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Article

Biopolitics, Immunity and Religion: A Brief Critical Reading of Roberto Esposito

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Abstract: The relationship between religion and politics is a constant in the history of humanity. In the specific case of Western culture, it is possible to trace an archeology of the political as an effect of theological-political devices (essentially Christian-inspired). If we add to this the evolution of politics, in modern times, towards biopolitics, then the relationship focuses on very concrete topics. This is the case of the immunological process – from a personal, social, and philosophical perspective – thoroughly analyzed by Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito. In the context of his philosophical immunology, the place of religion is mainly archaeological and is interpreted critically. This article also aims to critically analyze his position, proposing a reading close to his thought but which is, at the same time, somewhat different.

Keywords: biopolitics; philosophical immunology; political theology; community

1. Introduction

The Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito has developed a reflection that is very focused on the category of politics, with a particular focus on the issue of biopolitics. As part of this reflection, he elaborated a proposal called, in his own nomenclature, philosophical immunology. In this reading, it is possible to think of a proper place for the religious dimension, especially in its political articulation and political relevance. The present study intends to understand and critically situate, within this proposal, the place of religion, first of all, from the perspective of the category of immunity. In this sense, this will allow establishing a significant relationship with the post-pandemic historical moment. Furthermore, in his philosophical immunology, the reference to certain theological-political *dispositifs* that influenced the Western World, and which are critically analyzed occupies a prominent place, namely in the sense of discovering the place of the non-political dimension in the constitution of human communities. This dimension of Esposito's proposal makes it possible to deepen the place of religion, namely Christianity, in philosophical immunology, exploring the archaeological and genealogical significance of certain concepts which are theological in origin, as well as their impact on the configuration of Western societies, namely in the political dimension. The study that follows, in addition to presenting some fundamental lines in Esposito's thought, intends to critically analyze the way in which he situates the religious dimension and how he analyzes the effect of theological-political *dispositifs*, advancing a proposal inspired by the Italian philosopher, but with some significant changes.

2. Biopolitics and Immunology

The period of the recent pandemic can be considered one of the most explicit global manifestations of the biopolitical devices described by Michel de Foucault: firstly, the affirmation of politics as governability; secondly, the expansion and concentration of government activity in the lives of subjects and populations, with special focus on its strictly biological (or zoological) dimension, which Giorgio Agamben named, after Walter Benjamin, "bare life" ("*nuda vita*") (Agamben 1995). Regardless of the different positions on that issue, either more radically or more

moderately balanced for or against (with Agamben among those who were radically against, and Esposito among those moderately in favor), it is indisputable that it was a matter of revelation and, to some extent, consummation of a paradigm which had been intensified by modernity. The protection and conservation of “bare life” became the central focus of political activity, namely through the classic mechanisms of disciplining individuals, population control and the politicization of medicine (or medicalization of politics). Of course, all this raised more acutely the question of a biopolitics that not only reduces politics to the protection of life, before and after any other function in the constitution of the *polis*, but also reduces life to its purely biological – or even zoological (cf. Agamben 1995, 4) – dimension, transforming the pursuit of *salus* (salvation, health) into a pure concern for biological health and concentrating everything on health policy. The conflict of values, which we witnessed during the pandemic, was merely the clearest revelation of a state of affairs that has marked modern and contemporary societies, in which protection and security have become a primary concern.

It is not my intention to discuss here the different perceptions of the concept of biopolitics (Marzocca 2020), from the most critical to the most receptive positions, and much less to debate the correct interpretation of Foucault's proposal (Nancy 2020). I only intend to establish the relationship between the biopolitical process that clearly accompanied the pandemic – and which raises the question about the political paradigm that will succeed it – and the concept of philosophical immunology, in the sense of a reading that clearly combines the biological lexicon with the sociopolitical lexicon (in the sense of protecting life, in whatever form), in order to extract some ideas about the plural and diversified place of religion in a social context marked by all these tensions, potentially collected in the concepts of exposure, contamination, and community, versus confinement, protection, and immunity. One of Roberto Esposito's most recent volumes, *Immunità comune. Biopolitica all'epoca della pandemia* (Esposito 2022) will serve as a guide. Here, Esposito presents different philosophical readings of the real (ontologies, anthropologies), according to the immunological paradigm, applying them to the post-pandemic situation.

Essentially, it is a question of thinking about the religious dimension in its relationship with the mechanism of conservation and protection of life, as the main task of the political dimension. A task that is carried out through the category of the body, as an organism that constitutes the horizon which makes life possible – and implies death – whether as a natural, biological (or zoological) body, or as a social or political body.

In his previous book, *Communitas. Origine e destino della comunità*, Esposito had already addressed the philosophical dimension of the immunological paradigm, especially in Hobbes (Esposito 1998, 3). At the heart of modern political theory would remain precisely the search for protection, provoked by fear of the human other (in reality, as fear of the community), which would lead to the construction of the State as a protective social body, represented in the biological body of the sovereign (Leviathan). There, the political-religious dimension of the protective device is even more evident than what will happen in its subsequent biopolitical transformations, in which science (especially medicine) will progressively gain prevalence and where the relationship to the absolute sovereign is diluted (including in its configuration as sovereign state).

Esposito proposes a re-reading of certain landmarks of recent Western thought as the configuration of a philosophical immunology, that is, of an interpretation of reality or the strategies of its control as essentially an immunological process. According to him, Nietzsche was the first to establish a more explicit relationship between immunization devices and life – thus inaugurating a particular form of biopolitical reading. At the same time, Nietzsche also inaugurates what could be called immunological thinking, based on a fundamental contradiction between protection and threat to life, which makes the biopolitical process aporetic. According to him, the potency of life invariably threatens life itself, precisely because of its excess; however, by wanting to control this excess, because of a defense instinct, humans threaten their own lives: “To want to preserve oneself is an expression of an extremely painful state, of a limitation of the true basic instinct of life that tends to an expansion of potency” (Nietzsche 1967); the protection that controls the vital power, in order to conserve it (namely through morality, law, religion, subjectivism), invariably destroys it, in a nihilistic way. We

are, in practice, facing the phenomenon of autoimmunity, which will accompany all immunological thinking.

Following Nietzsche, Heidegger applied the immunological reading to modern Western thought, insofar as it is interpreted as corresponding to an attempt to immunize the subject against the “threat” of the object; protection is mounted through Cartesian certainty, achieved by creating an image of the world as a representation of reality (Heidegger 1950). Here too, the cure turns against the organism, through the effects of representative thinking, based on certainty and the idea of ownership of the subject over the object. The harmful, even destructive, effects of this immunological strategy became clear with Bruno Latour's criticism of the so-called “asymmetric anthropology” (Latour 1991).

In a way that is possibly closer to Nietzsche's intention, Esposito states that Freud also considers that resorting to law or morality protects each human being from the chaos of instinct, thus serving as an immunizing *dispositif*; but, insofar as this protection provokes neuroses, it tends to liquidate life, precisely through its control. At the same time, in reaction to everything that limits them, the brothers seek the father's death as protection from an ancestral threat; except that the limiting effect of the dead father, in the imagination of the children who killed him, becomes even stronger than that of the living father (Freud 1960). In this sense, the ghost of violence remains alive in all immunization strategies, and it is stronger the more ghostly it is, that is, the less explicit and evident its permanent impact is.

It is precisely to the *dispositif* of violence as control of violence itself that René Girard dedicates his attention, in his interpretation of the immunological devices of human societies. The scapegoat mechanism is thus interpreted as the basic scheme of all immunization, as a search for protection, in order to survive (personally and communitarian), in the face of the fatal outcome of the mimetic desire that marks every human relationship (Girard 1972). But violence does not solve the problem of violence. Autoimmunity is therefore a permanent danger that threatens to destroy the social organism, as a result of the protective mechanism itself. For Girard, Christianity introduces an unprecedented dimension – precisely as a denunciation and overcoming of the victimization and scapegoat scheme – and can be interpreted as the beginning of another solution. Religion (if one assumes Christianity as a religion) thus appears in a dialectical rupture with the reality of violence and its violent control, as we will see. To what extent this *dispositif* can constitute an archeology for a specific mode of politics remains an open question. We will return to this subject later on.

Returning to Esposito's reading, Niklas Luhmann would apply the immunity paradigm – as the inclusion of contradiction (possibly as violence or conflict) in the autopoietic process of each system – to the social system as a whole and to each subsystem (Luhmann 1984). In this sense, the immunization process is an endless and central process in all social systems. Its function is to manage insecurity, in the communicative process, as opposed to achieving stable and final security. Here, too, religion occupies a particular place, helping to manage contingencies within the system and the global contingency of the system itself, as well as the non-integrability of many of its elements. And here too, this social “task” of the religious dimension can have effects on the political, given shape to the archaeological process of the theological-political *dispositifs*.

Derrida explicitly explores the permanent contradictory process of the real, namely in the co-belonging of life and death. In this sense, all identity delimitations that distinguish the same from the other, the inside from the outside, the own and the strange, are strictly impossible delimitations, because they are invariably marked by their opposite. The process of deferring identities turns all intent at immunization into its opposite, which results in inevitable autoimmunity. The case of religious identities is one of the most obvious. In its own delimitation, religious identity destroys itself. The *indemne*, while sacred, is simultaneously life-giving and potentially life-destroying, without the possibility of overcoming this ambivalence (Derrida 1996).

Finally, according to Esposito, Peter Sloterdijk's entire work can be considered a philosophical immunology in the strict sense. It would be, in fact, the most complete proposal for philosophical immunology. The volumes of “Spheres” approach the immunological periods as human protection strategies in relation to the outside of themselves: the Cosmos that surrounds and protects the Earth

(within the sphere that it protects); the Earth as a globe, abandoned to itself (on the surface of the sphere, but within the history it protects); the individual spheres or bubbles, in the era of the end of history and the end of community (total exposure, seeking protection in the individuality of each bubble). In contrast to this individualized immunity, there is the possibility of a single common immunity for all humanity (Sloterdijk 1998). From a biological perspective, this possibility is tested precisely as a result of the pandemic process – and this is one of the final topics of Esposito's work, as indicated in the title. From a more properly social, even political and religious perspective, this question remains open.

In all these approaches to the immunological *dispositifs* present in human relationships, one can consider the claim of immunity from the perspective of the subjects or the perspective of the community. If it is true that, in a way, immunity takes place in relation to the community (possibly in the sense of a radical individualism, or in its corresponding mitigation), in many other ways it happens in the relationship of communities with each other (in the sense of a radical tribalism, or also in its possible mitigation).

In this process, we witness an insurmountable ambiguity of immunization – it does not close itself to the threat (although this may be, in the extreme, one of its paradigms), but integrates it in a controlled way (giving rise to hybridity instead of tribalism). Instead of affirming a well-defined identity, with clearly delimited contours and which, at the same time, exclude what is different, the immunological *dispositif* (as it happens in Biology and Medicine) does not allow identity definitions except in a hybrid form, as exposure to the outside of oneself – in fact, making the very distinction between inside and outside difficult, as is the case in the human body and all the fauna and flora that inhabits it.

At the same time, any immunological *dispositif* is permanently exposed to the possibility of provoking the phenomenon of autoimmunity. On the one hand, the integration of the threat in itself can turn against the body, destroying what it intends to protect, especially if it happens in an uncontrolled way or in excessive doses; on the other hand, the radical pretense of protection by excluding the outside results, inevitably, in turning against what it protects, as with legalism, moralism, chauvinism and all kinds of fundamentalism. That is, the body – individual or social – can succumb to excessive protection (in the tribal paradigm) or to excessive exposure (in hybridism). But whichever the case, one will only be able to protect oneself by exposing oneself.

3. Religion and autoimmunity

As already seen, all these analyzes can be transposed to understand the different manifestations of the religious phenomenon. On the one hand, because in all these processes religious convictions and practices are often involved – in some cases, as the main protagonists. On the other hand, because religious practices, like all individual and social practices, are also marked by immunological *dispositifs*.

Firstly, biopolitical practices have made the religious character of science more evident, especially in Medicine and Biotechnology. The distinction between health and salvation – *salus* – thus becomes very tenuous. Naturally, the immunological *dispositifs* specific to Biology and applied in Medicine thus become permeable to a certain religious dimension, albeit metaphorically (Agamben 2020).

Secondly, reading the political dimension in immunological terms allows an extension to the religious dimension and respective practices, especially insofar as these also include clearly political aspects. I will therefore focus on interpretations of the religious, in the context of biopolitical immunology:

Firstly, the classic reading of the religious experience as a process referred to as an untouchable dimension or reality can be included in this perspective (Derrida 1996; Esposito 2002, 51). It would be about safeguarding an immune, inaccessible, transcendent, unspeakable scope, with effects on the possible immunity of its human representation: this is how the *Homo Sacer* is understood as an exception excluded from the social body (that is why he is immune), but which at the same time is included in it (even as the foundation of society). This dimension would protect humans in the same

movement that it would enhance life. Freud, for example, is explicit when referring to it as protection from the fear of death. Of course, in the dialectic of immunology, as Nietzsche had mentioned, this protection devalues concrete earthly life (including “bare life”) and produces illusory images, which can become pathological and neurotic, nihilistic, even. The religious *dispositifs* of sacredness can therefore turn against what they intend to protect.

One of the social, political and even juridical configurations of this immunity is precisely the protection through law and through identity (*religio*), against the threat of the different, above all provoked once again by fear; the religious dimension thus constitutes a civil religion, in its function of controlling the contingency and the danger that accompanies it, with the respective fear (Lübbe 1986). Interestingly, both the religion of untouchable (*indemne*) transcendence and the civil religion of immanent control were replaced in modernity by the alleged political or scientific self-immunization, maintaining remnants of transcendence and civil mystique, which seems to indicate a genealogical relationship between another, regardless of whether this relationship is read in terms of secularization (Schmitt 1922; Esposito 2013). This more complex reading of the phenomena becomes explicit in more recent sociological approaches, overcoming the strict thesis of secularization (Costa 2019; Rosito 2017), as in Luhmann’s systemic perspective. Religion appears as a possibility for the system to survive, in the integration of what is different, what is uncontrollable, what is contingent; immunity (religious or otherwise) does not correspond to a protection that closes off, but to a permanent process of communication, which is synonymous with exposure and openness.

Derrida, for example, intends to do justice to this complexity, by initially conceiving religion as the construction of an unimpaired (sacred) sphere, which at the same time saves (protecting) and threatens (forbidding); but the historical phenomenon of Christian religion, for example, is something that includes its own contradiction (life/death; sacralization/secularization); currently, this happens even in relation to its potential opponents or even competitors, such as technology and even capitalism. Nor does he forget the permanent danger of autoimmunity, whether from democracy or religion, or even of an articulation between both, as explicitly happens with fundamentalism (Esposito 2022, 49).

Also, Esposito, by explicitly approaching the scope of the religious experience, chooses the path proposed by Derrida – inspired by the distinction worked out by Benveniste between *sacer* and *sanctus* (*hieros/ agios* in Greek). According to him, all religious experience has two dimensions: a positive one, which saves (especially from death) and promises life (corresponding to the original sacred); the other negative, as it establishes prohibitions relating to certain fields of existence, namely through the law (corresponding to the holy, as distinct from the profane). The immune function of the first dimension is in the protection it promises; that of the second is in the exception it establishes (Esposito 2002, 51).

In a different distinction, namely that established by Levinas between Sacred and Holy (Levinas 1977), or by Jan Patocka between sacredness and responsibility (Patocka 1981; Derrida 1999), the religious that protects and that forbids would still be completely on the side of sacredness; the dimension of sanctity or responsibility would be placed on the side of human freedom, which corresponds to a requirement posed by the exposure to the other, who contaminates. Instead of immunizing, the religious dimension would be the process of exposing the human to the outside of itself. In this sense, the religious only protects, to the extent that it exposes; hybridity would be an identity constructed on the basis of non-identity.

It is likely in this sense that Girard interprets Christianity as a critical break in the mechanism of immunization of violence through violence – it would be, therefore, a kind of counter-religion, opening up to another way of being. Strictly speaking, Esposito also allows for this reading, insofar as he bases community – as opposed to immunity, as he exhaustively explores in his emblematic work *Immunitas. Protezione e negazione della vita* – on the process of permanent exposure to what is different (Esposito 2002). The fact that this community mechanism is not explicitly related to a theological-political or religious device does not prevent this reading from being carried out. In this sense, Esposito’s proposal can help us go beyond his strict reading of the religious phenomenon.

The religious dimension, instead of protecting from fear (of death or of the other), through an identitarian confinement defined by a set of properties, would constitute a demand for exposure, in the recognition of the absolute non-absoluteness of oneself and the community and in the assumption of a responsibility; it would therefore be a way of being that is beyond fear and beyond oneself (individually and as a community). This would correspond to the recognition of an excess of exteriority and the consequent impossibility of ownership; it would be, therefore, exposure to death (as finitude, limit) instead of protection from death; of the integration of death not as an act of killing, of giving death, sacrificing what is different, but as an act of dying, of giving one's life as a sacrifice/gift of oneself (Derrida 1999).

From the point of view of the social body, the paradigm of hybridity (corresponding to the *dispositif* of exposure) would overcome the paradigm of tribalism (corresponding to the *dispositif* of appropriate identity). At the same time, the danger of autoimmunity, either as overexposure or as overprotection, is permanent. On the one hand, the ghost of dissolution looms over the social body due to the absence of contours; on the other hand, over the same body looms the danger of destruction by expelling the other from himself or the other in himself, to the extreme of *thanatopolitics* or *necropolitics* (Mbembe).

It is in this reformulation of the possible (archaeological and genealogical) place of religion in the constitution of the immunity and community process (also in its political dimension) that we find clues to a second level of critical debate with Esposito, equally in an archaeological perspective of the political in articulation with the theological dimension, which in his case leads to the search for an origin prior to the political, in the realm of the non-political (Esposito 2012; Rosito 2015, 141). To what extent this scope touches even more closely on a theological archeology of the social body and the relationship between subjects is something that remains open for now.

4. Theological-political machine

In a 2013 published work, entitled *Due: la machina della teologia politica e il posto del pensiero* (Esposito 2013), Esposito dives directly into the debate of a theological archeology of political power – which in part also extends to a political archeology of certain theological concepts. In this regard, it is not exactly original, since the discussion on the relationship between theological concepts and political concepts – with their respective paradigms – is very old, having found in the work of Carl Schmitt and in the debate it triggered possibly one of its most explicit symbols (Schmitt 2022). Esposito's originality lies in the way he reads all Western history, namely its political aspect, as triggered by a very specific theological-political *dispositif*, which is precisely the *dispositif* of *person*.

While possibly not being an exclusively theological *dispositif* – perhaps not even an originally theological one – its appropriation by this field, carried out specifically by Christianity, explicitly transformed it into an historically and conceptually significant one. Strictly speaking, its Greek origins in the theatrical mask (*prosopon*) and its Roman origins in the scope of law reveal it as a *dispositif* that leads to a dual – possibly dualistic – understanding of all reality. Between the individual and his mask, in fact, such a distinction was established whereby the device of the mask resulted in transforming the individual, adding an identity that he did not previously have. Between the “bare life” of his being as a biological body and his identity as an actor there is a duality that separates and, at the same time, merges, but this fusion consists of the absorption of the body by the new identity of actor. Personhood would always be something added to the previous assumption, which absorbed this same assumption – roughly in the sense of *Aufhebung* in the Hegelian dialectic.

This process is even more explicit in Roman law, insofar as it divides humans between persons and non-persons, through the *dispositif* of the legal person (*persona*). The dimension of the person is, in reality, functional (as in the case of the mask), and does not coincide with the bodies of the humans in question (in the realization of “bare life”); however, it becomes the central modality of the qualification of humans, at different levels, from the maximum personalization of the *dominus*, to the depersonalization of slaves, placed at the level of things.

The structural scheme of the theological-political *dispositif* itself corresponds to a relationship of permanent tension and, at the same time, of unavoidable union between the theological and the

political: "Whether on the historical level or on the conceptual level, the two poles of the theological and the political relate themselves in the continuous attempt to overcome themselves alternately" (Esposito 2013, 41). The result of this type of relationship has become so impactful that even the current work of deconstruction is always already within it, which makes it difficult to analyze it. "The fundamental obstacle to penetrating the horizon of political theology resides, in short, in the fact that we are already inside it" (Esposito 2103, 12).

For this very reason, Esposito refers the whole process to the Heideggerian idea of "machination", since the process happens as an impact of the theological-political "machine". Strictly speaking, the fundamental structure of this machine cuts across different dimensions, starting with the very dual-unitary relationship between the theological and the political: "The thesis I advance is that such an exclusionary assimilation procedure is the fundamental provision of the 'theological-political machine'. This works precisely by separating what it declares to unite and unifying what it divides, through the submission of one part to the domain of the other" (Esposito 2013, 45).

While this relationship of excluding unification, based on a previous dualistic division, is worked on by other genealogical approaches to the relationship between theology and politics – namely, in Schmitt's case, through the idea of sovereign and the corresponding separation between friend and enemy – what Esposito proposes is different, finding in the category of person, as transformed from the Greek theater and Roman law, the fundamental *dispositif* for the functioning of this "theological-political machine".

At this level, Trinitarian theology itself works as a theological-political "machination", contrary to what Erik Peterson defended, who based the impossibility of any political theology on Trinitarian monotheism (Peterson 1935). In fact, for Esposito, the Trinitarian *dispositif* constitutes a supreme example – highly influential – of the *dispositif* of division – in this case, between Father and Son – which leads to an excluding unification, insofar as the monotheistic principle (concentrated in the Father) absorbs in the unification that which divided, subjugating the other end of the pole, resulting in a contraction of "the triadic formula in a dual module, centered on the hierarchical relationship between Father and Son". This module manifests itself in a "functional distinction between the First person, holder of sovereign power, and the Second, delegated with the effective government of humans" (Esposito 2013, 113). Thus, the application of the same "machination" of the dual-unitary relationship is verified. "As in the case of the dual nature, divine and human, of Christ – or the relationship between soul and body in every human being – a duality tends towards unity, through the submission of one part to the dominion of the other" (Esposito 2013, 117).

Now, in line with this mechanical structure, the theological-political *dispositif* of the person, through its "machination" throughout the history of the West – within which we find ourselves – contributed to an extreme opposition between person and thing. It is true that, throughout history, we have witnessed a kind of universalization (namely with Kant) of the person status, which at a certain point stopped dividing humans – unifying them, precisely, in the subjugation of the non-personal dimension (impersonal) to one's personal dimension. But, by universalizing this application to humans, the division shifted to the relationship between person and thing, between the personal dimension and the impersonal dimension. This same division is unified, to the extent that the impersonal dimension is subjugated to the personal dimension, the latter dominating the other, as happens in the aforementioned "asymmetric anthropology". At the same time, from a strictly political point of view, this paradigm based on the *dispositif* of person results in a global practice "that unifies the world in the form of its division" (Esposito 2013, 262), namely in the field of the so-called sovereign debt of some nations in relation to others, or even personal debts.

In order to overcome this "asymmetrical anthropology", as well as the political effects of the entire corresponding *dispositif*, which are expressed in the political form of the bipolar division, Esposito's deconstructive process leads him to the discovery of another path, also present in the history of Western thought, namely following the tradition of Averroes, Giordano Bruno and Espinoza, with its repercussions on Schelling, Nietzsche, Bergson and Deleuze. This is the lode of a thought of the impersonal: "This, moreover, is the destiny of thought of the impersonal – not to

oppose frontally what a long tradition has defined as a person, or even a subject, but to make it rotate on its axis, until deactivating the excluding power" (Esposito 2013, 262).

At the same time, overcoming the paradigm of the person would allow overcoming the duality between persons and things, which tends to divide reality in a problematic or, at least, ambiguous way – including the hybrid modalities that personalize things and reify persons. "If there is a postulate that seems to organize human experience from the beginning, it is that of the division between persons and things... The world of life is cut by a dividing line that divides it into two zones defined by their reciprocal opposition" (Esposito 2014, VII-VIII). The overcoming of the theological-political ties of the West would allow a simultaneous overcoming of this division and the respective subjugation from one side to the other.

Of course, it would be possible – for example, if we concentrated on the relationship of this modality of thought with Spinoza – to also link the category of the impersonal, as an alternative to the *dispositif* of person, with a theological-political machine, possibly closer to a pantheistic or even cosmotheistic reading of the real. Jan Assmann, for example, brings his deconstruction of monotheism as a theological-political *dispositif* closer to this cosmotheistic reading – which is, therefore, no less a "theological-political machination" (Assmann 2003).

Esposito intends the *dispositif* of person to be strictly theological-political and, therefore, inseparably linked to the religious dimension of the human, even if only in an archaeological way, no longer explicit and often not even perceptible. The category of the impersonal, which is opposed to it, would be due to the activity of thought and, therefore, to another "machine": "Averroes, Bruno and Spinoza, although in different ways, separate the purpose of religion, oriented towards social cohesion, from that of philosophical research, oriented towards the knowledge of truth" (Esposito 2013, 174). But the issue will not be as simple and as alternative as that, since an archeology of power based on theological-political *dispositifs* is equally possible in a context where the device of person is absent. The aforementioned thinkers can also be placed within a theological-political vein that is very specific and that is dominant in certain cultural traditions, as is the case of the many Eastern Asian cultures, or even of ancient Egypt (Assmann 2000).

Perhaps because he senses the near impossibility of leaving the interior of a theological genealogy of the political, or of a political genealogy of the theological, Esposito attempts, in almost all of his work – which is, strictly speaking, a political philosophy – to identify the non-political origin of the political dimension – which could be equivalent, in our case, also to a possible non-theological origin of the theological dimension that accompanies politics.

From the point of view of the deconstruction of the political dimension towards the non-political, as possibly being more original, the central question posed is the possibility of the existence of a politically non-representable dimension, namely through the mechanisms of power. This dimension of the unrepresentable would therefore be prior and subsequent to all representation, namely through theological-political *dispositifs* or "machines". It is, therefore, about "critically determining the threshold of irrepresentability of Good, or Justice, by power. From this point of view, power is always characterized by contractual terms and, therefore, situated within precise limits, which precisely trace the line of the non-political" (Esposito 2012, 50).

Strictly speaking, if the logic of theological-political machination intends to tame the community process itself, through mechanisms of power of which the concept of sovereignty is one of the most representative, then politics – which is always theological-political – already constitutes a process of immunization relative to the community's own role, which takes place especially in exposure to the other (Rosito 2015, 143).

This exposure is, so to speak, the index of reference to the unrepresentable Justice, whose representation through power is already always the result of a problematic machination and which must be constantly deconstructed. In this sense, the issue of biopolitics and immunity – as opposed to community – intersects with the theological-political device of person, insofar as this reduces everything to the dimension of someone's power over others, through the division introduced by the notion of person. The impersonal dimension would thus open up not only to the non-political dimension, but also to the communitarian dimension, in overcoming all immunizing machinations –

including those of religion, in the strict sense, as a place of the *indemne*, understood as salvation or protection.

5. Some concluding questions

If, in fact, the root of community – overcoming immunity – is exposure to the other, including the otherness of the irrepresentability of Justice by power, how can it be identified with the impersonal dimension? Does the reduction to the immanent field of pure impersonality, as a differential continuum, not imply the impossibility of real difference and, therefore, of alterity? But if there is no otherness, how can there be exposure to the other?

It is true that the relationship to alterity can be immediately understood in terms of hierarchical duality. The use of Trinitarian theology can be elucidative here, in the possible continuity of a theological archeology of the political dimension. In fact, Esposito's reading of the "theological-political machine" according to this Trinitarian model is based on its tendentially *subordinationist* interpretation, which in fact predominated in history. Or else, it was dissolved into the *modalist* interpretation, which completely annuls the difference between Father and Son and, therefore, the duality. At the outset, resorting to the category of the impersonal would end up being very close to the modalist reading of Trinitarian relationships – which, in reality, would not be relationships, as they do not know true alterity.

As it happens, in traditional Trinitarian theology, despite the predominance of these two extremes, neither of them was considered correct by patristic Theology and Councils, since the one hierarchized the relationship, through the mechanism of unification through exclusion; and the other annulled the relationship, through the mechanism of its reduction to a pure one. But does this not imply the search for an intermediate path – as was the case throughout the history of Trinitarian theology – the presence of a theological *dispositif* that allows the understanding of community as exposure to the other? Incidentally, this *dispositif* includes the use of the "third" as an essential dimension – formulated in the person of the Spirit (Duque 2023). The third dimension is precisely the one that prevents the binary reduction of the relationship and, therefore, the rigorous application of the "theological-political machine" as described by Esposito.

Also in the explicitly Christological dimension, the relationship between divine nature and human nature, if seen from a simply binary perspective, would end up implying the absorption of the latter by the former – as is the case in all versions of Docetism. But the person of Jesus is conceived as a conjugation without division – despite the distinction – between humanity and divinity, which do not constitute a division of the single personal being and for that reason His unity cannot be conceived as an absorption of one by the other. Here too, the dimension of the Spirit – strictly speaking, the condition of the possibility of human mediation of the divine – can be read as the third dimension that prevents the monism of impersonal unity and the dualism of division that leads to unity through the exclusion of the other. "Orthodox" Christology (expressed in the Council of Chalcedon) does not correspond to the way in which Esposito presents the functioning of the person's theological-political *dispositif*. At the same time, its solution, by resorting to the impersonal dimension, does not do justice to what the Christological formulation intends either. What could the third dimension mean by overcoming the excluding duality of the binary relationship?

Esposito, in this and other contexts, explores the dimension of the third person (Esposito 2007). However, the tendency is to identify, in a total and radical way, the third dimension with the non-person and, therefore, with the field of the impersonal. It is difficult, however, to understand this identification, as the dimension of the impersonal would end up absorbing all other dimensions, removing all meaning from the distinction between first, second and third – or even between me, you and he/she. If the third dimension can be understood – as in the case of Trinitarian theology – as a personal dimension, which annuls the binary relationship between first and second (between me and you, between Father and Son), then it could be the index of another understanding of the political – not necessarily as non-political, but in a very specific sense – which always implies an opening up of the dual dynamics of power beyond themselves. The theological (pneumatological) dimension could,

in this sense, be close to the “impolitical” (but personal) and allow another path for the theological-political “machine”, namely as political pneumatology (Rosito 2015, 179-185).

Esposito resorts to central elements of Christian theology to identify parallels with his proposal for understanding the human community. In the search for clarification of the *munus* of community, the reference to the Christian *koinonia* becomes explicit: “What one participates in is not the glory of the Resurrected, but the suffering and blood of the Cross (*I Cor*, 10,16; *Phil* 3, 10). There is no possibility of appropriation: ‘taking part’ means anything but ‘taking’; on the contrary, losing something, diminishing oneself, sharing the lot of the servant, not the master” (*Phil* 3, 10-11). “His death. The gift of life – offered in the community supper archetype” (Esposito 1998, 19). Will we not find here another way of being a person, not identifiable with the duality that leads to the domination of one over the other? And isn’t it also a theological archeology of another political model? In this sense, it seems that, based on the references contained in Esposito’s work, it would become possible to follow different paths from those that he himself proposes, in the critique – not just in the deconstruction – of the dominant “theological-political machine”.

A final question takes up the meaning attributed to the religious dimension. At the end of his analysis of theological-political “machining”, Esposito suggests: “The biblical figure of liberation from all debts, no longer confined to the sabbatical year, could become the mirror, philosophical and political, in which political theology glimpses the unprecedented possibility of dissolution” (Esposito 2013, 266). But will it be possible, precisely from this perspective, to speak of the complete dissolution of the theological-political *dispositif*? What is the foundation, the genealogical archeology of this practice of debt forgiveness – which, in fact, does not unite humanity through the dualistic division? Is not the very reference to the one God the origin of the notion of a common humanity? (Cohen 1935) In this sense, religion would not simply be a source of protection and immunization of communities and subjects – in dialectical opposition to the other – but exposure to otherness, with all the resulting insecurities and contaminations.

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