as bridging the gap between the concept of human being and that of citizen, of finding “a notion endowed with a higher degree of universality than the modern concept of citizenship.” The concept of *the person* is, for Esposito, central to *the political*²⁸.

Esposito looks, not for a way of using the concept of person to extend the scope of the political, as Hannah Arendt does, but instead for a way of escaping from the particularity of the singular person altogether – through the impolitical. The importance of “the impolitical is the breach it creates for a space to open up in which the limits of the personal as privileged form of the political are uncovered”²⁹.

²⁷ Esposito, *Communitas*, pp. 12-13.

²⁸ Esposito uses, I think, the idea of particularity and universality, unicity and generality, exclusivity and inclusivity, the individual and the collectivity in similar ways, as what underpins them is their common reliance on the logic of inclusion and exclusion.

²⁹ Campbell, Timothy, “Foucault was not a person”: Idolatry and the Impersonal in Roberto Esposito’s “Third Person”, *CR: The New Centennial Review*, Vol. 10, No. 2, New Paths in Political Philosophy (fall 2010), p. 139.

The impolitical is for Esposito, the way in which the inclusivity/ exclusivity logic that Arendt identifies is undermined. “The impersonal isn’t the simple opposite of person – its direct negation – but something of or in the person that blocks the immunitary mechanism which places the I in the simultaneously inclusive and excluding circle of We”³⁰.

The concept of a *person* and of *generality* and *universality* has been central to political philosophy since Locke and before. Locke bases his political philosophy upon the idea of the equality of persons, and is happy to extend the concept of person to the non-human: “[W]ere there a Monkey, or any other Creature to be found, that had the use of Reason, to such a degree, as to be able to understand general Signs, and to deduce Consequences about general *Ideas*, he would no doubt be subject to Law, and, in that Sense, be a Man, how much soever he differ’d in Shape from others of that Name”³¹. The concept of person, in this sense, is inclusive, rather than exclusive.

The difficulty that Esposito identifies in the inclusivity of person, which carries with it an exclusivity, is related not to the conceptual problems that reside within the idea of a person, but to the historic use that has been made of the related notion of *citizen*. Robert Wokler sees the French Revolution, not just corresponding roughly to the birth of biopolitics and a conception of society as something to be managed by expertise with a view to promoting social virtue, health, progress, and prosperity³², but also as being the moment of the birth of the nation state, with, as Hannah Arendt noted, the attendant restriction of citizenship to members of nation states and the exclusion from the domain of rights of those excluded from citizenship.

Wokler sees the response to this logic of exclusion, not in looking for a new conception, founded in the impolitical, but in addressing the deficiencies of the existing use of the conception of person, by extending our conception of what politics is to what he calls a Promethean conception – Prometheus being the one who with “his spark of civilization opened the skies to (humanity) through an apotheosis of the intellect; it was the catalyst of their liberation from the veil of ignorance they could not have swept away unaided. It pointed citizens towards a path of self-development through self-government in pursuit of a civic education conceived less as obedience to rules than as engagement in ruling...map(ping) the way to more collectivist forms of freedom”³³.

I think what this illustrates is that despite a very different approach, thinkers schooled in the analytical tradition, which see conceptual and historical analysis as the way to understand contemporary politics can find they have common ground with thinkers like Esposito, whose approach is ontological rather than conceptual, and etymological rather than historical. Both are looking for ways to resolve the

³⁰ Esposito, *Third Person*, p. 125.

³¹ Locke, John, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book III, Chapter 11, para 16.

³² Wokler, Robert, *Ideology And The Origins Of Social Science*, in Goldie, Mark and Wokler, Robert, ‘The Cambridge History Of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought’, Cambridge, 2006.

³³ Wokler, Robert, *Democracy’s Mythical Ordeals: the Procrustean and Promethean paths to popular self-rule*, in Parry Geraint, and Moran, Michael (eds.), ‘Democracy and Democratization’, Routledge, London, 1994, pp. 41-42.

problem that Arendt identified, and both want to escape from the logic of inclusion/exclusion into a conception that embraces a much broader notion of who constitutes “we”, encompassing, for Wokler, all of humanity; and for Esposito, encompassing a mode of being that does not consist of either person or thing – a move instead from the personal to the impersonal.

V.M. What is the best way of alternatively translating the concept of *bare life*?

I.B. For Esposito, bare life is not pre-community life, life that falls outside the scope of history. Bare life is a philosophical fiction, the counter-image that Hobbes offers to society. It is that nihilistic condition into which man will fall if society collapses, where there is “continual fear and danger of violent death, and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short”³⁴.

But such a situation is not a political reality, nor even a political possibility. As Esposito says, “there is no such thing as a nucleus of pre-political bare life”. There is only a fictive opposition which plays the role of legitimizing sovereignty invested in the Leviathan. In this sense, as philosophical fiction, with its specifically Hobbesian connotations, the term *brutish life* may be preferable, capturing both the brutality of such an imagined life and its Hobbesian origins.

V.M. Affirmative bio-politics or positive bio-politics? Minor bio-politics or major bio-politics?

I.B. Foucault identifies the report on the state of France submitted to Louis XIV in 1727 by the Marquis de Boulainvilliers as providing an answer to the question ‘Who are we?’ Boulainvilliers offers a narrative that provides a racial myth of origin for the French. Boulainvilliers account “tells how the French are descended from the Franks, and says that the Franks themselves were Trojans who, having left Troy under the leadership of Priam’s son King Francus when the city was set on fire, initially found refuge on the banks of the Danube, then in Germany on the banks of the Rhine, and finally found, or rather founded, their homeland in France”³⁵. This attempt to provide a narrative of what it is to be French is actually a narrative of inclusion and exclusion – of who is and who is not part of the community, of friend and enemy. Such myths of origin are bound up with narrative – the narrative that connects the present with the past in mythic form. For Esposito, this sort of identity – making is at the center of a biopolitical and immunitarian model of community.

In looking at personal identity, and trying to provide an answer to the question ‘Who am I?’ Galen Strawson has argued forcibly for the rejection of a narrative conception of personal identity³⁶. Similarly, it is possible to conceive of a society having a self-identity that is detached from a conception of narrative.

³⁴ Hobbes, Thomas, *Leviathan: Or the Matter, Forme, and Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill*, ed. Ian Shapiro, Yale University Press, 2010, XIII. 9.

³⁵ Foucault, ‘*Society Must Be Defended*’, p. 115.

³⁶ Strawson, Galen, *Against Narrativity*, ‘Ratio’ (new series), XVII, 4, December 2004.

The answer to the question ‘Who are we?’ does not have to take the form of the sort of story that Boulainvilliers offers. It offers the possibility of dismantling the immunitarian logic that Esposito associates particularly with the phantasm of historical origin.

This relates to a conception of biopolitics, which we might call minor biopolitics – a conception which retains what Esposito identifies as the “nothing-in-common” that underlies community, whilst avoiding the impetus towards logic of inclusion and exclusion. Esposito argues for a richer conception of biopolitics, dismantling the logic of immunity/community by rejecting the meaning which *subject* has and returning to a conception of *subjectivity* that stands outside the *immunity/community dyad*. “On the other hand, this deactivation or devastation of overall meaning opens up a space of simultaneity with respect to the emergence of a singular meaning that coincides with the absence of meaning, and that at the same time transforms it into its opposite. It is when every meaning that is already given, arranged in a frame of meaningful reference, goes missing that the meaning of the world as such is made visible, turned inside out, without enjoying a reference to any transcendental meaning”³⁷.

As Bird and Short put it, “Rather than appeal to an immunizing “enclosure” locking subjects inside themselves, either on an individualistic or collective basis, community is experienced in and through an opening and exposure that “turns individuals inside out, freeing them to their exteriority.” His revision of positive liberty as “affirmative freedom/liberty” directly addresses this open model of community”³⁸. Freedom is not a property one has, being free is something one is, or one becomes, or, in the sense of ‘actualism’, one that one is constantly in the process of becoming³⁹.

V.M. For Esposito, any debate about *community* is neither philosophically – political nor anthropological, but rather belonging to the domain of ontology. Hence, the sense given to *the others* as *absence of subject, of identity, of ownership/own*, an articulating void for the “non- thing” (extrapolated from “no-thing-in-common”) seen as a correspondent of *co-belonging – or co-appurtenance*. Because the “no- thing” does not represent a condition or result of the *community* but *the community’s only way of being*. Or rather, the community is not that *esse’s inter*, but rather *esse* seen as *inter*, in the sense of a *Being who becomes a relationship in its own right*. A community’s *being* becomes an interval of difference, a space bringing together the insiders of a *community of non- belonging, as a loss of what is personal, and not added to any common asset*.

³⁷ Esposito, *Communitas* p. 149.

³⁸ Bird, Greg and Short, Jonathan, *Community, Immunity, And The Proper - An Introduction To The Political Theory Of Roberto Esposito*, ‘Angelaki, Journal Of The Theoretical Humanities’, Volume 18, Number 3, September 2013, p. 9.

³⁹ Esposito, Roberto, *Terms of the Political: Community, Immunity, Biopolitics*. Trans. Rhiannon Noel Welch, New York, Fordham University Press, 2013, pp. 52-54.

What alternative translations can one offer for “*no-thing*” and “*no-thing-in-common*”?

I.B. It is important to be cognizant of how radical Esposito’s claims are. Our normal understanding of community is one in which we see community as providing identity, and that what makes some group of people into a community is that they share a common element, a common property. For example, one of the most highly respected British historians of the last 30 years, Linda Colley, wrote an insightful history of how a collective sense of Britishness emerged out of the disparate Scottish and English identities that co-existed in Great Britain. But for Esposito, this approach to community ignores something fundamental.

Esposito’s approach is, as he says, neither political nor anthropological. It is ontological – the nature of how something is. Esposito’s point is that community requires individuals to alienate their subjectivity, where subjectivity is understood not so much as being a unique person but as the locus of experience that defines *being*. Being a person and being the center of subjectivity are quite different things, so whilst Linda Colley can write a history of how a new kind of person came into being, a British person, as opposed to say a Scottish or an English person, the essential word here is ‘person’. People can share a property which defines their identity, but for Esposito, there must still be a loss of subjectivity, as that loss is the inevitable consequence of entering into the relationships that any community requires.

It is this diminution of subjectivity that Esposito thinks of as “*no-thing*” – an ontological change that constitutes a lack or loss in the nature of subjective being. This is what all members of any community share, hence the idea that what the members of communities have in common is “*nothing-in-common*” – a common lack in the realm of subjectivity.