BIOS | Biopolitics and Philosophy

Roberto ESPOSITO

Translated and with an Introduction by Timothy Campbell

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5 *Dorsality: Thinking Back through Technology and Politics*
David Wills

4 *Bíos: Biopolitics and Philosophy*
Roberto Esposito

3 *When Species Meet*
Donna J. Haraway

2 *The Poetics of DNA*
Judith Roof

1 *The Parasite*
Michel Serres

Bíos

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Contents

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Bíos, Immunity, Life

The Thought of Roberto Esposito

Timothy Campbell

The name of Roberto Esposito is largely unknown in the United States. Outside of a few Romance Studies departments who know him primarily for *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of the Community,* the work of this Italian philosopher over the past twenty-five years remains completely untranslated into English.[1] That his introduction to an American audience should occur now and concern his most recent study, *Bíos: Biopolitics and Philosophy,* is owing in no small part to the particular (bio)political situation in which we find ourselves today: the ever-increasing concern of power with the life biology of its subjects, be it American businesses urging, indeed forcing, workers to be more active physically so as to save on health care costs, or the American government's attempts in the "war on terror" to expose the lives of foreign nationals to death, "fighting them there" so as to "protect" American lives here.[2] Yet this politicization of biology, the biopolitics that forms the object of Esposito's study, has a long and terrible history in the twentieth century. Indeed, *Bíos* may be profitably read as nothing short of a modern genealogy of biopolitics that begins and ends in philosophy.

In the following pages, I will sketch the parameters of this genealogy and Esposito's contribution to our current understanding of biopolitics, particularly as it relates to the conceptual centerpiece of *Bíos,* what Esposito calls the "paradigm of immunization." Immunity has a long and well-known history in recent critical thought. Niklas Luhmann placed immunity at the heart of his systems theory in his 1984 opus *Soziale Systeme;* Donna Haraway deployed "an immune system discourse" in her seminal reading of postmodern bodies from 1988; Jean Baudrillard in the early 1990s spoke

of artificial sterilization compensating for "faltering internal immunological defenses."[3] For them and for many writing today on immunity, the term quickly folds into autoimmunity, becoming the ultimate horizon in which contemporary politics inscribes itself. Others continued to discuss immunity throughout the 1990s—Agnes Heller most prominently—as well as Mark C. Taylor, but no one placed it more forcefully at the center of contemporary politics than did Jacques Derrida in a series of interviews and writings after the "events" of September 11.[4] Speaking of autoimmunity aggression and suicidal autoimmunity, Derrida affiliates the figure of immunity with trauma and a repetition compulsion.[5] As the reader will soon discover, much sets apart Esposito's use of immunity from Derrida's, as well as the others just mentioned, especially as it relates to Esposito's radical inversion of immunity in its communal antinomy and the subsequent effects on our understanding of biopolitics. In the first section, therefore, I attempt to trace where Esposito's use of the immunity paradigm converges and diverges with Derrida and others.

In the second part, I situate *Bíos* more broadly within current American and European thinking on biopolitics. Here obviously the work of Michel Foucault in his seminars from 1975 and 1976 on biopolitics and racism merits considerable attention for it is precisely on these discourses that Esposito will draw his own reflections in *Bíos*.[6] But as anyone who has followed the recent fortunes of the term "biopolitics" knows, two other figures dominate contemporary discussions of life in all its forms and they both originate in Italy: Giorgio Agamben and Antonio Negri. In *Homo Sacer, Remnants of Auschwitz,* and *The Open,* Giorgio Agamben declines biopolitics negatively, anchoring it to the sovereign state of exception that separates bare life *(zōē)* from political forms of life *(bíos)*.[7] For Antonio Negri, writing with Michael Hardt, biopolitics takes on a distinctly positive tonality when thought together with the multitude.[8] It is between these two contradictory poles that Esposito's focus on *bíos* must be understood. Indeed, as I argue here, *Bíos* comes to resemble something like a synthesis of both Agamben's and Negri's positions, with Esposito co-opting Agamben's negative analysis of biopolitics early on, only to criticize later the antihistorical moves that characterize Agamben's association of biopolitics to the state of exception.[9] In some of *Bíos*'s most compelling pages, Esposito argues instead for the modern origin of biopolitics in the immunizing features of sovereignty, property, and liberty as they emerge in the writings of Hobbes and Locke. It is at this point that the differences with Hardt and Negri become clear;

they concern not only what Esposito argues is their misguided appropriation of the term "biopolitics" from Foucault, but also their failure to register the thanatopolitical declension of twentieth-century biopolitics. Essentially, Esposito argues that Hardt and Negri aren't wrong in pushing for an affirmative biopolitics—a project that Esposito himself shares—but that it can emerge only after a thoroughgoing deconstruction of the intersection of biology and politics that originates in immunity.

Clearly, understanding Italian contributions to biopolitical discourse is crucial if we are to register the originality of Esposito's argument. Equally, though, other critical texts will also help us in situating *Bíos* within contemporary work on biopolitics—Judith Butler's reflections on mourning and community in *Precarious Life* and *Giving an Account Oneself* come to mind, as do Keith Ansell Pearson's Deleuzian musings on symbiosis and viroid life, as well as Jürgen Habermas's recent *The Future of Human Nature* and Ronald Dworkin's essays on euthanasia and abortion.[10] Here too Esposito's work shares a number of areas of contact with them, ranging from the notion of community to the genetic engineering that promises to prevent "lives unworthy of life" in Binding and Hoche's phrase.[11] But other texts figure as well, especially as they relate to Esposito's reading of community/immunity. I will introduce them at appropriate moments and then in my conclusion tie up some of the loose ends that inevitably result when broad introductions of the sort I am attempting are made. Most important will be asking after the use value of *bíos* for imagining a public culture no longer inscribed in a negative horizon of biopolitics.

Community/Immunity

In order to appreciate the originality of Esposito's understanding of biopolitics, I first want to rehearse the relation of community to immunity as Esposito sketches it, not only in *Bíos* but in his two earlier works, *Communitas: Origin and Destiny of the Community* and *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life.*[12] Reading the terms dialectically, Esposito asks if the relation between community and immunity is ultimately one of contrast and juxtaposition, or rather if the relation isn't part of a larger move in which each term is inscribed reciprocally in the logic of the other. The launching pad for his reflections concerns the principles on which communities are founded. Typically, of course, when we think of community, we immediately think of the common, of that which is shared among the members of a group. So too for Esposito: community is inhabited by the communal, by

that which is not my own, indeed that begins where "my own" ends. It is what belongs to all or most and is therefore "public in juxtaposition to 'private,' or 'general' (but also 'collective') in contrast to particular."[13] Yet Esposito notes three further meanings of *communitas,* all associated with the term from which it originates: the Latin *munus.* The first two meanings of *munus*—*onus* and *officium*—concern obligation and office, while the third centers paradoxically on the term *donum,* which Esposito glosses as a form of gift that combines the features of the previous two. Drawing on the classic linguistic studies of Benveniste and Mauss, Esposito marks the specific tonality of this communal *donum,* to signify not simply any gift but a category of gift that requires, even demands, an exchange in return.[14] "Once one has accepted the *munus,*" Esposito writes, then "one is obliged to return the *onus,* in the form of either goods or services *[officium].*"[15] *Munus* is, therefore, a much more intense form of *donum* because it requires a subsequent response from the receiver.

At this point, Esposito can distill the political connotations of *munus.* Unlike *donum, munus* subsequently marks "the gift that one gives, not the gift that one receives," "the contractual obligation one has vis-à-vis the other," and finally "the gratitude that *demands* new donations" on the part of the recipient (emphasis in original).[16] Here Esposito's particular declension of community becomes clear: thinking community through *communitas* will name the gift that keeps on giving, a reciprocity in the giving of a gift that doesn't, indeed cannot, belong to oneself. At its (missing) origin, *communitas* is constructed around an absent gift, one that members of community cannot keep for themselves. According to Esposito, this debt or obligation of gift giving operates as a kind of originary defect for all those belonging to a community. The defect revolves around the pernicious effects of reciprocal donation on individual identity. Accepting the *munus* directly undermines the capacity of the individual to identify himself or herself as such and not as part of the community.

I want to hold the defective features of *communitas* in reserve for the moment and reintroduce the question of immunity because it is precisely the immunitary mechanism that will link community to biopolitics.[17] For Esposito, immunity is coterminus with community. It does not simply negate *communitas* by protecting it from what is external, but rather is inscribed in the horizon of the communal *munus.* Immune is he—and immunity is clearly gendered as masculine in the examples from classical Rome that Esposito cites—who is exonerated or has received a *dispensatio*

from reciprocal gift giving. He who has been freed from communal obligations or who enjoys an originary autonomy or successive freeing from a previously contracted debt enjoys the condition of *immunitas*. The relationship immunity maintains with individual identity emerges clearly here. Immunity connotes the means by which the individual is defended from the "expropriative effects" of the community, protecting the one who carries it from the risk of contact with those who do not (the risk being precisely the loss of individual identity).[18] As a result, the borders separating what is one's own from the communal are reinstituted when the "substitution of private or individualistic models for communitarian forms of organization" takes place.[19] It follows therefore that the condition of immunity signifies both not to be and not to have in common.[20] Seen from this perspective, immunity presupposes community but also negates it, so that rather than centered simply on reciprocity, community doubles upon itself, protecting itself from a presupposed excess of communal gift giving. For Esposito, the conclusion can only be that "to survive, the community, every community, is forced to introject the negativity of its own opposite, even if the opposite remains precisely a lacking and contrastive mode of being of the community itself."[21] It is this introjection of negativity or immunity that will form the basis of Esposito's reading of modern biopolitics. Esposito will argue that the modern subject who enjoys civil and political rights is itself an attempt to attain immunity from the contagion of the possibility of community. Such an attempt to immunize the individual from what is common ends up putting at risk the community as immunity turns upon itself and its constituent element.

Immunity and Modernity

Those familiar with Jean-Luc Nancy's writings on the inoperative community or Alphonso Lingis's reflections on the shared nothingness of community will surely hear echoes of both in much of the preceding synopsis.[22] What sets Esposito's analysis apart from them is the degree to which he reads immunity as a historical category inextricably linked to modernity:

> That politics has always in some way been preoccupied with defending life doesn't detract from the fact that beginning from a certain moment that coincides exactly with the origins of modernity, such a self-defensive requirement was identified not only and simply as a given, but as both a problem and a strategic option. By this it is understood that all civilizations past and present faced (and in some way solved) the needs of their own

> immunization, but that it is only in the modern ones that immunization constitutes its most intimate essence. One might come to affirm that it wasn't modernity that raised the question of the self-preservation of life, but that self-preservation is itself raised in modernity's being *[essere]*, which is to say it invents modernity as a historical and categorical apparatus able to cope with it.[23]

For Esposito, modernity doesn't begin simply in the institution of sovereign power and its theorization in Hobbes, as Foucault argues. Rather, modernity appears precisely when it becomes possible to theorize a relation between the communitarian *munus*, which Esposito associates with a Hobbesian state of generalized conflict, and the institution of sovereign power that acts to protect, or better to immunize, the community from a threatened return to conflict.

If we were to push Esposito's argument, it might be more appropriate to speak of the sovereign who immunizes the community from the community's own implicit excesses: the desire to acquire the goods of another, and the violence implicated in such a relation. When its individual members become subject to sovereign power, that is, when it is no longer possible to accept the numerous threats the community poses to itself and to its individual members, the community immunizes itself by instituting sovereign power. With the risk of conflict inscribed at the very heart of community, consisting as it does in interaction, or perhaps better, in the equality between its members, immunization doesn't precede or follow the moment of community but appears simultaneously as its "intimate essence." The moment when the immunitary aporia of community is recognized as the strategic problem for nascent European nation-states signals the advent of modernity because it is then that sovereign power is linked theoretically to communal self-preservation and self-negation.[24]

Two further reflections ought to be made at this point. First, by focusing on the immunizing features of sovereignty as it emerges in modernity, Esposito takes issue with a distinction Foucault makes between the paradigm of sovereignty and that of governmentality. For Foucault, governmentality marks the "tactics of government which make possible the continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence of the State and what is not, the public versus the private, and so on." These tactics are linked to the emergence of the population as an objective of power that culminates at the end of the eighteenth century, particularly regarding campaigns to reduce mortality.[25] A full-fledged regime of governmentality for Foucault

cannot be thought separately from the emergence of biopower that takes control of "life in general—with the body as one pole and the population as the other" in the nineteenth century.[26] Esposito, however, shows how Foucault oscillates between sovereignty and governmentality precisely because of his failure to theorize the immunitary declension of both terms. Both are inscribed in a modern biopolitical horizon thanks to a modernity that strengthens exponentially its own immunitary characteristics.

Second, Esposito's focus on immunity ought to be compared to recent attempts, most notably by Judith Butler, to construct a conceptual language for describing gender and sexuality as modes of relation, one that would "provide a way of thinking about how we are not only constituted by our relations but also dispossessed by them as well."[27] Esposito's language of an always already immunized and immunizing *munus* suggests that Butler is clearly right in affirming the importance of relationality for imagining community, but at the same time that any hoped-for future community constructed on "the social vulnerability of bodies" will founder on the implicit threat contained in any relation among the same socially constituted bodies.[28] In other words, an ecology of socially interdependent bodies doesn't necessarily ensure vulnerability, but might actually augment calls for protection. Thus the frequent suggestion of immunity in Butler whenever the body appears in all its vulnerability or the threat of contagion symbolically produced by the presumed enemy.[29] For his part, Esposito is attempting something different: the articulation of a political semantics that can lead to a nonimmunized (or radically communitized) life.[30]

Autoimmunity after September 11

Yet Esposito's diagnosis of the present biopolitical scene doesn't rest exclusively on reading the antinomies of community in immunity or, for that matter, on the modern roots of immunization in the institution of sovereignty. In *Bíos* and *Immunitas*, Esposito sketches the outlines of a global autoimmunity crisis that grows more dangerous and lethal by the day. The reason, Esposito argues, has primarily to do with our continuing failure to appreciate how much of our current political crisis is the result of a collective failure to interrogate the immunitary logic associated with modern political thought. In somewhat similar fashion, Jacques Derrida also urged forward an autoimmunity diagnosis of the current political moment, beginning in his writings on religion with Gianni Vattimo, then in *The Politics of Friendship*, and most famously in his interviews in the aftermath of September 11.

I want to summarize briefly how Derrida conjoins politics to autoimmunity so as to distinguish Esposito's own use of the term from Derrida's. Setting out their differences is a necessary step to understanding more fully the contemporary formation of power and what strategies are available to resolve the current moment of political autoimmunity crisis.

In "Faith and Knowledge," his contribution to Gianni Vattimo's volume titled *On Religion,* Derrida utilizes the optic of immunity to describe a situation in which religion returns to the forefront of political discourse. Interestingly, the change will be found in religion's relation to immunity. For Derrida, (auto)immunity names the mode by which religion and science are reciprocally inscribed in each other. And so any contemporary analysis of religion must begin with the recognition that religion at the end of the millennium "accompanies and precedes" what he calls "the critical and tele-technoscience reason," or better those technologies that decrease the distance and increase the speed of communications globally, which he links to capitalism and the Anglo-American idiom.[31] The same movement that makes religion and the tele-technoscience coextensive results in a countermove of immunity. Drawing upon the etymological roots of religion in *religio,* which he associates with repetition and then with performance, Derrida shows how religion's iterability presupposes the automatic and the machinelike—in other words, presupposes a technique that marks the possibility of faith. Delivering technique (technology) over to a faith in iterability shared with religion allows him to identify the autoimmunitary logic underpinning the current moment of religious revival and crisis. He writes: "It [the movement that renders religion and tele-technoscientific reason] secretes its own antidote but also its own power of auto-immunity. We are here in a space where all self-protection of the unscathed, of the safe and sound, of the sacred (*heilig,* holy) must protect itself against its own protection, its own police, its own power of rejection, in short against its own, which is to say, against its own immunity."[32]

In the context of the overlapping fields of religion and tele-technoscientific reason, immunity is always autoimmunity for Derrida and hence always destructive. It is immunal because, on the one hand, religion—he will substitute the term "faith" repeatedly for it—cannot allow itself to share performativity with tele-reason as the effects of that same reason inevitably lead to an undermining of the basis for religion in tradition, that is, in maintaining a holy space apart from its iterable features. Furthermore, it is autoimmunal to the degree that the protection of the sacred space, the "unscathed" of

the preceding quote, is created precisely thanks to the same iterability, the same features of performance that it shares with tele-technoscientific reason. The result is a protective attack against protection itself, or a crisis in autoimmunity.

Not surprisingly, religious (auto)immunity also has a biopolitical declension for Derrida, though he never refers to it as such. Thus, in the mechanical principle by which religions say they value life, they do so only by privileging a transcendental form of life. "Life" for many religions, Derrida writes, "is sacred, holy, infinitely respectable only in the name of what is worth more than it and what is not restricted to the naturalness of the bio-zoological (sacrificeable)."[33] In this, biological life is repeatedly transcended or made the supplement religion provides to life. So doing, transcendence opens up the community, constitutively formed around the living, to the "space of death that is linked to the automaton . . . to technics, the machine, prosthesis: in a word, to the dimensions of the auto-immune and self-sacrificial supplementarity, to this death drive that is silently at work in every community, every *auto-co-immunity*."[34] For Derrida (as for Esposito) the aporia of immunity operates in every community, based on "a principle of sacrificial self-destruction ruining the principle of self-protection."[35] At the origin of religious immunity lies the distinction between bio-zoological or anthropo-theological life and transcendental, sacred life that calls forth sacrifices in almost parasitical form so as to protect its own dignity. If there is a biopolitical moment to be found in Derrida's analysis of religion and autoimmunity, it will be found here in the difference between biological life and transcendental life that will continually require the difference between the two to be maintained. It is, needless to say, despite the contemporary context that informs Derrida's analysis, a conceptual aporia that precedes the discussion of capitalism, life, and late-twentieth-century technology. Writing in 1994, Derrida gestures to these changes, but in his analysis of the resurgence of religion within a certain kind of political discourse, autoimmunity co-originates with religion in the West.

Whether the same holds true in the political dimension, Derrida doesn't actually answer, at least not in his important work from 1997, *The Politics of Friendship*. There instead, after the requisite footnote marking the debt he owes Blanchot, Bataille, and Nancy, Derrida emphasizes a different political declension of (political) community, one based on a certain form of friendship of separation undergirding philosophical attempts to think a future community of solitary friends:

> Thus is announced the anchoritic community of those who love in separation . . . The invitation comes to you from those who can *love only at a distance, in separation* . . . Those who love only in cutting ties are the uncompromising friends of solitary singularity. They invite you to enter into this community of social disaggregation *[déliaison]*, which is not necessarily a secret society, a conjuration, the occult sharing of esoteric or crypto-poetic knowledge. The classical concept of the secret belongs to a thought of the community, solidarity, or the sect—initiation or private space which represents the very thing the friend who speaks to you as a friend of solitude has rebelled against.[36]

Here a different form of political relationship emerges, one linked to Bataille's "community of those without community," and one at least initially distinct from the autoimmunizing features of religion. Derrida suggests as much with his gesture here to the Deleuzian singularity, those separate entities whose very separateness functions as the invitation to the common.[37] At the same time, Derrida does preface the remarks with the adjective *anchoritic,* thereby associating the form of distant love afforded those who have withdrawn for religious reasons from the world with a political dimension. Derrida suggests that in the separateness of singularity it may be possible to avoid some of the immunizing features of community that emerged with his discussion on faith.

If I have focused initially on these two pieces in an introduction to Esposito's thought, it is because they inform much of Derrida's important reflections on global autoimmunity in the wake of September 11. Without rehearsing here all of the intricacies of his analysis, the reintroduction of the notion of autoimmunity into a more properly political discourse, both in his interviews with Giovanna Borradori after September 11 and in his later reflections on democracy in *Rogues,* shows Derrida extending the autoimmune process to two related fronts: first, to a constituent "pervertibility of democracy" at the heart of defining democracy, and second the suicidal, autoimmune crisis that has marked American foreign policy since the 1980s. As for the first, democracy for Derrida appears to have at its heart a paradoxical meaning, one in which it continually postpones both the moment when it can be fully realized as the political government in which the many rule and simultaneously the possibility that when such an event comes, the many may precisely vote to suspend democracy. Writing with the recent experience of 1990s Algeria in mind, Derrida argues that "democracy has always been suicidal" because there are always some who

do not form part of the many and who must be excluded or sent off.[38] The result, and it is one that we ought to keep in mind when attempting to think Esposito's thought on community/immunity, is that "the autoimmune topology always dictates that democracy be *sent off [renvoyer]* elsewhere, that it be excluded or rejected, expelled under the pretext of protecting it on the inside by expelling, rejecting, or sending off to the outside the domestic enemies of democracy."[39] For Derrida, autoimmunity is inscribed "right onto the concept of democracy" so that "democracy is never properly what it is, never *itself.* For what is lacking in democracy is proper meaning, the very *[même]* meaning of the selfsame *[même]* . . . the it-self *[soi-même],* the selfsame, the properly selfsame of the itself."[40] A fundamental, constitutive lack of the proper marks democracy.

Esposito's analysis of the immunity aporia of community does, much like Derrida's analysis of democracy, implicitly evoke in community something like democracy, but we ought to be careful in linking the two discussions on autoimmunity too closely—first, because Esposito clearly refuses to collapse the process of immunization into a full-blown autoimmune suicidal tendency at the heart of community. That he doesn't has to do primarily with the larger project of which *Bíos* and *Immunitas* are a part, namely, how to think an affirmative biopolitics through the lens of immunity. Esposito's stunning elaboration of a positive immunity evidenced by mother and fetus in *Immunitas* is the proof that immunity doesn't necessarily degenerate—and that sense is hardly unavoidable in Derrida's discussion—into a suicidal autoimmunity crisis. In this, Esposito sketches the outlines of an affirmative model of biopolitical immunity, whereas rarely if ever does Derrida make explicit the conceptual language of biopolitics that undergirds his analysis.

But, as I mentioned, Derrida speaks of autoimmunity in a different context, one that characterizes American foreign policy after September 11 as essentially an autoimmune reaction to previous cold-war policy that armed and trained former freedom fighters during the cold war's hot phase in Afghanistan in the early 1980s. He says:

> Immigrated, trained, prepared for their act in the United States by the United States, these *hijackers* incorporate so to speak, two suicides in one; their own (and one will remain forever defenseless in the face of a suicidal, autoimmunitary aggression—and that is what terrorizes most) but also the suicide of those who welcomed, armed and trained them.[41]

The soul-searching among the British in response to the bombings in London in the summer of 2005 is clearly proof of the correctness of Derrida's analysis; in the United States, a similar analogy might be found with the Oklahoma City bombings (though there was clearly less reflection on the elements that contributed to that instance of suicidal immunity than in the United Kingdom). In any case, by linking American foreign policy to suicide via autoimmunity, Derrida not only acknowledges an important historical context for understanding September 11, but implicitly links "these *hijackers*" to technical proficiency and high-tech knowledge and, so it would seem, to his earlier analysis of tele-reason and technology as reciprocally implicated in religious iterability. Although space doesn't allow me more than a mere mention, it might be useful to probe further the overdetermined connection of the "religious" in radical Islamic fundamentalism with just such a technological prowess. In any case, for the present discussion what matters most is that Derrida believes that September 11 cannot be thought independently of the figure of immunity; indeed, that as long as the United States continues to play the role of "guarantor or guardian of the entire world order," autoimmunitary aggression will continue, provoked in turn by future traumatizing events that may be far worse than September 11.

How, then, does Esposito's reading of an immunological lexicon in biopolitics differ from Derrida's? Where Derrida's emphasis falls repeatedly on autoimmunity as the privileged outcome of American geopolitics in the period preceding September 11, Esposito carefully avoids conflating immunity with autoimmunity; instead, he repeatedly returns to the question of *munus* and modernity's attempts to immunize itself against the ever-present threat, from its perspective, of immunity's reversal into the communal, from immunization to communization.[42] Writing at length in *Immunitas* on the imperative of security that assails all contemporary social systems and the process by which risk and protection strengthen each other reciprocally, he describes the autoimmunity crisis of biopolitics and with it the possibility of a dialectical reversal into community. "Evidently, we are dealing," Esposito writes, "with a limit point beyond which the entire biopolitical horizon risks entering in a lethal contradiction with itself." He continues:

> This doesn't mean that we can turn back the clock, perhaps reactivating the ancient figures of sovereign power. It isn't possible today to imagine a politics that doesn't turn to life as such, that doesn't look at the citizen from the point of view of his living body. But this can happen reciprocally in

> opposite forms that put into play the different meanings of biopolitics: on the one hand the self-destructive revolt of immunity against itself or the opening to its reversal in community.[43]

Looking back today at the series of attempts after September 11 in the United States to immunize the "homeland" from future attack—the term itself a powerful immunizing operator—it isn't hard to imagine that we are in the midst of a full-scale autoimmunity crisis whose symptomology Derrida and Esposito diagnose.

Yet a political autoimmunity crisis isn't the only possible biopolitical outcome of the present moment. Esposito suggests that another possibility exists, one to which his own affirmative biopolitics is directed, namely, creating the conditions in which it becomes possible to identify and deconstruct the principal twentieth-century biopolitical, or better, thanatopolitical, *dispositifs* that have historically characterized the modern immunitary paradigm. Only after we have sufficiently understood the extent to which our political categories operate to immunize the collective political body from a different set of categories associated with community can we reorient ourselves to the affirmative biopolitical opening presented by the current crisis in immunity. This opening to community as the site in which an affirmative biopolitics can emerge is the result of a dialectical reversal at the heart of the immunitary paradigm: once we recognize that immunization is the mode by which biopolitics has been declined since the dawn of modernity, the question becomes how to rupture the juncture between biology and politics, between *bíos* and *politikos*. The necessary first step is moving away from a rationality of bodies when attempting to locate the object of politics, and so shifting the conceptual ground on which immunization depends. An affirmative biopolitics thought through the *munus* of community proceeds with the recognition that a new logic is required to conceptualize and represent a new community, a coming "virtual" community, Esposito will say with Deleuze, characterized by its impersonal singularity or its singular impersonality, whose confines will run from men to plants, to animals independent of the material of their individuation.[44]

Biopolitics and Contemporary Italian Thought

The reference to a virtual, future community immediately recalls two other contemporary thinkers from Italy who are deeply engaged with the notion of biopolitics in its contemporary configuration. Of course, I am speaking of Antonio Negri and Giorgio Agamben. That modern Italian political

philosophy has emerged as perhaps the primary locus for research related to biopolitics is not happenstance. Few places have been as fertile for Foucault's teachings; few places so well primed historically and politically to reflect on and extend his work. The reasons, it seems to me, have to do principally with a rich tradition of political philosophy in Italy—we need only remember Machiavelli, Vico, de Sanctis, Croce, and Gramsci, for instance—associated with the specificity of the Italian history and a political scene characterized by the immunizing city-state.[45] Many other reasons may account for it, but what they together spell is an ongoing engagement in Italy with politics thought in a biopolitical key.[46]

With that said, the more one reads of recent Italian contributions to biopolitics, the more two diverging lines appear to characterize them: one associated with the figure of Agamben and the negative tonality he awards biopolitics; the other a radically affirmative biopolitics given in the writings of Michael Hardt and Toni Negri. As the originality of Esposito's reading of modern biopolitics cannot be appreciated apart from the implicit dialogue that runs through *Bíos* with both Agamben, and Hardt and Negri, I want to summarize these two often competing notions of biopolitics. What emerges in Esposito's analysis is a thorough critique of both Agamben and Negri; his pinpointing of their failures to think through the immunity aporia that characterizes their respective configurations of biopolitics leads to his own attempt to design a future, affirmative biopolitics. That all three launch their reflections from essentially the same series of texts, namely, Foucault's series of lectures collected in English in *Society Must Be Defended* and the fifth chapter of *The History of Sexuality,* suggests that we ought to begin there for an initial definition of biopolitics before turning to their respective appropriations of Foucault.

For Foucault, biopolitics is another name for a technology of power, a biopower, which needs to be distinguished from the mechanisms of discipline that emerge at the end of the eighteenth century. This new configuration of power aims to take "control of life and the biological processes of man as species and of ensuring that they are not disciplined but regularized."[47] The biopolitical apparatus includes "forecasts, statistical estimates, and overall measures," in a word "security mechanisms [that] have to be installed around the random element inherent in a population of living beings so as to optimize a state of life."[48] As such, biopolitics is juxtaposed in Foucault's analysis to the power of sovereignty leading to the important distinc-

tion between them: "It [biopower] is the power to make live. Sovereignty took life and let live. And now we have the emergence of a power that I would call the power of regularization, and it, in contrast, consists in making live and letting die."[49] Biopower thus is that which guarantees the continuous living of the human species. What turns out to be of almost greater importance, however, for Agamben, Negri, and Esposito, is the relation Foucault will draw between an emerging biopower at the end of the eighteenth century, often in opposition to individual disciplinary mechanisms and its culmination in Nazism. For Foucault, what links eighteenth-century biopower to Nazi biopower is precisely their shared mission in limiting the aleatory element of life and death. Thus, "[C]ontrolling the random element inherent in biological processes was one of the regime's immediate objectives."[50] This is not to say that the Nazis simply operated one-dimensionally on the body politic; as Foucault notes repeatedly, the Nazis had recourse again and again to disciplinary power; in fact "no State could have more disciplinary power than the Nazi regime," presumably because the attempts to amplify biopower depended on certain concurrent disciplinary tools.[51] For Foucault, the specificity of the Nazis' lethal biopower resides in its ability to combine and thereby intensify the power directed both to the individual and to the collective body.

Certainly, other vectors crisscross biopolitics in Foucault's analysis, and a number of scholars have done remarkable jobs in locating them, but the outline above is sufficient for describing the basis on which Agamben, Hardt and Negri, and Esposito frame their respective analyses.[52] Thus Agamben's notion of biopolitics is certainly indebted to the one sketched above—the impression that modernity produces a certain form of biopolitical body is inescapable reading Agamben as it is one implicit in Foucault. But Agamben's principal insight for thinking biopolitics concerns precisely the distinction between *bíos* and *zōē* and the process by which he links the sovereign exception to the production of a biopolitical, or better a zoo-political, body. Indeed, *Homo Sacer* opens with precisely this distinction:

> The Greeks had no single term to express what we mean by the word "life." They used two terms that, although traceable to a common etymological root, are semantically and morphologically distinct: zoë, which expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods) and bios, which indicated the form or way of life proper to an individual or group.[53]

Leaving aside for the moment whether in fact these terms exhaust the Greek lexicon for life, Agamben attempts to demonstrate the preponderance of *zōē* for the production of the biopolitical body.[54] The reason will be found in what Agamben, following Carl Schmitt, calls the sovereign exception, that is, the process by which sovereign power is premised on the exclusion of those who are simply alive when seen from the perspective of the *polis*.[55] Thus Agamben speaks of an inclusive exclusion of *zōē* from political life, "almost as if politics were the place in which life had to transform itself into good and in which what had to be politicized were always already bare life."[56] A number of factors come together to condition politics as the site of exclusion, but chief among them is the role of language, by which man "separates and opposes himself to his own bare life and, at the same time, maintains himself in relation to that bare life in an inclusive exclusion."[57] The *homo sacer* is precisely the political figure that embodies what is for Agamben the originary political relation: it is the name of the life excluded from the political life (*bíos*) that sovereignty institutes, not so much an ontology of the one excluded (and therefore featuring an unconditional capacity to be killed), but more the product of the relation in which *bíos* is premised not upon another form of life but rather on *zōē* (because *zōē* is not by definition such a form), and its principal characteristic of being merely alive and hence killable.

In such a scheme, the weight afforded the classical state of exception is great indeed, and so at least initially biopolitics for Agamben is always already inscribed in the sovereign exception. Thus Agamben will de-emphasize the Foucauldian analysis of the emergence of biopower in the late nineteenth century, for it represents less a radical rupture with sovereignty or for that matter a disciplinary society, and will instead foreground the means by which biopolitics intensifies to the point that in the twentieth century it will be transformed into thanatopolitics for both totalitarian and democratic states. Certainly, a number of differences remain between the classic and modern models of biopolitics—notably the dispersal of sovereign power to the physician and scientist so that the *homo sacer* no longer is simply an analogue to the sovereign—and of course Agamben will go out of his way to show how the political space of modernity is in fact a biopolitical space linked to "the birth of the camps."[58] But the overwhelming impression is of a kind of flattening of the specificity of a modern biopolitics in favor of a metaphysical reading of the originary and infinite state of exception that has since its inception eroded the political foundations of social life. For

Agamben, an authentically political *bíos* always withdraws in favor of the merely biological.[59] The result is a politics that is potentially forever in ruins in Marco Revelli's description, or a politics that is always already declined negatively as biopolitical.[60]

Where Agamben's negative characterization of contemporary biopolitics as thanatopolitics depends on the predominance of *zōē* over *bíos,* Hardt and Negri's radical affirmation of biopolitics centers instead on the productive features of *bíos,* and "identifying the materialist dimension of the concept beyond any conception that is purely naturalistic (life as '*zōē*') or simply anthropological (as Agamben in particular has a tendency to do, making the concept in effect indifferent)."[61] Leaving aside for the moment the descriptor "indifferent," which it seems to me fails to mark the radical negativity of Agamben's use of the term, what stands out in Hardt and Negri's reading of biopolitics is the mode by which they join contemporary forms of collective subjectivity to the transformations in the nature of labor to what a number of Italian Marxist thinkers have termed immaterial labor.[62] Thinking together these changes in forms of labor—ones characterized not by the factory but rather by "the intellectual, immaterial, and communicative labor power" affiliated with new communication technologies—through Foucault's category of biopower allows Hardt and Negri to see biopolitics as both the locus in which power exerts itself in empire and the site in which new subjectivities, what they call social singularities, subsequently emerge. Thus the term "biopolitical" characterizes not only the new social formation of singularities called the multitude but also the emergence of a new, democratic sovereignty, one joined to a radically different understanding of the common.

As Hardt and Negri themselves readily admit, reading the multitude ontologically as a biopolitical social formation represents a significant reversal if not outright break with Foucault's conception of biopolitics. Where Foucault often associates the negative features of biopower with its object, a biopolitical subject, Hardt and Negri deanchor biopolitics from its base in biopower in the current moment of empire to read it primarily and affirmatively as a social category. Thus: "Biopolitical production is a matter of ontology in that it constantly creates a new social being, a new human nature" linked to the "continuous encounters, communications, and concatenations of bodies."[63] They do the same in their reading of Agamben, forgoing his declension of a twentieth-century thanatopolitics by evoking instead a new form of sovereignty in which the state of exception presumably

either no longer operates or is soon overwhelmed by the rhizomatic production of singular multitudes, unveiling the illusory nature of modern sovereignty.[64] In its place the multitude produces a concept of the common, which "breaks the continuity of modern state sovereignty and attacks biopower at its heart, demystifying its sacred core. All that is general or public must be reappropriated and managed by the multitude and thus become common."[65] Transposing into the biopolitical language we have used to this point, Hardt and Negri juxtapose the affirmative biopolitics associated with the multitude and the common to biopower and its privileging of modern sovereignty.

In *Bíos* Esposito takes up a position directly opposite both Agamben and Hardt and Negri and their conflicting uses of biopolitics. First Agamben. Certainly, Esposito's genealogy of biopolitics shares many features with Agamben's reading of modern biopolitics through the figure of the *homo sacer*. Indeed, the chapter on thanatopolitics and the cycle of *genos* is nothing short of an explicit dialogue with Agamben and his biopolitical interpretation of Nazism, as well as an implicit critique of Agamben's biopolitics. To see why, we need to rehearse briefly the chief lines of argument Esposito develops for working through the coordinates of Nazi biopolitics. Significantly, Esposito first pinpoints an oscillation in Foucault's reading of Nazism. On the one hand, Nazism for Foucault shares the same biopolitical valence with a number of modern regimes, specifically socialist, which Foucault links to a racist matrix. On the other hand, the mode by which Foucault frames his interpretations of Nazism privileges the singular nature of the "Nazi event," as Esposito calls it. The result is an underlying inconsistency in Foucault's reading: either Nazi biopolitics is inscribed along with socialism as racism, and hence is no longer a singular event, or it maintains its singularity when the focus turns to its relation to modernity.[66]

The second line will be found in Esposito's principal question concerning the position of life in Nazi biopolitics. "Unlike all the other forms past and present," he asks, "why did Nazism propel the homicidal temptation of biopolitics to its most complete realization?"[67] That his answer will move through the category of immunization suggests that Esposito refuses to superimpose Nazi thanatopolitics too directly over contemporary biopolitics.[68] Rather, he attempts to inscribe the most significant elements of the Nazi biopolitical apparatus in the larger project of immunizing life through the production of death. In so doing, death becomes both the object and

the therapeutic instrument for curing the German body politic, simultaneously the cause and the remedy of "illness." Esposito dedicates much of the final third of *Bíos* to elaborating the immunizing features of Nazi biopolitics in order to reconstruct the move from a modern biopolitics to a Nazi thanatopolitics. The Nazi immunitary apparatus, he theorizes, is characterized by the absolute normativization of life, the double enclosure of the body, and the anticipatory suppression of life. Space doesn't allow me to analyze each, though the reader will certainly find some of the most compelling pages of *Bíos* here. More useful is to ask where Esposito's overall portrayal of Nazi biopolitics diverges from that of Agamben in immunization. By focusing on the ways in which *bíos* becomes a juridical category and *nomos* (law) a biologized one, Esposito doesn't directly challenge Agamben's reading of the state of exception as an aporia of Western politics, one the Nazis intensified enormously so that the state of exception becomes the norm. Rather, he privileges the figure of immunization as the ultimate horizon within which to understand Nazi political, social, juridical, and medical policies. In a sense he folds the state of exception in the more global reading of modern immunity *dispositifs*.

Implicit in the optic of immunity is a critique of the categories by which Nazism has been understood, two of which are primarily sovereignty and the state of exception.[69] By privileging the immunitary paradigm for an understanding of Nazi biopolitics, Esposito forgoes Agamben's folding of sovereignty into biopolitics (and so bypasses the *Musulmann* as the embodiment of the twentieth-century *homo sacer*), focusing instead on the biocratic elements of the Nazi dictatorship. He notes, for instance, the requirement that doctors had to legitimate Nazi political decisions, which previously had been translated into the Reich's new legal codes, as well as the required presence of a physician in all aspects of the workings of the concentration camp from selection to the crematoria. Esposito's analysis not only draws upon Robert Lifton's classic description of the Nazi state as a "biocracy," but more importantly urges forward the overarching role that immunization plays in the Nazi understanding of its own political goals; indeed, the Nazi politicization of medicine cannot be fully understood apart from the attempt to immunize the Aryan race.[70] Central therefore to Esposito's reading of the biopolitical tonality of the Nazi dictatorship is the recognition of the therapeutic goal the Nazis assigned the concentration camp: only by exterminating the Jews did the Nazis believe that the German *genos*

could be strengthened and protected. And so for Esposito the specificity of the Nazi experience for modernity resides in the actualization of biology, when the transcendental of Nazism becomes life, its subject race, and its lexicon biological.[71]

An Affirmative Biopolitics?

The same reasons underlying Esposito's critique of Agamben's biopolitics also spell out his differences with Hardt and Negri. Not only does Esposito explicitly distance himself from their reading of the multitude as an affirmative biopolitical actor who resists biopower—he notes how their line of interpretation pushes well beyond Foucault's manifest intentions when delimiting biopolitics, beyond the resistance of life to power—but he asks a decisive question for their use of biopolitics as an organizing principle around which they posit their critique of empire. "If life is stronger than the power that besieges it, if its resistance doesn't allow it to bow to the pressure of power, then how do we account for the outcome obtained in modernity of the mass production of death?"[72] In a number of interviews Esposito has continued to challenge Hardt and Negri's reading of biopolitics. What troubles Esposito principally is a categorical (or historical) amnesia vis-à-vis modernity's negative inflection of biopolitics.[73]

Essentially, Esposito charges that Hardt and Negri's reading of the multitude is riven by the same immunitary aporia that characterizes Agamben's negative biopolitics. In what way does the biopolitical multitude escape the immunitary aporia that resides at the heart of any creation of the common? Although he doesn't state so explicitly, Esposito's analysis suggests that folding biopower into the social in no way saves Hardt and Negri from the long and deadly genealogy of biopolitics in which life is protected and strengthened through death, in what Esposito calls the "enigma" of biopolitics. Esposito laid some of the groundwork for such a critique in the early 1990s when, in a series of reflections on the impolitical, he urged forward a thorough deconstruction of many of the same political categories that undergird Hardt and Negri's analysis, most particularly sovereignty. It certainly is plausible (and productive) to read *Bíos* through an impolitical lens, in which Esposito offers biopolitics as the latest and ultimate of all the modern politics categories that require deconstruction. Indeed, it's not by chance that the first chapter of *Bíos* aggressively positions biopolitics not only as one of the most significant ways of organizing contemporary political discourse, but also as the principal challenger to the classic political category of sover-

eignty. For Esposito, sovereignty, be it a new global sovereignty called empire or the long-lived national variety, doesn't transcend biopolitics but rather is immanent to the workings of the immunitary mechanism that he sees driving all forms of modern (bio)politics. The multitude remains inscribed in modern sovereignty, whose final horizon, following Esposito's reading of Foucault, is the immunitary paradigm itself. In other words, the multitude remains anchored to a genealogy of biopolitics. Thus Esposito not only deeply questions the hermeneutic value of sovereignty for understanding the contemporary political scene or for imagining a progressive politics oriented to the future, but also points to a sovereign remainder in the figure of multitude.

Bíos also offers another less explicit objection to Esposito's analysis of Hardt and Negri's use of the term "biopolitics." We recall that for Hardt and Negri the multitude produces a new concept of the common, which corresponds to their belief that the multitude represents a rupture with all forms of state sovereignty. This occurs thanks to the economic and biopolitical activity of the multitude, which coincides with a "commonality created by the positive externalities or by the new informational networks, and more generally by all the cooperative and communicative forms of labor."[74] The multitude mobilizes the common in the move from a *res-publica* to a *res-communis,* in which the multitude comes to embody ever more the expansive logic of singularity-commonality. However, Esposito's reading of *communitas/immunitas* sketched above suggests that there is no common obligation joining members of a community *in potentia* that can be thought apart from attempts to immunize the community, or in this case the multitude. As Esposito notes, "without this immunity apparatus individual and common life would die away."[75] The impolitical question Esposito raises for Hardt and Negri is precisely whether the new biopolitical multitude somehow transcends the political aporia of immunity that undergirds every conception of community. Perhaps in the new configuration of the common that they describe and the fundamental changes in the nature of immaterial production, the global *munus* changes as well, so that, unlike every previous form of community, the multitude no longer has any need of immunizing itself from the perils of *communitas.* Just such a reading is suggested by Hardt and Negri's repeated troping of the multitude as a network of rhizomatic singularities, who presumably would have less need of immunizing themselves because the network itself provides the proper threshold of virtual contact. Esposito in *Bíos* implicitly raises the question of

whether these singularities acting in common and so forming "a new race or, rather, a new humanity" don't also produce new forms of immunity.[76]

Immunity, we recall, emerges as a constituent element of community for Esposito, when the common threatens personal identity. Thus it isn't difficult to read those pages in *Bíos* dedicated, for instance, to the immunitary mechanism in Locke as aimed as well at Hardt and Negri. Writing apropos of the potential risk of a world that is given in common (and therefore exposed to an unlimited indistinction) is neutralized by an element presupposed in the originary manifestation . . . namely, that of the relationship one has with oneself in the form of personal identity, Esposito once again situates personal identity as the subject and object of immunitary protection.[77] The *res-communis* that Hardt and Negri see as one of the most important productions of the multitude is in Esposito's reading of Locke always seen as a threat to a *res propria*. Following this line of inquiry, *Bíos* asks us, what becomes of personal identity when the multitude produces the new sense of the common? Is it now less a threat given new forms of communication and labor, or rather does the threat to individual identity increase given the sheer power of extension Hardt and Negri award the multitude? What is at stake isn't only a question of identity or difference here, but the prevalence of one or the other in the multitude. Seen in this optic, their emphasis on the singularity and commonality of the multitude may in fact be an attempt to ward off any suggestion of an underlying antinomy between the multitude as a radically new social formation and personal identity.

A Communal *Bíos*

Given these differences, the obvious question will be what form Esposito awards his own conception of biopolitics such that it avoids the kinds of difficulties raised in these other contributions. After two illuminating readings of *bíos* in Arendt and Heidegger—which may be read as dialoging with Agamben's discussion of *homo sacer* and his appropriation of "the open" via Heidegger—Esposito sets out to construct just such an affirmative vision by "opening the black box of biopolitics," returning to the three *dispositifs* that he had previously used to characterize the Nazi bio-thanatological project and then reversing them. These are the normativization of life, the double enclosure of the body, and the anticipatory suppression of life that I noted earlier. The effect of appropriating them so as to reverse Nazi immunitary procedures will surprise and certainly challenge many readers. Esposito clearly is aware of such a possible reaction and his response merits a longer citation:

> Yet what does it mean exactly to overturn them and then to turn them *inside out?* The attempt we want to make is that of assuming the same categories of "life," "body," and "birth," and then of converting their immunitary (which is to say their self-negating) declension in a direction that is open to a more originary and intense sense of *communitas*. Only in this way—at the point of intersection and tension between contemporary reflections that have moved in such a direction—will it be possible to trace the initial features of a biopolitics that is finally affirmative. No longer over life but of life.[78]

Esposito recontextualizes his earlier work on *communitas* as the basis for an affirmative biopolitics: following his terminology, the term becomes the operator whereby a long-standing immunitary declension of *bíos* as a form of life can be reversed.[79] He premises such a reading on the belief that contemporary philosophy has fundamentally failed to grasp the relation between Nazi bio-thanatological practices and biopolitics today. "The truth," he writes, "is that many simply believed that the collapse of Nazism would also drag the categories that had characterized it into the inferno from which it had emerged."[80] Only by identifying the immunitary apparatus of the Nazi biopolitical machine and then overturning it—the word Esposito uses is *rovesciare,* which connotes the act of turning inside out—can contemporary philosophy come to terms with the fundamental immunitary features of today's global biopolitics and so devise a new lexicon able to confront and alter it.

It's precisely here that Esposito synthesizes Agamben's negative vision of biopolitics with Hardt and Negri's notion of the common as signaling a new affirmative biopolitics. Esposito doesn't offer a simple choice between immunity and community that will once and for all announce the arrival of a new human nature and with it an affirmative biopolitics. The continuum between Nazi and contemporary biopolitics that characterizes Agamben's approach is less significant from this point of view than the continuum of immunity and community. At the risk of reducing Esposito's line of argument, he suggests that if Nazi thanatopolitics is the most radically negative expression of immunization, then inverting the terms, or changing the negative to a positive, might offer contemporary thought a series of possibilities for thinking *bíos,* a qualified form of life, as the communal form of life. Such a positive conception of biopolitics can only emerge, however, if one simultaneously develops a conception of life that is aporetically exposed to others in such a way that the individual escapes an immunization of the self (and hence is no longer an individual proper).[81] For Esposito, it is less

a matter of exposure than of openness to what is held in common with others.[82] The reader will find much of interest in the way Esposito draws on the work of Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, and Deleuze when elaborating such a conception.[83]

The reference to the singular and the common also echoes those pages of Agamben's *The Coming Community,* especially the sections in which Agamben anchors a nude, exposed life to incommunicability. We recall that the coming community for Agamben begins when a meaningful context for life emerges in which death has meaning, that is, when it can be communicated. Only when the previously meaningless and unfelt death of the individual takes on meaning can one speak more properly of singularities without identity who enjoy the possibility of communication. Such a community will consequently be "without presuppositions and without subjects" and move "into a communication without the incommunicable."[84] So too for Esposito, though *Bíos* doesn't offer many details on the communicative aspects of an affirmative biopolitical community. To find them we need to turn to *Communitas,* where Esposito links forms of communication to singular lives open to each other in a community. There the differences with Agamben can be reassumed around their respective readings of Heidegger and Bataille. Thus, when Agamben emphasizes death as the means by which a life may uncover (or recover) an authentic opening into *Dasein,* he rehearses those moments of Heidegger's thought that celebrate death as the final horizon of our existence. For Esposito, such a perspective is too limiting for thinking future forms of community. "Death," he writes, glossing Bataille, "is our communal impossibility of being that which we endeavor to remain—isolated individuals."[85]

In that sense, Agamben and Esposito certainly agree on the antinomy between individuals or subjects and community. But for Bataille as for Esposito, the crucial thought for a future community concerns precisely what puts members of the community outside themselves; not their own death, "since that is inaccessible," but rather "the death of the other."[86] In such a reading, communication occurs when beings lose a part of themselves, the Bataillian rent or a wound, that unites them in communication while separating them from their identity.[87] It is in Bataille's notion of "strong communication" linked to sacrifice that Esposito locates the key for unlocking a contemporary *communitas,* one in which communication will name "a contagion provoked by the breaking of individual boundaries and by the reciprocal infection of wounds" in a sort of arch-event of contagion and

communication.[88] The implicit question for Esposito appears to be how to create conditions in which such a contagion can be contained without involving the entire immunitary machinery. To do so we need to develop a new vocabulary for thinking the boundaries of life and its other, in biojuridical forms that recognize the one in the other such that any living being is thought in "the unity of life," in a co-belonging of what is different.[89] Essentially, then, Esposito's emphasis on difference is linked to his larger defense of personal identity throughout *Bíos,* which is deeply inflected, as the reader will discover, in chapter 3 by Esposito's encounter with a hyperindividualistic Nietzsche. This may explain in part his defense of *bíos* as individuated life as opposed to *zōē.*

Birth and Autoimmunity

Esposito's emphasis on man and his relation to his living being (as opposed to Heidegger's distinction between life and existence) calls to mind other attempts to think nonontologically the difference between living beings through other perspectives on life. Keith Ansell-Pearson's privileging of symbiosis and of inherited bacterial symbionts is perhaps the most sophisticated, in his attempts to show how "amid cell gorgings and aborted invasions" a reciprocal infection arises such that the bacteria "are reinvigorated by the incorporation of their permanent disease." The human becomes nothing more than a viroid life, "an integrated colony of ameboid beings," not distinct from a larger history of symbiosis that sees germs "not simply as 'disease-causing,' but as 'life-giving' entities."[90] Consequently, anthropocentric readings of human nature will give way to perspectives that no longer focus on one particular species, such as humankind, but rather on those that allow us to think life together across its different forms (biological, social, economic). The reference to disease as life-giving certainly recalls Esposito's own reading of Nietzsche and the category of *compensatio* in *Immunitas,* as well as Machiavelli's category of productive social conflict, suggesting that some forms of immunity do not necessarily close off access to an authentically political form of life. Indeed, reading the immunitary system as only self-destructive fails to see other interpretive perspectives in which immunity doesn't protect by attacking an authentic *bíos* grounded in a common *munus,* but rather augments its members' capacity to interact with their environment, so that community can actually be fortified by immunity.

The primary example Esposito offers for such an immunitary opening to community will be found in birth. In *Immunitas,* Esposito introduces

pregnancy as a model for an immunity that augments the ability of the fetus and mother to remain healthy as the pregnancy runs its course. Their interaction takes place, however, in an immunitary framework in which the mother's system of self-defense is reined in so that the fetus does not become the object of the mother's own immunization. The immunity system of the mother "immunizes itself against an excess of immunization" thanks to the extraneousness of the fetus to the mother.[91] It isn't that the mother's body fails to attack the fetus—it does—but the immunological reaction winds up protecting the fetus and not destroying it. In the example of pregnancy with its productive immunitary features, Esposito finds a suggestive metaphor for an immunity in which the greater the diversity of the other, which would in traditional immunitary terms lead to an all-out immunitary struggle against it, is only one possibility. Another is an immunization that, rather than attacking its communal antinomy, fortifies it. *Bíos* as a political form of life, a community, emerges out of an immunization that successfully immunizes itself against attacking what is other, with the result that a more general defense of the system itself, the community, occurs.

This may account for the distance Esposito is willing to travel in awarding birth a political valence. In some of *Bíos*'s most rewarding pages, Esposito suggests that immunization isn't the only category capable of preserving or protecting life from death, but rather that birth, or the continual rebirth of all life in different guises, can function similarly. Drawing on Spinoza's theory of life and Gilbert Simondon's reflections on individuation, Esposito extends the category of birth to those moments in which the subject, "moving past one threshold," experiences a new form of individuation. He assumes a stratum of life that all living beings share, a common *bíos* that is always already political as it is the basis on which the continued birth of individuation occurs. So doing, he elaborates *bíos* in such a way that *zōē* will in turn be inscribed within it: there is no life without individuation through birth. Although Esposito doesn't say so explicitly, the suggestion is that a new affirmative biopolitics might begin by shuffling the terms by which we think of the preservation of life. Life is no longer linked exclusively to those deemed worthy of it along with those who are not, but now comes to mark every form of life that appears thanks to individuation. He writes:

> If one thinks about it, life and birth are both the contrary of death: the first synchronically and the second diachronically. The only way for life to defer death isn't to preserve it as such (perhaps in the immunitary form of negative protection), but rather to be reborn continually in different guises.[92]

An ontology of the individual or the subject becomes less a concern than the process of individuation associated with the appearance of life, be it individual or collective. Attempts to immunize life against death give way to strategies that seek to promote new forms of individuation. The emphasis on individuation (and not the individual) allows Esposito to argue that the individual is the subject that produces itself through individuation, which is to say that the individual "is not definable outside of the political relationship with those that share the vital experience." So too the collective, which is no longer seen as the "neutralization of individuality" but rather as a more elaborated form of individuation.[93] Rather than limiting *bíos* to the immunization of life, Esposito imagines an affirmative *bíos* that privileges those conditions in which life as manifested across different forms is equipped for individuation. There will be no life that isn't born anew and hence that isn't inscribed in the horizon of *bíos.* Thus Esposito repositions *bíos* as the living common to all beings that allows for individuation to take place, not through the notion of a common body—for that too assumes an immunizing function—but rather through a *bíos* that is inscribed in the flesh of the world. Those pages dedicated to Francis Bacon are significant here for Esposito sees in Bacon's paintings not only a reversal of the Nazi biopolitical practice of animalizing man, but also an opening to flesh as describing the condition of the majority of humanity. Or more than an opening to the category of flesh, we might well speak of a nonbelonging or an interbelonging among bodies that makes certain that what is different isn't closed hermetically within itself but remains in contact with the outside. Essentially, Esposito is describing not an exteriorization of the body but rather an internal, even Bataillian rending, that impedes the body's own absolute immanence. It is on this basis that an affirmative biopolitics can begin to be imagined.

The Biopolitics of Biotechnology

What does the opening to *bíos* as a political category that humanity shares tell us about that other development that so decidedly marks the current biopolitical moment, namely, biotechnology? The question isn't posed in the reflections and exchanges with regard to biotechnology between Jürgen Habermas and Ronald Dworkin; indeed, missing is precisely a reflection on the role biotechnology plays for contemporary biopolitics.[94] The uncovering of the immunitary paradigm in *Bíos,* however, allows us to see just where biopolitics and the ethical uncertainty surrounding biotechnology might

intersect. Consider first Habermas's objection that genetic programming, which allows individuals to enhance what they believe to be the desirable features of future offspring, places the future of human nature at risk. Describing a new type of interpersonal relationship "that arises when a person makes an irreversible decision about the natural traits of another person," Habermas argues that our self-understanding as members of the species will be altered when a person or persons can manipulate the genetic basis of life of another; the basis of free societies that are premised on relations "between free and equal human beings" will be undermined. He adds: "This new type of relationship offends our moral sensibility because it constitutes a foreign body in the legally institutionalized relations of recognition in modern societies."[95] The reference to foreign bodies in new recognition protocols makes it clear that Habermas's language is one largely indebted to the language of immunity. What's more, the impression is that for Habermas symmetrical relations among the members of a group are homologous to the foundation of a moral and ethical community; he assumes something like an unproblematic origin of community that is both the cause and the effect of "human nature." With the genetic manipulation of the human, the development of certain individuals becomes unhinged from their free and unhindered growth. Knowing that others are responsible for who and what they are not only alters how they see themselves and the kinds of narratives they construct about their individual lives, but also jeopardizes how others will see them (as privileged, as escaping somehow from the natural development of characteristics that occur in interactions with others). These social foundations of society will be irreparably damaged when some members are allowed to intervene genetically in the development of others.

Certainly, Esposito's analysis in *Bíos* and elsewhere shares a number of features with Habermas's symptomology of a catastrophic neoliberal eugenic regime in which individual choice on future genetic programming operates, in not so different form, to immunize certain individuals from the community. But Esposito parts ways with Habermas in two areas. First, by disclosing the negative modality of community in immunity, Esposito deconstructs the transcendental conception of community that for Habermas is structured by "forms of communication through which we reach an understanding with one another."[96] For Esposito, there is no originary moment of individual self-understanding that brings together subjects to form a community, but rather an impolitical immunitary mechanism

operating at the heart of the genesis of community: everyone is joined together in their subtraction from community to the degree the gift of the *munus* does not belong to the subject. There is "nothing in common," as he titles a chapter in *Communitas,* and hence no self-understanding that can bridge the irreducible difference between subjects. If there is to be a defense of community against the threat of future members whose genetically altered bodies undercut the shared life experiences of all, it cannot be premised on the effects of biotechnology to subtract certain members from the communal giving of the *munus.* A critique of the dangers of contemporary eugenics based on the threat it raises for the biological conformity of its members runs aground therefore on the impulse to create a transcending norm of biological life.

This by no means precludes a thoroughgoing critique on Esposito's part of the biopolitical lexicon in which neoliberal eugenic practices are inscribed. Although Esposito in *Bíos* doesn't discuss current neoliberal eugenics, certainly genetic programming cannot be thought apart from a history of twentieth-century immunizing biopolitics. Thus, in genetic enhancement one observes the domination of the private sphere in questions of public interest, which is captured in the blurring between therapeutic and enhancing interventions. As Esposito shows, such a blurring was already a part of early-twentieth-century eugenics beginning in the United States. The result is that in the realm of biotechnology and genetic engineering, politics continues to center on—Esposito will say to be crushed by—the purely biological. But there is more. Neoliberal eugenics often appears to combine within it the three immunitary procedures sketched above that Esposito locates in a Nazi thanatopolitics. The enormous influence that biologists enjoy today for how individual life may unfold later suggests that the absolute normativization of life has increased exponentially, witnessed in the example with which Esposito opens *Bíos* of the French child, born with serious genetic lesions, who sued his mother's doctor for a missed diagnosis. One can easily imagine other such cases in the near future in which a failure to intervene genetically might well lead to similar cases against parents or doctors. So too the second immunitary procedure in which the bodies of a future generation of genetically enhanced individuals can be said to belong no longer to themselves, but rather to the individuals who had earlier decided on their genetic makeup. A hereditary patrimony based on the elimination of weaker elements will occur no longer primarily through euthanasia or sterilization, but rather by selecting beforehand the desired

characteristics. In this sense, where the bodies of the German people during Nazism were said to belong to the *Führer,* neoliberal eugenics disperses the choice to the marketplace and science that together will determine which genetic features are deemed of value. Thus, in ever more rapid fashion bioengineered bodies may be said to belong to the mechanisms of profit and science. So too the preemptory suppression of birth that now takes place routinely in those instances in which the risk of genetic defects surrounding a birth leads to early termination of the pregnancy. This is not to say, of course, that Nazi thanatopolitics and contemporary neoliberal eugenics are coterminus for Esposito. In his recent discussion of totalitarianism and biopolitics, Esposito anticipates objections to any kind of superimposition of Nazism and liberalism:

> If for Nazism man *is* his body and only his body, for liberalism, beginning with Locke, man *has* a body, which is to say he possesses his body—and therefore can use it, transform it, and sell it much like an internal slave. In this sense liberalism—naturally I'm speaking of the category that founds it—overturns the Nazi perspective, transferring the property of the body from the State to the individual, but within the same biopolitical lexicon.[97]

Here Esposito implicitly marks the shared vocabulary of liberalism that collaborates deeply with capitalism and twentieth-century thanatopolitics—not the double of Nazi biopolitics or its return, but their shared indebtedness to the terms of an immunizing modern biopolitics.

Dworkin and Life's Norm

The acuteness of Esposito's angle of vision on liberalism also allows us to situate his position with regard to Ronald Dworkin's discussion of abortion, euthanasia, and biotechnology. What we find is a thoroughgoing deconstruction of the biopolitical and immunizing features of many of the terms Dworkin employs. To review: in *Life's Dominion* from 1994, Dworkin speaks of the sacred and inviolable characteristics of "human life" in current debates on euthanasia and abortion in an attempt to undercut any arguments about the fetus as enjoying any intrinsic rights as a person. His argument hinges on a reading of the sacred as embedded in human and "artistic creation":

> Our special concern for art and culture reflects the respect in which we hold artistic creation, and our special concern for the survival of animal species reflects a parallel respect for what nature, understood as divine or as secular,

> has produced. These twin bases of the sacred come together in the case of survival of our own species, because we treat it as crucially important that we survive not only biologically but culturally, that our species not only lives but thrives.[98]

Naturally, the sacred life Dworkin defends is not *bíos* at all but what he calls subjective life, the "personal value we have in mind when we say that normally a person's life is the most important thing he or she has," which is to say bare life. Such a conflation of bare life and *bíos* accounts for his failure to think life across different forms; a sacred life is one limited almost entirely to bare life and hence to all the associations that it calls forth.

Not surprisingly, the emphasis he places on artistic and divine creation appears again in his most recent defense of biotechnology. There the inviolability of life is linked to a defense of biotechnology via the notion of creation. In an essay titled "Playing God," Dworkin strongly pushes for what appears to be a neoliberal eugenics program masked by the term "ethic individualism." "There is nothing in itself wrong," he writes, "with the detached ambition to make the lives of future generations of human beings longer and more full of talent and hence achievement." "On the contrary," he continues, "if playing God means struggling to improve our species, bringing into our conscious designs a resolution to improve what God deliberately or nature blindly has evolved over eons, then the first principle of ethical individualism commands that struggle, and its second principle forbids, in the absence of positive evidence of danger, hobbling the scientists and doctors who volunteer to lead it."[99] To the degree the weight we afford human lives is contingent on a notion of creation, the "playing God" of the title, biotechnology cannot be separated from the implicit sacred nature of created life in all its forms. The emphasis on creation (and not creationism, we should be clear) leads Dworkin down the path of a robust defense of biotechnology. Who, the argument runs, would disagree with the implicit desire of the not-yet-born individual to live a longer and more successful life?[100]

Here too Esposito offers a rejoinder. By focusing on the inviolability of individual human life, Dworkin fails to weigh properly the singularity of all life, which is to say that as long as the emphasis is placed on the individual and other traditional forms used to decline the subject, Dworkin's perspective on life is disastrous for any affirmative biopolitics. What's more, in such a scheme, ethic individualism quickly becomes the norm that transcends life; it is a norm of life that limits life to the confines of an individual subject

and individual body; in this it operates, as it has traditionally done, to immunize the community and modernity itself, from the immanence of impersonal, singular life. Such an immanence Esposito anchors to the *bíos* of *communitas*—not one based, as Dworkin would have it, on a community of citizens who "recognize that the community has a communal life," but rather an ecumenical community that runs to all life-forms and one that is not always and everywhere transcended by notions of citizenship and individuality.[101] In other words, Dworkin's explicit linking of the "sacred" nature of biotechnology and bare life depends not simply on the function of creation but more importantly is riven through with a debt owed the notion of the individual. It isn't simply that the government and commerce ought to "fuel, restrain, or shape these developments [in biotechnology]," but rather that life understood as the opening to the impersonal singularity and to the trans- or preindividual cannot emerge as the immanent impulse of life so long as the norm of life is only thought in terms of the individual subject.[102] The open question is to what degree the marriage between biotechnology and the individual subject represents a radical jump in quality of the immunizing paradigm. How one answers that will determine the prospects for a coming, affirmative biopolitics.

A Fortified *Bíos*?

How, then, can we set about reversing the current thanatopolitical inflection of biotechnics and biopolitics? Esposito's final answer in *Bíos* will be found by rethinking precisely the relation between norm and life in opposition to Nazi semantics by developing another semantics in which no fundamental norm exists from which the others can be derived. This is because "every behavior carries with it the norm that places it in existence within a more general natural order. Considering that there are as many multiple individuals as there are infinite modes of substance means that the norms will be multiplied by a corresponding number."[103] Once the notion of individual no longer marks an individual subject but the process of individuation linked to the birth of all forms of life, our attention will then shift to producing a multiplicity of norms within the sphere of law. The individual will no longer be seen as simply the site in which previous genetic programming is executed, no mere hardware for a genetic software, but instead the space in which individuation takes place thanks to every living form's interdependence with other living forms. Norms for individuals will give way to individualizing norms that respect the fact that the human body "lives

in an infinite series of relations with the bodies of others."[104] Here as elsewhere Esposito is drawing on Spinoza for his elaboration of a new, nonimmunitary semantics of a multiplicity of norms, in which norms cannot be thought outside the "movement of life," one in which the value of every norm is linked to its traducibility from one system to another. The result is the continual deconstruction of any absolute normative system, be it Nazi thanatopolitics or contemporary capitalist bioengineering of the human. The result is both a defense of difference among life-forms and their associated norms and an explicit critique of otherness, which for Esposito inevitably calls forth immunization from the implicit threat of contagion and death.[105] The emphasis on difference (and not otherness) among life-forms in the closing pages of *Bíos* is linked to change, which Esposito sees not only as a prerogative of the living, but as the basis for elaborating a radical tolerance toward a world understood as a multiplicity of different living forms.

The question, finally, is how to fortify a life's opening to other lives without at the same time inscribing it in an immunitary paradigm. For Esposito, the answer, as I suggested when addressing Dworkin's neoliberal perspective on biotechnology, lies in destabilizing the absolute immanence of the individual life by forgoing an emphasis on the individual life in favor of an "indefinite life." The reference to Deleuze's last essay, "Pure Immanence," allows Esposito to counterpose the absolute immanence of individual life to the absolute singularity of a "life." The relevant quote from Deleuze merits citation:

> The life of the individual gives way to an impersonal and yet singular life that releases a pure event freed from the accidents of internal and external life, that is, from subjectivity and objectivity of what happens: a "Homo tantum" with whom everyone empathizes and who attains a sort of beatitude. It is haecceity no longer of individuation but of singularization: a life of pure immanence, neutral beyond good and evil, for it was only the subject that incarnated it in the midst of things that made it good or bad. The life of such an individuality fades away in favor of the singular life immanent to a man who no longer has a name, though he can be mistaken for no other. A singular essence, a life.[106]

Esposito's excursus on flesh and individuating birth attempts to articulate the necessary conditions in which the characteristics of just such a singular *homo tantum* can be actualized; implicit in the figure of the *homo tantum* is a "norm of life that doesn't subject life to the transcendence of a norm, but makes the norm the immanent impulse of life."[107] If we were to express

such a figure biopolitically, the category of *bíos* will name the biopolitical thought that is able to think life across all its manifestations or forms as a unity. There is no *zōē* that can be separated from *bíos* because "every life is a form of life and every form refers to life."[108] Esposito here translates Deleuze's singular life as the reversal of the thanatopolitics he sees underpinning the Nazi normative project in which some lives were not considered forms and hence closed off from *bíos*. The opening to an affirmative biopolitics takes place precisely when we recognize that harming one part of life or one life harms all lives. The radical toleration of life-forms that epitomizes Esposito's reading of contemporary biopolitics is therefore based on the conviction that every life is inscribed in *bíos*.

No greater obstacle to fortifying *bíos* exists today than those biopolitical practices that separate out *zōē* from *bíos*, practices that go hand in hand with the workings of the immunitary paradigm. Esposito seems to be suggesting that our opening to an affirmative biopolitics becomes thinkable only when a certain moment has been reached when a philosophy of life appears possible in the folds of an ontology of death, when the immunitary mechanisms of the twenty-first century reach the point of no return. In such an event, when the immunitary apparatus attacks *bíos* by producing *zōē*, a space opens in which it becomes possible to posit *bíos* as not in opposition to *zōē* but as its ultimate horizon. Thus the subject of *Bíos* is life at the beginning of the twenty-first century, its fortunes inextricably joined to a ductile immunitary mechanism five hundred years or so in operation. Five hundred years is a long time, but the conditions, Esposito argues, may be right for a fundamental and long overdue rearticulation or reinscription of *bíos* in a still to be completed political lexicon that is radically humanistic to the degree that there can be no *zōē* that isn't already *bíos*. One of the shorthands Esposito offers in *Bíos* for thinking the difference will be found in the juxtaposition between a "politics of mastery and the negation of life" and another future, affirmative politics of life.[109]

Life as *Bíos*

These are, it seems to me, the most significant elements of Esposito's genealogy and ontology of contemporary biopolitics. What I would like to do in the remaining pages is to suggest possible areas of contact between *Bíos* and contemporary public culture.

Esposito's uncovering of the reciprocity between community and immunity captures brilliantly the stalemate that continues to characterize debates

about the choice between security and freedom. One need only recall the Patriot Act and the justification for its attacks on civil liberties in the name of "homeland security" to see where the disastrous effects of excessive immunization on a community will be registered: precisely in immunity's closing to community. Once we see immunity/community as a continuum we can understand the precise meaning of "the war on terror begins at home" as directed against the radical opening to social relations that are implicit in the gift and obligation of the *munus,* both globally and locally. We are living, Esposito suggests, in one of the most lethal immunitary mechanisms of the modern period, lethal for both global relations, which now are principally based on war, and the concurrent repression sanctioned by security concerns. As I have noted repeatedly, recognizing the dangers of immunization for meaningful and productive relations between individual members and among communities doesn't in any way lead Esposito, however, to argue for a return to some privileged origin of community. Attempts to locate such an origin are doomed to a melancholic search for community that can never be met. At the same time, recognizing the futility of such a search creates an opportunity, thanks to the contemporary immunity crisis, to think again what the basis for community might be. What needs to take place therefore is thinking through a dialectic of how to singularize "we." Esposito's itinerary that moves through immunities that fortify singular "we's" thanks to the articulation of individuation can help make us not only more attentive to our encounters with others and the other, but also to examine more deeply the kinds of motivations that undergird these kinds of encounters.

Obviously, the opportunity for thinking anew the assumptions on which communities come together will have a profound impact on the kind of public culture we wish for ourselves. What kind of public culture, for instance, makes possible and nourishes an opening to the common flesh of all, one that is capable of vitalizing all forms of life? Is there already implicit in the notion of public culture a private space that can have no truck with the kinds of retooled relations Esposito is describing? These kinds of questions are not easily asked in the current war on terror, a war founded precisely on excluding "terrorists" from the horizon of *bios,* that is, as forms of life (now enemy combatants) who do not merit any political qualification. Thus, when President Bush speaks of terrorism as representing "a mortal danger to all humanity" or when he describes "tense borders" under assault, the implicit connection to an immunitary paradigm becomes obvious.[110]

It is because terrorism represents a war on humanity that it is a war against life itself, that borders must be defended and strengthened. Not simply geographic borders but, more significantly, the borders of the kind of life that can and cannot be inscribed in *bíos*. The result is once again the politicization of life and with it the demarcation of those lives outside *bíos*. The effect of limiting *bíos* to only those on one side of the border isn't simply to mark, however, those who can be sacrificed as *homo sacer,* as Agamben would have it, but rather to attack with violence the *munus* immunity shares with community. Interestingly, in some of his speeches President George W. Bush also speaks of liberty as the vital catalyst for improving "the lives of all"; leaving aside just what he intends for liberty, clearly today liberty is disclosed ever more readily as an effect of the immunity modality, much as Esposito describes it in those pages dedicated to Locke.[111] In perhaps more obvious fashion than in recent memory, liberty is spectacularly reduced to the security of the subject; a subject who possesses liberty is the secure(d) citizen. Although Esposito doesn't elaborate on the relation of the modern subject to the citizen—as the closing pages of *Bíos* make clear, his research is moving necessarily toward a genealogy of "the person"—he does explicitly suggest that a semantics of the individual or the citizen has always functioned within an immunitary paradigm.[112] As tempting as it might be to read liberty as a vital multiplier of community in opposition to immunity, such a strategy is doomed to failure as well, given liberty's historical failure to maintain any autonomy with regard to the protection of life.

If we read Esposito carefully, the first step to a public culture made vital by *communitas* begins with the recognition that the lives of "terrorists" can in no way be detached from a political qualification that is originary to life. Rather than merely agreeing to their exteriorization to *bíos,* which appears as both an ethical and a philosophical failure of enormous magnitude, what we need to do is to understand and practice differently the unity of *bíos* and politics in such a way that we no longer reinforce the politicization of life (which is precisely what the war on terror is intended to do), but instead create the conditions for what he calls a "vitalization of politics."[113] No greater task confronts us today than imagining the form such a vitalized politics might take, as that is precisely the direction in which an originary and intense sense of *communitas* resides.

Bíos

Introduction

France, November 2000. A decision of the French Appeals Court opens a lacerating conflict in French jurisprudence. Two appeals are overturned, which had in turn reversed the previous sentences. The court recognized that a baby by the name of Nicolas Perruche, who was born with serious genetic lesions, had the right to sue the doctor who had misdiagnosed a case of German measles in the pregnant mother. Against her expressed wishes, she was prevented from aborting. What appears to be the legally irresolvable object of controversy in the entire incident is attributing to small Nicolas the right *not* to be born. At issue is not the proven error of the medical laboratory, but rather the status of the subject who contests it. How can an individual have legal recourse against the only circumstance that furnishes him with juridical subjectivity, namely, that of his own birth? The difficulty is both of a logical and an ontological order. If it is already problematic that a being can invoke his or her right not to be, it is even more difficult to think of a nonbeing (which is precisely who has not yet been born) that claims the right to remain as such, and therefore not to enter into the sphere of being. What appears undecidable in terms of the law is the relation between biological realty and the juridical person, that is, between natural life and a form of life. It is true that being born into such conditions, the baby incurred harm. But who if not he himself could have decided to avoid it, eliminating beforehand his own being as the subject of life, the life proper of a subject? Not only. Because every subjective right corresponds to the obligation of not obstructing those who are in a condition to do so signifies that the mother would have been forced to

abort irrespective of her choice. The right of the fetus not to be born would be configured therefore as a preventive duty on the part of the person who conceived to eliminate him *[sopprimerlo]*, instituting in such a way a eugenic caesura, one that is legally recognized, between a juridical life that is judged as valid and another "life unworthy of life," to use the Nazi phrase.

Afghanistan, November 2001. Two months after the terrorist attacks of September 11, a new kind of "humanitarian" war takes shape in the skies above Afghanistan. The adjective *humanitarian* no longer concerns the reasons behind the conflict—as had occurred in Bosnia and Kosovo, namely, to defend entire populations from the threat of ethnic genocide—but its privileged instrument, which is to say air bombardments. And so we find that both highly destructive bombs were released along with provisions and medicine on the same territory at the same time. We must not lose sight of the threshold that is crossed here. The problem doesn't lie only in the dubious juridical legitimacy of wars fought in the name of universal rights on the basis of arbitrary or biased decisions on the part of those who had the force to impose and execute them, and not even in the lack of uniformity often established between proposed ends and the results that are obtained. The most acute oxymoron of humanitarian bombardment lies rather in the superimposition that is manifested in it between the declared intention to defend life and to produce actual death. The wars of the twentieth century have made us accustomed to the reversal of the proportion between military deaths (which was largely the case before) and civilian victims (which are today far superior to the former). From time immemorial racial persecutions have been based on the presupposition that the death of some strengthens the life of others, but it is precisely for this reason that the demarcation of a clear division between lives to destroy and lives to save endures and indeed grows. It is precisely such a distinction that is tendentiously erased in the logic of bombardments that are destined to kill and protect the same people. The root of such an indistinction is not to be sought, as is often done, in a structural mutation of war, but rather in the much more radical transformation of the idea of *humanitas* that subtends it. Presumed for centuries as what places human beings *[gli uomini]* above the simple common life of other living species (and therefore charged with a political value), *humanitas* increasingly comes to adhere to its own biological material. But once it is reduced to its pure vital substance and for that reason removed from every juridical-political form, the humanity of man remains necessarily exposed to what both saves and annihilates it.

Russia, October 2002. Special groups of the Russian state police raid the Dubrovska Theater in Moscow, where a Chechen commando unit is holding almost a thousand people hostage. The incursion results in the death of 128 hostages as well as almost all of the terrorists thanks to an incapacitating and lethal gas. The episode, justified and indeed praised by other governments as a model of firmness, marks another step with respect to the others I've already described. Even if in this case the term "humanitarian" was not used, the underlying logic is no different: the deaths here emerge out of the same desire to save as many lives as possible. Without lingering over other troubling circumstances (such as the use of a gas that was prohibited by international treaties or the impossibility of making available adequate antidotes while keeping secret their very nature), let's consider the point that interests us most. The death of the hostages wasn't an indirect and accidental effect of the raid by law enforcement, which can happen in cases such as these. It wasn't the Chechens, who, surprised by the police assault, killed the hostages, but the police who killed them directly. Frequently one speaks of the specularity of the methods between terrorists and those that face off against them. This is understandable and under certain limits inevitable. But never before does one see governmental agents, charged with saving prisoners from a possible death, carry out the massacre themselves, which the terrorists had themselves only threatened. Various factors weighed in the Russian president's decision: the desire to discourage other attempts of the sort; the message to the Chechens that their fight had no hope of succeeding; and a display of sovereign power in a time of its apparent crisis. But, fundamentally, something else constitutes its tacit assumption. The blitz on the Dubrovska Theater not only marks, as I said, the withdrawal of politics in the face of brute force, nor is it irreducible to the unveiling of an originary connection between politics and evil *[male]*. It is the extreme expression that politics can assume when it faces, without any mediation, the question of the survival of human beings suspended between life and death. To keep them alive at all cost, one can even decide to hasten their death.

China, February 2003. The Western media circulates the news (strongly censored by the Chinese government) that in the sole province of Henan there are a million and a half Chinese who are seropositive, with some villages such as Donghu having a percentage that reaches upwards of 80 percent of the population. Unlike other Third World countries, the contagion does not have a natural or a sociocultural cause, but an immediate economic

and political one. At its origin is not unprotected sexual relations nor dirty drug needles, but rather the sale en masse of blood, which the central government encouraged and organized. The blood, which the government had extracted from peasants who were in need of money, was centrifuged in large containers that separated the plasma from the red globules. While the former was sent to rich buyers, the latter was again injected into the donors so as to avoid anemia and to force them into repeating the operation. But it only took one of them to be infected to contaminate the entire stock of blood contained in the huge cauldrons. Thus, entire villages were filled with those who were seropositive, which, given the lack of medicine, became a death sentence. It is true that China has recently sold cheap anti-AIDS medicines produced locally on the market, but it did not make them available to the peasants of Henan, whom it not only ignored, but whom it obliged to keep quiet at the risk of imprisonment. The affair was revealed by someone who, left alone after the deaths of his relatives, preferred dying in prison rather than in his own hut alone. It's enough to move our gaze onto another, larger phenomenon to see that biological selection in a country that continues to define itself as communist isn't only of class, but also of sex. This happens at the moment when the state policy of "a single child" (which was intended to halt a growing demographic) is joined to the technology of ecography, causing the abortion of a large number of those who would have become future women. This made the former traditional practice in the countryside, of drowning female infants upon birth, unnecessary, but it was bound to augment the numerical disproportion between males and females. It has been calculated that in less than twenty years it will be difficult for Chinese men to find a wife, if they don't tear her away from her family as an adolescent. Perhaps it's for this reason that in China the relation between female and male suicides is five to one.

Rwanda, April 2004. A United Nations report tells us that around ten thousand babies of the same age are the biological result of mass ethnic rapes that occurred ten years ago during the genocide that the Hutu committed on the Tutsi. As occurred later in Bosnia and other parts of the world, such a practice modified in original ways the relation between life and death that had until then been recognized in traditional wars and even in those so-called asymmetrical wars against terrorists. While in these wars death always comes from life—and even comes *through* life as in kamikaze suicide attacks—in the act of ethnic rape it is also life that emerges from death,

from violence, and from the terror of women who were made pregnant while unconscious from the blows they had received or immobilized with a knife to their throat. It is an example of "positive" eugenics that is not juxtaposed to the negative one practiced in China or elsewhere, but rather constitutes its counterfactual result. Whereas the Nazis and all their imitators carried out genocide by preemptively destroying birth, those of today do so through forced birth and therefore in the most drastic perversion of the event that brings essence to self *[in sé l'essenza]*, other than the promise of life. Contrary to those who saw in the newness of birth the symbolic and real presupposition for renewed political action, ethnic rape makes it the most acute point of connection between life and death, but which occurs in the tragic paradox of a new generation of life. That all Rwandan mothers of the war, when asked about their own experiences, declared their love for their children born from hate signifies that the force of life prevails once again over that of death. Furthermore, the most extreme immunitary practice, which is to say affirming the superiority of one's own blood to the point of imposing it on those with whom one does not share it, is destined to be turned against itself, producing exactly what it wanted to avoid. The Hutu children of Tutsi women, or the Tutsi children of Hutu men, are the objective communitarian, which is to say multiethnic outcome of the most violent racial immunization. We are faced here too with a sort of undecidability, or a double-faced phenomenon in which life and politics are joined in a relation whose interpretation demands a new conceptual language.

At the center of such a language is the notion of biopolitics. It is by starting with biopolitics that events such as those I've just described, which escape a more traditional interpretation, find a complex of meaning that moves beyond their simple manifestation. It is true that they provide an extreme image (though certainly not unfaithful) of a dynamic that already involves all the most important political phenomena of our time. From the war of and against terrorism to mass migrations; from the politics of public health to those of demography; from measures of security to the unlimited extension of emergency legislation—there is no phenomenon of international importance that is extraneous to the double tendency that situates the episodes I've just described within a single of line of meaning. On the one hand, a growing superimposition between the domain of power or of law *[diritto]* and that of life; on the other, an equally close implication

that seems to have been derived with regard to death. It is exactly the tragic paradox that Michel Foucault, in a series of writings dating back to the middle of the 1970s, examined. Why does a politics of life always risk being reversed into a work of death?

I think I can say, without failing to acknowledge the extraordinary analytic power of his work, that Foucault never fully answered the question; or better, that he always hesitated choosing from among different responses, responses that were for their part tributaries of different modes of approaching the question that he himself had raised. The opposite interpretations of biopolitics, the one radically negative and the other absolutely euphoric that today lead the field, do nothing except make absolute (by spreading them apart) the two hermeneutic options between which Foucault never decided. Without anticipating here a more detailed reconstruction of the affair, my impression is that this situation of philosophical and political stalemate originates with a question that is either missing or has been insufficiently posed concerning the presuppositions of the theme in question: not just what biopolitics signifies but how it was born. How is it configured over time and which aporias does it continue to carry? It's enough to extend research on the diachronic axis as well the horizontal level to recognize that Foucault's decisive theorizations are nothing but the final segment (as well as the most accomplished) of a line of discourse that goes rather further back in time, to the beginning of the last century. To bring to light this lexical tradition (for the first time I would add), revealing its contiguity and semantic intervals, obviously doesn't only have a philological emphasis, because only a similar kind of operation of excavation promotes the force and originality of Foucault's thesis through differences with it; but above all because it allows us to peer into the black box of biopolitics from a variety of angles and with a greater breadth of gaze. It becomes possible to construct a critical perspective on the interpretive path that Foucault himself created; for example, with reference to the complex relationship, which he instituted, between the biopolitical regime and sovereign power. We will return in more detail to this specific point further on, but what ought to draw our attention—because it involves the very same meaning of the category in question—is the relation between the politics of life and the ensemble of modern political categories. Does biopolitics precede, follow, or coincide temporally with modernity? Does it have a historical, epochal, or originary dimension? Foucault's response to such a question is not completely clear, a question that is decisive because it is logically connected to the interpreta-

tion of contemporary experience. He oscillates between a continuist attitude and another that is more inclined to mark differential thresholds.

My thesis is that this kind of an epistemological uncertainty is attributable to the failure to use a more ductile paradigm, one that is capable of articulating in a more intrinsic manner the two lemmas that are enclosed in the concept in question, which I have for some time now referred to in terms of immunization. Without expanding here on its overall meaning (which I've had occasion to define elsewhere in all its projections of sense), the element that quickly needs to be established is the peculiar knot that immunization posits between biopolitics and modernity.[1] I say quickly because it restores the missing link of Foucault's argumentation. What I want to say is that only when biopolitics is linked conceptually to the immunitary dynamic of the negative protection of life does biopolitics reveal its specifically modern genesis. This is not because its roots are missing in other preceding epochs (they aren't), but because only modernity makes of individual self-preservation the presupposition of all other political categories, from sovereignty to liberty. Naturally, the fact that modern biopolitics is also embodied through the mediation of categories that are still ascribable to the idea of order (understood as the transcendental of the relation between power and subjects) means that the politicity of *bíos* is still not affirmed absolutely. So that it might be, which is to say so that life is *immediately* translatable into politics or so that politics might assume an *intrinsically* biological characterization, we have to wait for the totalitarian turning point of the 1930s, in particular for Nazism. There, not only the negative (which is to say the work of death) will be functionalized to stabilize order (as certainly was still the case in the modern period), but it will be produced in growing quantities according to a thanatopolitical dialectic that is bound to condition the strengthening of life vis-à-vis the ever more extensive realization of death.

In the point of passage from the first to the second form of immunization will be found the works of Nietzsche, to whom I've dedicated an entire chapter of this book. I have done so not only for his underlying biopolitical relevance, but because he constitutes an extraordinary seismograph of the exhaustion of modern political categories when mediating between politics and life. To assume the will of power as the fundamental vital impulse means affirming at the same time that life has a constitutively political dimension and that politics has no other object than the maintenance and expansion of life. It is precisely in the relationship between these two ultimate modes

of referring to *bíos* that the innovative or conservative, or active or reactive character of forces facing each other is established. Nietzsche himself and the meaning of his works is part of this comparison and struggle, in the sense that together they express the most explicit criticism of the modern immunitary loss of meaning and an element of acceleration from within. From here a categorical as well as stylistic splitting occurs between two tonalities of thought juxtaposed and interwoven that constitutes the most typical cipher of the Nietzschean text: destined on the one side to anticipate, at least on the theoretical level, the destructive and self-destructive slippage of twentieth-century biocracy, and on the other the prefiguration of the lines of an affirmative biopolitics that has yet to come.

The final section of the book is dedicated to the relation between philosophy and biopolitics *after Nazism*. Why do I insist on referring philosophy to what wanted to be the most explicit negation of philosophy as ever appeared? Well, first because it is precisely a similar negation that demands to be understood philosophically in its darkest corners. And then because Nazism negated philosophy not only generically, but in favor of biology, of which it considered itself to be the most accomplished realization. I examine in detail this thesis in an extensive chapter here, corroborating its truthfulness, at least in the literal sense that the Nazi regime brought the biologization of politics to a point that had never been reached previously. Nazism treated the German people as an organic body that needed a radical cure, which consisted in the violent removal of a part that was already considered spiritually dead. From this perspective and in contrast to communism (which is still joined in posthumous homage to the category of totalitarianism), Nazism is no longer inscribable in the self-preserving dynamic of both the early and later modernities; and certainly not because it is extraneous to immunitary logic. On the contrary, Nazism works within that logic in such a paroxysmal manner as to turn the protective apparatus against its own body, which is precisely what happens in autoimmune diseases. The final orders of self-destruction put forward by Hitler barricaded in his Berlin bunker offer overwhelming proof. From this point of view, one can say that the Nazi experience represents the culmination of biopolitics, at least in that qualified expression of being absolutely indistinct from its reversal into thanatopolitics. But precisely for this reason the catastrophe in which it is immersed constitutes the occasion for an epochal rethinking of a category that, far from disappearing, every day acquires more meaning, not

only in the events I noted above, but also in the overall configuration of contemporary experience, and above all from the moment when the implosion of Soviet communism cleared the field of the last philosophy of modern history, delivering us over to a world that is completely globalized.

It is at this level that discourse today is to be conducted: the body that experiences ever more intensely the indistinction between power and life is no longer that of the individual, nor is it that sovereign body of nations, but that body of the world that is both torn and unified. Never before as today do the conflicts, wounds, and fears that tear the body to pieces seem to put into play nothing less than life itself in a singular reversal between the classic philosophical theme of the "world of life" and that theme heard so often today of the "life of the world." This is the reason that contemporary thought cannot fool itself (as still happens today) in belatedly defending modern political categories that have been shaken and overturned. Contemporary thought cannot and must not do anything of the sort, because biopolitics originates precisely in these political categories, before it rebels against them; and then because the heart of the problem that we are facing, which is to say the modification of *bíos* by a part of politics identified with technology *[tecnica],* was posed for the first time (in a manner that would be insufficient to define as apocalyptic), precisely in the antiphilosophical and biological philosophy of Hitlerism. I do realize how delicate this kind of statement may seem in its contents and still more in its resonance, but it isn't possible to place questions of expediency before the truth of the matters at hand. From another perspective, twentieth-century thought has from the beginning implicitly understood this, accepting the comparison and the struggle with radical evil on its own terrain. It was so for Heidegger, along an itinerary that brought him so close to that vortex that he risked letting himself be swallowed by it. But the same was also true for Arendt and Foucault, both of whom were conscious, albeit in different ways, that one could rise above Nazism only by knowing its drifts and its precipices. It is the path that I myself have tried to follow here, working back to front within three Nazi *dispositifs:* the *absolute normativization of life,* the *double enclosure of the body,* and the *anticipatory suppression of birth.* I have traced them with the intention of profiling the admittedly approximate and provisional contours of an affirmative biopolitics that is capable of overturning the Nazi politics of death in a politics that is no longer over life but *of* life.

Here there is a final point that seems to me useful to clarify before proceeding. Without denying the legitimacy of other interpretions or other normative projects, I do not believe the task of philosophy—even when biopolitics challenges it—is that of proposing models of political action that make biopolitics the flag of a revolutionary manifesto or merely something reformist. This isn't because it is too radical a concept but because it isn't radical enough. This would, moreover, contradict the initial presupposition according to which it is no longer possible to disarticulate politics and life in a form in which the former can provide orientation to the latter. This is not to say, of course, that politics is incapable of acting on what is both its object and subject; loosening the grip of new sovereign powers is possible and necessary. Perhaps what we need today, at least for those who practice philosophy, is the converse: not so much to think life as a function of politics, but to think politics within the same form of life. It is a step that is anything but easy because it would be concerned with bringing life into relation with biopolitics not from the outside—in the modality of accepting or refusing—but from within; to open life to the point at which something emerges which had until today remained out of view because it is held tightly in the grip of its opposite. I have attempted to offer more than one example of such a possibility and of such a demand with regard to the figure of *flesh, norm,* and *birth* thought inversely with respect to body, law, and nation. But the most general and intense dimension of this constructive deconstruction has to do precisely with that immunitary paradigm that constitutes the distinctive mode in which biopolitics has until now been put forward. Never more than in this case does its semantics, that of the negative protection of life, reveal a fundamental relation with its communitarian opposite. If *immunitas* is not even thinkable outside of the common *munus* that also negates it, perhaps biopolitics, which until now has been folded tightly into it, can also turn its negative sign into a different, positive sense.

CHAPTER ONE

The Enigma of Biopolitics

Bio/politics

Recently, not only has the notion of "biopolitics" moved to the center of international debate, but the term has opened a completely new phase in contemporary thought. From the moment that Michel Foucault reproposed and redefined the concept (when not coining it), the entire frame of political philosophy emerged as profoundly modified. It wasn't that classical categories such as those of "law" *[diritto]*, "sovereignty," and "democracy" suddenly left the scene—they continue to organize current political discourse—but that their effective meaning always appears weaker and lacking any real interpretive capacity. Rather than explaining a reality that everywhere slips through their analytic grip, these categories themselves demand to be subjected to the scrutiny of a more penetrating gaze that both deconstructs and explains them. Let's consider, for instance, law *[legge]*. Differently from what many have argued, there is nothing that suggests that such a domain has somehow been reduced. On the contrary, the impression is that the domain of law is gaining terrain both domestically and internationally; that the process of normativization is investing increasingly wider spaces. Nevertheless, this doesn't mean that juridical language per se reveals itself to be incapable of illuminating the profound logic of such a change. When one speaks of "human rights," for example, rather than referring to established juridical subjects, one refers to individuals defined by nothing other than the simple fact of being alive. Something analogous can be said about the political *dispositif* of sovereignty. Anything but destined to weaken as

some had rashly forecast (at least with regard to the world's greatest power), sovereignty seems to have extended and intensified its range of action—beyond a repertoire that for centuries had characterized its relation to both citizens and other state structures. With the clear distinction between inside and outside weakened (and therefore also the distinction between war and peace that had characterized sovereign power for so long), sovereignty finds itself directly engaged with questions of life and death that no longer have to do with single areas, but with the world in all of its extensions. Therefore, if we take up any perspective, we see that something that goes beyond the customary language appears to involve directly law and politics, dragging them into a dimension that is outside their conceptual apparatuses. This "something"—this element and this substance, this substrate and this upheaval—is precisely the object of biopolitics.

Yet there doesn't appear to be an adequate categorical exactitude that corresponds to the epochal relevance of biopolitics. Far from having acquired a definitive order, the concept of biopolitics appears to be traversed by an uncertainty, by an uneasiness that impedes every stable connotation. Indeed, I would go further. Biopolitics is exposed to a growing hermeneutic pressure that seems to make it not only the instrument but also the object of a bitter philosophical and political fight over the configuration and destiny of the current age. From here its oscillation (though one could well say its disruption) between interpretations, and before that even its different, indeed conflicting tonalities. What is at stake of course is the nature of the relation that forces together the two terms that make up the category of biopolitics. But even before that its definition: what do we understand by *bíos* and how do we want to think a politics that directly addresses it? The reference to the classic figure of *bíos politikos* doesn't help, since the semantics in question become meaningful precisely when the meaning of the term withdraws. If we want to remain with the Greek (and in particular with the Aristotelian) lexicon, biopolitics refers, if anything, to the dimension of *zōē,* which is to say to life in its simple biological capacity *[tenuta],* more than it does to *bíos,* understood as "qualified life" or "form of life," or at least to the line of conjugation along which *bíos* is exposed to *zōē,* naturalizing *bíos* as well. But precisely with regard to this terminological exchange, the idea of biopolitics appears to be situated in a zone of double indiscernibility, first because it is inhabited by a term that does not belong to it and indeed risks distorting it. And then because it is fixed by a concept, precisely that of *zōē,* which is stripped of every formal

connotation. *Zōē* itself can only be defined problematically: what, assuming it is even conceivable, is an absolutely natural life? It's even more the case today, when the human body appears to be increasingly challenged and also literally traversed by technology *[tecnica]*.[1] Politics penetrates directly in life and life becomes other from itself. Thus, if a natural life doesn't exist that isn't at the same time technological as well; if the relation between *bíos* and *zōē* needs by now (or has always needed) to include in it a third correlated term, *technē*—then how do we hypothesize an exclusive relation between politics and life?

Here too the concept of biopolitics seems to withdraw or be emptied of content in the same moment in which it is formulated. What remains clear is its negative value, what it is *not* or the horizon of sense that marks its closing. Biopolitics has to do with that complex of mediations, oppositions, and dialectical operations that in an extended phase made possible the modern political order, at least according to current interpretation. With respect to these and the questions and problems to which they correspond relative to the definition of power, to the measure of its exercise and to the delineation of its limits, it's indisputable that a general shift of field, logic, and the object of politics has taken place. At the moment in which on one side the modern distinctions between public and private, state and society, local and global collapse, and on the other that all other sources of legitimacy dry up, life becomes encamped in the center of every political procedure. No other politics is conceivable other than a politics of life, in the objective and subjective sense of the term. But it is precisely with reference to the relation between the subject and object of politics that the interpretive divergence to which I alluded earlier appears again: How are we to comprehend a political government of life? In what sense does life govern politics or in what sense does politics govern life? Does it concern a governing *of* or *over* life? It is the same conceptual alternative that one can express through the lexical bifurcation between the terms, used indifferently sometimes, of "biopolitics" and "biopower." By the first is meant a politics in the name of life and by the second a life subjected to the command of politics. But here too in this mode the paradigm that seeks a conceptual linking between the terms emerges as split, as if it had been cut in two by the very same movement. Compressed (and at the same time destabilized) by competing readings and subject to continuous rotations of meaning around its own axis, the concept of biopolitics risks losing its identity and becoming an enigma.

To understand why, it isn't enough to limit our perspective simply to Foucault's observations. Rather, we need to return to those texts and to authors (often not cited) that Foucault's discussion derives from, and against which he repositions himself, while critically deconstructing them. These can be cataloged in three distinct and successive blocks in time (at least those that explicitly refer to the concept of biopolitics). They are characterized, respectively, by an approach that is organistic, anthropological, and naturalistic. In the first instance, they refer to a substantial series of essays, primarily German, that are joined by a vitalistic conception of the state, such as Karl Binding's *Zum Werden und Leben der Staaten* (1920), of which we will have occasion to speak later; Eberhard Dennert's *Der Staat als lebendiger Organismus* (1920); and Edward Hahn's *Der Staat, ein Lebenwesen* (1926).[2] Our attention will be focused, however, most intently on the Swede Rudolph Kjellén, probably because he was the first to employ the term "biopolitics" (we also owe him the expression "geopolitics" that Friedrich Ratzel and Karl Haushofer will later elaborate in a decidedly racist key). With respect to such a racist propensity, which will shortly thereafter culminate in the Nazi theorization of a "vital space" *(Lebensraum)* we should note that Kjellén's position remains less conspicuous, despite his proclaimed sympathy for Wilhelminian German as well as a certain propensity for an aggressive foreign policy. As he had previously argued in his book of 1905 on the great powers, vigorous states, endowed with a limited territory, discover the need for extending their borders through the conquest, fusion, and colonialization of other lands.[3] But it's in the volume from 1916 titled *The State as Form of Life* that Kjellén sees this geopolitical demand as existing in close relation to an organistic conception that is irreducible to constitutional theories of a liberal framework.[4] While these latter represent the state as the artificial product of a free choice of individuals that have created it, he understands it to be a "living form" (*som livsform* in Swedish or *als Lebensform* in German), to the extent that it is furnished with instincts and natural drives. Already here in this transformation of the idea of the state, according to which the state is no longer a subject of law born from a voluntary contract but a whole that is integrated by men and which behaves as a single individual both spiritual and corporeal, we can trace the originary nucleus of biopolitical semantics. In *Outline for a Political System,* Kjellén brings together a compendium of the preceding theses:

> This tension that is characteristic of life itself . . . pushed me to denominate such a discipline *biopolitics,* which is analogous with the science of life, namely, biology. In so doing we gain much, considering that the Greek word *bíos* designates not only natural and physical life, but perhaps just as significantly cultural life. Naming it in this way also expresses that dependence of the laws of life that society manifests and that promote, more than anything else, the state itself to that role of arbiter or at a minimum of mediator.[5]

These are expressions that take us beyond the ancient metaphor of the body-state with all its multiple metamorphoses of post-Romantic inspiration. What begins to be glimpsed here is the reference to a natural substrate, to a substantial principle that is resistant and that underlies any abstraction or construction of institutional character. The idea of the impossibility of a true overcoming of the natural state in that of the political emerges in opposition to the modern conception derived from Hobbes that one can preserve life only by instituting an artificial barrier with regard to nature, which is itself incapable of neutralizing the conflict (and indeed is bound to strengthen it). Anything but the negation of nature, the political is nothing else but the continuation of nature at another level and therefore destined to incorporate and reproduce nature's original characteristics.

If this process of the naturalization of politics in Kjellén remains inscribed within a historical-cultural apparatus, it experiences a decisive acceleration in the essay that is destined to become famous precisely in the field of comparative biology. I am referring to *Staatsbiologie,* which was also published in 1920 by Baron Jakob von Uexküll with the symptomatic subtitle *Anatomy, Physiology, and Pathology of the State.*[6] Here, as with Kjellén, the discourse revolves around the biological configuration of a state-body that is unified by harmonic relations of its own organs, representative of different professions and competencies, but with a dual (and anything but irrelevant) lexical shift with respect to the preceding model. Here what is spoken about is not any state but the German state with its peculiar characteristics and vital demands. What makes the difference, however, is chiefly the emphasis that pathology assumes with respect to what is subordinated to it, namely, anatomy and physiology. Here we can already spot the harbinger of a theoretical weaving—that of the degenerative syndrome and the consequent regenerative program—fated to reach its macabre splendors in the following decades. Threatening the public

health of the German body is a series of diseases, which obviously, referring to the revolutionary traumas of the time, are located in subversive trade unionism, electoral democracy, and the right to strike: tumors that grow in the tissues of the state, causing anarchy and finally the state's dissolution. It would be "as if the majority of the cells in our body (rather than those in our brain) decided which impulses to communicate to the nerves."[7] But even more relevant, if we consider the direction of future totalitarian developments, is the biopolitical reference to those "parasites" which, having penetrated the political body, organize themselves to the disadvantage of other citizens. These are divided between "symbionts" from different races who under certain circumstances can be useful to the state and true parasites, which install themselves as an extraneous living body within the state, and which feed off of the same vital substance. Uexküll's threateningly prophetic conclusion is that one needs to create a class of state doctors to fight the parasites, or to confer on the state a medical competency that is capable of bringing it back to health by removing the causes of the disease and by expelling the carriers of germs. He writes: "What we are still lacking is an academy with a forward-looking vision not only for creating a class of state doctors, but also for instituting a state system of medicine. We possess no organ to which we can trust the hygiene of the state."[8]

The third text that should hold our attention—because it is expressly dedicated to the category in question—is *Bio-politics*. Written by the Englishman Morley Roberts, it was published in London in 1938 with the subtitle *An Essay in the Physiology, Pathology and Politics of the Social and Somatic Organism*.[9] Here too the underlying assumption, which Roberts sets forth immediately in the book's introduction, is the connection, not only analogical, but real, between politics and biology, and particularly medicine. His perspective is not so distant fundamentally from that of Uexküll. If physiology is indivisible from the pathology from which it derives its meaning and emphasis, the state organism cannot be truly known or guided except by evaluating its actual and potential diseases. More than a simple risk, these diseases represent the ultimate truth because it is principally a living entity that in fact can die. For this reason, biopolitics has the assignment on the one hand of recognizing the organic risks that jeopardize the body politic and on the other of locating and predisposing mechanisms of defense against them; these too are rooted in the same biological terrain. The most innovative part of Roberts's book is connected precisely to this ultimate

demand and is constituted by an extraordinary comparison between the defensive apparatus of the state and the immunitary system that anticipates an interpretive paradigm to which we will return:

> The simplest way to think of immunity is to look on the human body as a complex social organism, and the national organism as a simpler functional individual, or "person," both of which are exposed to dangers of innumerable kinds for which they must continually provide. This provision is immunity in action.[10]

Beginning with this first formulation, Roberts develops a parallel between the state and the human body involving the entire immunological repertoire—from antigens to antibodies, from the function of tolerance to the reticuloendothelial system—and finds in each biological element its political equivalent. The most significant step, however, one that moves in the direction previously taken by Uexküll, is perhaps constituted by the reference to mechanisms of immunitary repulsion and expulsion of the racial sort:

> The student of political biology should study national mass attitudes and their results as if they were actual secretions or excretion. National or international repulsions may rest on little. To put the matter at once on the lowest physiological level, it is well known that the smell of one race may offend as much or even more than different habits and customs.[11]

That Roberts's text closes with a comparison between an immunitary rejection of the Jews by the English and an anaphylactic shock of the political body in the year in which the Second World War begins is indicative of the increasingly slippery slope that the first biopolitical elaboration takes on: a politics constructed directly on *bíos* always risks violently subjecting *bíos* to politics.

The second wave of interest in the thematic of biopolitics is registered in France in the 1960s. The difference from the first wave is all too obvious and it couldn't be otherwise in a historical frame that was profoundly modified by the epochal defeat of Nazi biocracy. The new biopolitical theory appeared to be conscious of the necessity of a semantic reformulation even at the cost of weakening the specificity of the category in favor of a more domesticated neohumanistic declension, with respect not only to Nazi biocracy, but also to organistic theories that had in some way anticipated their themes and accents. The volume that in 1960 virtually opened this new stage of study was programmatically titled *La biopolitique: Essai d'interprétation de l'histoire de l'humanité et des civilisations* [Biopolitics: An essay on

the interpretation and history of humanity and civilization], and it takes exactly this step.[12] Already the double reference to history and humanity as the coordinates of a discourse intentionally oriented toward *bíos* expresses the central direction and conciliatory path of Aroon Starobinski's essay. When he writes that "biopolitics is an attempt to explain the history of civilization on the basis of the laws of cellular life as well as the most elementary biological life," he does not in fact intend to push his treatment toward a sort of naturalistic outcome.[13] On the contrary, the author argues (sometimes even acknowledging the negative connotations that the natural powers *[potenze]* of life enjoy), for the possibility as well as the necessity that politics incorporates spiritual elements that are capable of governing these natural powers in function of metapolitical values:

> Biopolitics doesn't negate in any way the blind forces of violence and the will to power, nor the forces of self-destruction that exist in man and in human civilization. On the contrary, biopolitics affirms their existence in a way that is completely particular because these forces are the elementary forces of life. But biopolitics denies that these forces are fatal and that they cannot be opposed and directed by spiritual forces: the forces of justice, charity, and truth.[14]

That the concept of biopolitics thus risks being whittled down to the point of losing its meaning, that is, of being overturned into a sort of traditional humanism, is also made clear in a second text published four years later by an author destined for greater fortune. I am referring to Edgar Morin's *Introduction à une politique de l'homme.*[15] Here the "fields" that are truly "biopolitical of life and of survival" are included in a more sweeping aggregate of the "anthropolitical" type, which in turn refers to the project of a "multidimensional politics of man."[16] Rather than tightening the biological-political nexus, Morin situates his perspective on the problematic connection in which the infrapolitical themes of minimal survival are productively crossed with those that are suprapolitical or philosophical, relative to the sense of life itself. The result, more than a biopolitics in the strict sense of the expression, is a sort of "onto-politics," which is given the task of circumscribing the development of the human species, limiting the tendency to see it as economic and productive. "And so all the paths of life and all the paths of politics begin to intersect and then to penetrate one another. They announce an onto-politics that is becoming ever more intimately and globally man's being."[17] Although Morin, in the following book dedicated to the paradigm of human nature, contests in a partially self-critical

key the humanistic mythology that defines man in opposition to the animal, culture in opposition to nature, and order in opposition to disorder, there doesn't seem to emerge from of all this an idea of biopolitics endowed with a convincing physiognomy.[18]

Here we are dealing with a theoretical weakness as well as a semantic uncertainty to which the two volumes of *Cahiers de la biopolitique,* published in Paris at the end of the 1960s by the Organisation au Service de la Vie, certainly do not put an end. It is true that with respect to the preceding essay we can recognize in them a more concrete attention to the real conditions of life of the world's population, exposed to a double checkmate of neocapitalism and socialist realism—both incapable of guiding productive development in a direction that is compatible with a significant increase in the quality of life. And it is also true that in several of these texts criticism of the current economic and political model is substantiated in references concerning technology, city planning, and medicine (or better the spaces and the material forms of living beings). Still, not even here can we say that the definition of biopolitics avoids a categorical genericness that will wind up reducing its hermeneutic scope: "Biopolitics was defined as a science by the conduct of states and human collectives, determined by laws, the natural environment, and ontological givens that support life and determine man's activities."[19] There is, however, no suggestion in such a definition of what the specific statute of its object or a critical analysis of its effects might be. Much like the Days of Biopolitical Research held in Bordeaux in December 1966, so too these works have difficulty freeing the concept of biopolitics from a mannerist formulation into a meaningful conceptual elaboration.[20]

The third resumption of biopolitical studies took place in the Anglo-Saxon world and it is one that is still ongoing. We can locate its formal introduction in 1973, when the International Political Science Association officially opened a research site on biology and politics. After that various international conventions were organized, the first of which took place in Paris in 1975 at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Humaines and another at Bellagio, in Warsaw, Chicago, and New York. In 1983, the Association for Politics and the Life Sciences was founded, as was the journal *Politics and Life Sciences* two years later, as well as the series *Research in Biopolitics* (of which a number of volumes were published).[21] But to locate the beginning of this sort of research we need to return to the middle of the 1960s when two texts appeared that elaborated the biopolitical lexicon. If Lynton K.

Caldwell was the first to adopt the term in question in his 1964 article "Biopolitics: Science, Ethics, and Public Policy," the two polarities within which is inscribed the general sense of this new biopolitical thematization can be traced to the previous year's *Human Nature in Politics* by James C. Davies.[22] It is no coincidence that when Roger D. Masters attempts to systematize the thesis in a volume (dedicated, however, to Leo Strauss) twenty years later, he will eventually give it a similar title, *The Nature of Politics.*[23] These are precisely the two terms that constitute both the object and the perspective of a biopolitical discourse, which after its organistic declension in the 1920s and 1930s and its neohumanistic one of the 1960s in France, now acquires a marked naturalistic character. Leaving aside the quality of this production, which in general is admittedly mediocre, its symptomatic value resides precisely in the direct and insistent reference made to the sphere of nature as a privileged parameter of political determination. What emerges—not always with full theoretical knowledge on the part of the authors—is a considerable categorical shift with respect to the principal line of modern political philosophy. While political philosophy presupposes nature as the problem to resolve (or the obstacle to overcome) through the constitution of the political order, American biopolitics sees in nature its same condition of existence: not only the genetic origin and the first material, but also the sole controlling reference. Politics is anything but able to dominate nature or "conform" *[formare]* to its ends and so itself emerges "informed" in such a way that it leaves no space for other constructive possibilities.

At the origin of such an approach can be distinguished two matrices: on the one side, Darwinian evolution (or more precisely social Darwinism), and, on the other, the ethological research, developed principally in Germany at the end of the 1930s. With regard to the first, the most important point of departure is to be sought in *Physics and Politics* by Walter Bagehot within a horizon that includes authors as diverse as Spencer and Sumner, Ratzel and Gumplowitz.[24] The clear warning, however, is that the emphasis of the biopolitical perspective resides in the passage from a physical paradigm to one that is exactly biological, something that Thomas Thorson underscores forcefully in his book from 1970 with the programmatic title *Biopolitics.*[25] What matters, therefore, is not so much conferring the label of an exact science on politics as referring it back to its natural domain, by which is understood the vital terrain from which it emerges and to which it inevitably returns.[26] Above all, we are dealing with the contingent condition of our body, which keeps human action within the limits of a determinate

anatomical and physical possibility, but also the biological or indeed genetic baggage of the subject in question (to use the lexicon of a nascent sociobiology). Against the thesis that social events require complex historic explanations, they refer here finally to dynamics that are tied to evolutive demands of a species such as ours, different quantitatively but not qualitatively from the animal that precedes and comprises our species. In this way, not only does the predominantly aggressive behavior of man (as well as the cooperative) refer to an instinctive modality of the animal sort, but insofar as it inheres in our feral nature, war ends up taking on a characteristic of inevitability.[27] All political behavior that repeats itself with a certain frequency in history—from the control of territory to social hierarchy to the domination of women—is deeply rooted in a prehuman layer not only to which we remain tied, but which is usually bound to resurface. In this interpretive framework, democratic societies are not impossible in themselves, but appear in the form of parentheses that are destined to be quickly closed (or that at least allow one to see the dark depths out of which they contradictorily emerge). The implicit and often explicit conclusion of the reasoning is that any institution or subjective option that doesn't conform, or at least adapt, to such a given is destined to fail.

The biopolitical notion that emerges at this point is sufficiently clear, as Somit and Peterson, the most credentialed theoreticians of this interpretive line express it.[28] What remains problematic, however, is the final point, which is to say the relation between the analytic-descriptive relation and that of the propositional-normative (all because it is one thing to study, explain, and forecast and another to prescribe). Yet it is precisely in this postponement from the first to the second meaning, that is, from the level of being to that of requirement, that the densest ideological valence is concentrated in the entire discourse.[29] The semantic passage is conducted through the double versant of fact and value in the concept of nature. It is used as both a given and a task, as the presupposition and the result, and as the origin and the end. If political behavior is inextricably embedded in the dimension of *bíos* and if *bíos* is what connects human beings *[l'uomo]* to the sphere of nature, it follows that the only politics possible will be the one that is already inscribed in our natural code. Of course, we cannot miss the rhetorical short-circuit on which the entire argument rests: no longer does the theory interpret reality, but reality determines a theory that in turn is destined to corroborate it. The response is announced even before the analysis is begun: human beings cannot be other than what they

have always been. Brought back to its natural, innermost part, politics remains in the grip of biology without being able to reply. Human history is nothing but our nature repeated, sometimes misshapen, but never really different. The role of science (but especially of politics) is that of impeding the opening of too broad a gap between nature and history; making our nature, in the final analysis, our only history. The enigma of biopolitics appears resolved, but in a form that assumes exactly what needs to be "researched."

Politics, Nature, History

From a certain point of view it's understandable that Foucault never gestured to the different biopolitical interpretations that preceded his own—from the moment in which his extraordinary survey is born precisely from the distance he takes up with regard to his predecessors. This doesn't mean that no points of contact exist, if not with their positive contents, then with the critical demand that follows from them, which refers more broadly to a general dissatisfaction with how modernity has constructed the relation among politics, nature, and history. It is only here that the work begun by Foucault in the middle of the 1970s manifests a complexity and a radicality that are utterly incomparable with the preceding theorizations. It isn't irrelevant that Foucault's specific biopolitical perspective is indebted in the first place to Nietzschean genealogy. This is because it is precisely from genealogy that Foucault derives that oblique capacity for disassembly and conceptual reelaboration that gives his work the originality that everyone has recognized. When Foucault, returning to the Kantian question surrounding the meaning of the Enlightenment, establishes a contemporary point of view, he doesn't simply allude to a different mode of seeing things that the past receives from the present, but also to the interval that such a point of view of the present opens between the past and its self-interpretation. From this perspective, Foucault doesn't think of the end of the modern epoch—or at least the analytic block of its categories highlighted by the first biopolitical theorizations—as a point or a line that interrupts an epochal journey, but rather as the disruption of its trajectory produced by a different sort of gaze: if the present isn't what (or only what) we have assumed it to be until now; if its meanings begin to cluster around a different semantic epicenter; if something novel or ancient emerges from within that contests the mannerist image; this means, then, that the past, which nonetheless the present derives from, is no longer necessarily the

same. This can reveal a face, an aspect, or a profile that before was obscured or perhaps hidden by a superimposed (and at times imposed) narrative; not necessarily a false narrative, but instead functional to its prevailing logic, and for this reason partial, when not tendentious.

Foucault identifies this narrative, which compresses or represses with increasing difficulty something that is heterogeneous to its own language, with the discourse on sovereignty. Despite the infinite variations and transformations to which it has been subjected in the course of modernity on the part of those who have made use of it, sovereignty has always been based on the same figural schema: that of the existence of two distinct entities, namely, the totality of individuals and power that at a certain point enters into relation between individuals in the modalities defined by a third element, which is constituted by the law. We can say that all modern philosophies, despite their heterogeneity or apparent opposition, are arranged within this triangular grid, now one, now the other, of its poles. That these affirm the absolute character of sovereign power according to the Hobbesian model or that, on the contrary, they insist on its limits in line with the liberal tradition; that they subtract or subject the monarch with respect to the laws that he himself has promulgated; that they subject or distinguish the principles of legality and of legitimacy—what remains common to all these conceptions is the *ratio* that subtends them, which is precisely the one characterized by the preexistence of subjects to sovereign power that these conceptions introduce and therefore by the rights *[diritto]* that in this mode they maintain in relation to subjects. Even apart from the breadth of such rights—one that moves from the minimum of the preservation of life and the maximum of participation in political government—the role of counterweight that is assigned to subjects in relation to sovereign decision is clear. The result is a sort of a zero-sum relation: the more rights one has, the less power there is and vice versa. The entire modern philosophical-juridical debate is inscribed to varying degrees within this topological alternative that sees politics and law *[legge]*, decision and the norm as situated on opposite poles of a dialectic that has as its object the relation between subjects *[sudditi]* and the sovereign.[30] Their respective weight depends on the prevalence that is periodically assigned to the two terms being compared. When, at the end of this tradition, Hans Kelsen and Carl Schmitt will argue (the one, normativism, armed against the other, decisionism), they do nothing but replicate the same topological contrast that from Bodin on, indeed in Bodin, seemed to oppose the versant of law to that of power.

It is in the breaking of this categorical frame that Foucault consciously works.[31] Resisting what he himself will define as a new form of knowledge (or better, a different order of discourse with that of all modern philosophical-political theories) doesn't mean, of course, erasing the figure or reducing the decisively objective role of the sovereign paradigm, but rather recognizing the real mechanism by which it functions. It isn't that of regulating relations between subjects or between them and power, but rather their subjugation *at the same time* to a specific juridical and political order. On the one side, rights will emerge as nothing other the instrument that the sovereign uses for imposing his own domination. Correspondingly, the sovereign can dominate only on the basis of the right that legitimates the whole operation. In this way, what appeared as split in an alternative bipolarity between law and power, legality and legitimacy, and norm and exception finds its unity in a same regime of sense. Yet this is nothing but the first effect of the reversal of perspective that Foucault undertakes, one that intersects with another effect relative to the line of division no longer internal to the categorical apparatus of the sovereign *dispositif*, but now immanent to the social body. This perspective claimed to unify it through the rhetorical procedure of polar oppositions. It is as if Foucault undertook the dual work of deconstructing or outflanking the modern narration, which, while suturing an apparent divergence, located a real distinction. It is precisely the recomposition of the duality between power and right, excavated by the sovereign paradigm that makes visible a conflict just as real that separates and opposes groups of diverse ethnicity in the predominance over a given territory. The presumed conflict between sovereignty and law is displaced by the far more real conflict between potential rivals who fight over the use of resources and their control because of their different racial makeup. This doesn't mean in any way that the mechanism of juridical legitimation fails, but rather than preceding and regulating the struggle under way, it constitutes the result and instrument used by those who now and again emerge as victorious. It isn't that the discourse of rights *[diritto]* determines war, but rather that war adopts the discourse of rights in order to consecrate the relation of forces that war itself defines.

Already this unearthing of the constituitive character of war—not its background or its limit, but instead its origin and form of politics—inaugurates an analytic horizon whose historical import we can only begin to see today. But the reference to the conflict between races, a topic to which Foucault dedicated his course in 1976 at the Collège de France, indicates

something else, which brings us directly to our underlying theme. That such a conflict concerns so-called populations from an ethnic point of view refers to an element that is destined to disrupt in a much more radical way the modern political and philosophical apparatus. I am referring to *bíos,* a life presupposed simultaneously in its general and specific dimension of biological fact. This is both the object and the subject of the conflict and therefore of the politics that it forms:

> It seems to me that one of the basic phenomena of the nineteenth century was what might be called power's hold over life. What I mean is the acquisition of power over man insofar as man is a living being, that the biological came under State control, that there was at least a certain tendency that leads to what might be termed State control of the biological.[32]

This phrase that opens the lecture of March 17, 1976, and appears to be a new formulation, is in fact already the point of arrival of a trajectory of thought that was inaugurated at least a biennial before. That the first utilization of the term in Foucault's lexicon can be traced directly back to the conference in Rio in 1974, in which Foucault said that "for capitalist society it is the biopolitical that is important before everything else; the biological, the somatic, the corporeal. The body is a biopolitical reality; medicine is a biopolitical strategy" doesn't have much importance.[33] What counts is that all his texts from those years seem to converge in a theoretical step within which every discursive segment comes to assume a meaning that isn't completely perceptible if it is analyzed separately or outside of a biopolitical semantics.

Already in *Discipline and Punish,* the crisis of the classical model of sovereignty, which was represented by the decline of its deadly rituals, is marked by the emergence of a new disciplinary power, which is addressed rather to the life of the subjects that it invests.[34] Although capital punishment through the dismemberment of the convicted responds well to the individual's breaking of the contract (making him guilty of injuring the Majesty), from a certain moment every individual death now is assumed and interpreted in relation to a vital requirement of society in its totality. Yet it is in the course Foucault offered simultaneously titled *Abnormal* that the process of deconstruction of the sovereign paradigm in both its state-power declination and its juridical identity of subject culminates: the entrance and then the subtle colonization of medical knowledge in what was first the competence of law *[diritto]* establishes a true shift in regime, one that pivots no longer on the abstraction of juridical relations but on the taking on of life

in the same body of those who are its carriers.[35] In the moment in which the criminal act is no longer to be charged to the will of the subject, but rather to a psychopathological configuration, we enter into a zone of indistinction between law and medicine in whose depths we can make out a new rationality centered on the question of life—of its preservation, its development, and its management. Of course, we must not confuse levels of discourse: such a problematic was always at the center of sociopolitical dynamics, but it is only at a certain point that its centrality reaches a threshold of awareness. Modernity is the place more than the time of this transition and turning *[svolta]*. By this I mean that while, for a long period of time, the relation between politics and life is posed indirectly—which is to say mediated by a series of categories that are capable of distilling or facilitating it as a sort of clearinghouse—beginning at a certain point these partitions are broken and life enters directly into the mechanisms and *dispositifs* of governing human beings.

Without retracing the steps that articulate this process of the governmentalization of life in Foucauldian genealogy—from "pastoral power" to the reason of state to the expertise of the "police"—let's keep our attention on the outcome: on the one side, all political practices that governments put into action (or even those practices that oppose them) turn to life, to its process, to its needs, and to its fractures. On the other side, life enters into power relations not only on the side of its critical thresholds or its pathological exceptions, but in all its extension, articulation, and duration. From this perspective, life everywhere exceeds the juridical constraints used to trap it. This doesn't imply, as I already suggested, some kind of withdrawal or contraction of the field that is subjected to the law. Rather, it is the latter that is progressively transferred from the transcendental level of codes and sanctions that essentially have to do with subjects of will to the immanent level of rules and norms that are addressed instead to bodies: "these power mechanisms are, at least in part, those that, beginning in the eighteenth century, took charge of men's existence, men as living bodies."[36] It is the same premise of the biopolitical regime. More than a removal of life from the pressure that is exercised upon it by law, it is presented rather as delivering their relation to a dimension that both determines and exceeds them both. It is with regard to this meaning that the apparently contradictory expression needs to be understood according to which "it was life more than the law that became the issue of political struggles, even if the latter

were formulated through affirmations concerning rights."[37] What is in question is no longer the distribution of power or its subordination to the law, nor the kind of regime nor the consensus that is obtained, but something that precedes it because it pertains to its "primary material." Behind the declarations and the silences, the mediations and the conflicts that have characterized the dynamics of modernity—the dialectic that up until a certain stage we have named with the terms of liberty, equality, democracy (or, on the contrary, tyranny, force, and domination)—Foucault's analysis uncovers in *bíos* the concrete power from which these terms originate and toward which they are directed.

Regarding such a conclusion, Foucault's perspective would seem to be close to that of American biopolitics. Certainly, he too places life at the center of the frame and he too, as we have seen, does so polemically vis-à-vis the juridical subjectivism and humanistic historicism of modern political philosophy. But the *bíos* that he opposes to the discourse of rights and its effects on domination is also configured in terms of a historical semantics that is also symmetrically reversed with respect to the legitimating one of sovereign power. Nothing more than life—in the lines of development in which it is inscribed or in the vortexes in which it contracts—is touched, crossed, and modified in its innermost being by history. This was the lesson that Foucault drew from the Nietzschean genealogy, when he places it within a theoretical frame that substituted a search for the origin (or the prefiguration of the end) with that of a force field freed from the succession of events and conflict between bodies. Yet he also was influenced by Darwinian evolution, whose enduring actuality doesn't reside in having substituted "the grand old biological metaphor of life and evolution" for history, but, on the contrary, in having recognized in life the marks, the intervals, and the risks of history.[38] It is precisely from Darwin, in fact, that the knowledge comes that "life evolved, that the evolution of the species is determined, by a certain degree, by accidents of a historical nature."[39] And so it makes little sense to oppose a natural paradigm to a historical one within the frame of life, or locate in nature the hardened shell in which life is immobilized or loses its historical content. This is because, contrary to the underlying presupposition of Anglo-Saxon *biopolitics,* something like a definable and identifiable human nature doesn't exist as such, independent from the meanings that culture and therefore history have, over the course of time, imprinted on it. And then because the same knowledges that have

thematized it contain within them a precise historical connotation outside of which their theoretical direction risks remaining indeterminate. Biology itself is born around the end of the eighteenth century, thanks to the appearance of new scientific categories that gave way to a concept of life that is radically different from what was in use before. "I would say," Foucault will say in this regard, "that the notion of life is not a *scientific concept;* it has been an *epistemological indicator* of which the classifying, delimiting, and other functions had an effect on scientific discussions, and not on what they were talking about."[40]

It is almost too obvious the shift (though one could also rightly say the reversal) that such an epistemological deconstruction impresses on the category of biopolitics. That it is always historically qualified according to a modality that Foucault defines with the term "biohistory" as anything but limited to its simple, natural casting implies a further step that to this point has been excluded from all the preceding interpretations. Biopolitics doesn't refer only or most prevalently to the way in which politics is captured—limited, compressed, and determined—by life, but also and above all by the way in which politics grasps, challenges, and penetrates life:

> If one can apply the term *bio-history* to the pressures through which the movements of life and processes of history interfere with one another, one would have to speak of *bio-power* to designate what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life.[41]

We can already glimpse in this formulation the radical novelty of the Foucauldian approach. What in the preceding declensions of biopolitics was presented as an unalterable given—nature or life, insofar as it is human—now becomes a problem; not a presupposition but a "site," the product of a series of causes, forces, and tensions that themselves emerge as modified in an incessant game of action and reaction, of pushing and resisting. History and nature, life and politics cross, propel, and violate each other according to a rhythm that makes one simultaneously the matrix and the provisional outcome of the other. But it is also a sagittal gaze that deprives it of its presumed fullness, as well as of every presumption of mastery of the entire field of knowledge. Just as Foucault adopts the category of life so as to break apart the modern discourse of sovereignty and its laws from within, so too in turn does that of history remove from life the naturalistic flattening to which the American biopolitical exposes it:

> It is history that designs these complexes [the genetic variations from which the various populations arise] before erasing them; there is no need to search for brute and definitive biological facts that from the depths of "nature" would impose themselves on history.[42]

It is as if the philosopher makes use of a conceptual instrument that is necessary for taking apart a given order of discourse in order to give it other meanings, at the moment in which it tends to assume a similarly pervasive behavior. Or additionally that it is separated from itself, having been placed in the interval in such a way as to be subject to the same effect of knowledge that it allows externally. From here we can see the continual movement, the rotation of perspective, along a margin that, rather than distinguishing concepts, dismantles and reassembles them in topologies that are irreducible to a monolinear logic. Life as such doesn't belong either to the order of nature or to that of history. It cannot be simply ontologized, nor completely historicized, but is inscribed in the moving margin of their intersection and their tension. The meaning of biopolitics is sought "in this dual position of life that placed it at the same time outside history, in its biological environment, and inside human historicity, penetrated by the latter's techniques of knowledge and power."[43]

The complexity of Foucault's perspective, that is, of his biopolitical *cantiere,* doesn't end here. It doesn't only concern his own position, which is situated precisely between what he calls "the threshold of modernity," on the limit in which modern knowledge folds upon itself, carried in this way outside itself.[44] Rather, it is also the effect of meaning that from an undecidable threshold communicates with the notion defined thusly: once the dialectic between politics and life is reconstructed in a form that is irreducible to every monocausal synthesis, what is the consequence that derives for each of the two terms and for their combination? And so we return to the question with which I opened this chapter on the ultimate meaning of biopolitics. What does biopolitics mean, what outcomes does it produce, and how is a world continually more governed by biopolitics configured? Certainly, we are concerned with a mechanism or a productive *dispositif,* from the moment that the reality that invests and encompasses it is not left unaltered. But productive of what? What is the *effect* of biopolitics? At this point Foucault's response seems to diverge in directions that involve two other notions that are implicated from the outset in the concept of *bios,* but which are situated on the extremes of its semantic extension: these are

subjectivization and *death*. With respect to life, both constitute more than two possibilities. They are at the same time life's form and its background, origin, and destination; in each case, however, according to a divergence that seems not to admit any mediation: it is either one or the other. Either biopolitics produces subjectivity or it produces death. Either it makes the subject its own object or it decisively objectifies it. Either it is a politics of life or a politics over life. Once again the category of biopolitics folds in upon itself without disclosing the solution to its own enigma.

Politics of Life

In this interpretive divergence there is something that moves beyond the simple difficulty of definition, which touches the profound structure of the concept of biopolitics. It is as if it were traversed initially and indeed constituted by an interval of difference or a semantic layer that cuts and opens it into two elements that are not constituted reciprocally. Or that the elements are constituted only at the price of a certain violence that subjects one to the domination of the other, conditioning their superimposition to an obligatory positioning-under *[sotto-posizione]*. It is as if the two terms from which biopolitics is formed (life and politics) cannot be articulated except through a modality that simultaneously juxtaposes them. More than combining them or even arranging them along the same line of signification, they appear to be opposed in a long-lasting struggle, the stakes of which are for each the appropriation and the domination of the other. From here the never-released tension, that lacerating effect from which the notion of biopolitics never seems to be able to liberate itself because biopolitics produces the effect in the form of an alternative between the two that cannot be bypassed. Either life holds politics back, pinning it to its impassable natural limit, or, on the contrary, it is life that is captured and prey to a politics that strains to imprison its innovative potential. Between the two possibilities there is a breach in signification, a blind spot that risks dragging the entire category into vacuum of sense. It is as if biopolitics is missing something (an intermediary segment or a logical juncture) that is capable of unbinding the absoluteness of irreconcilable perspectives in the elaboration of a more complex paradigm that, without losing the specificity of its elements, seizes hold of the internal connection or indicates a common horizon.

Before attempting a definition, it is to be noted that not even Foucault is able to escape completely from such a deadlock, and this despite working in a profoundly new framework with respect to the preceding formula-

tions. Foucault too ends up reproducing the stalemate in the form of a further "indecisiveness"—no longer relative to the already acquired impact of power on life, but relative to its effects, measured along a moving line that, as was said, has at one head the production of new subjectivity and at the other its radical destruction. That these contrastive possibilities cohabit within the same analytic axis, the logical extremes of which they constitute, doesn't detract from the fact that their different accentuations determine an oscillation in the entire discourse in opposite directions both from the interpretive and the stylistic point of view. Such a dyscrasia is recognizable in a series of logical gaps and of small lexical incongruences or of sudden changes in tonality, on which it is not possible to linger in detail here. When taken together, however, they mark a difficulty that is never overcome—or, more precisely, an underlying hesitation between two orientations that tempt Foucault equally. Yet he never decisively opts for one over the other. The most symptomatic indication of such an uncertainty is constituted by the definitions of the category, which he from time to time puts into play. Notwithstanding the significant distortions (owing to the different contexts in which they appear), the definitions are mostly expressed indirectly. This was already the case for perhaps Foucault's most celebrated formulation, according to which "for millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question."[45] This is even more the case where the notion of biopolitics is derived from the contrast with the sovereign paradigm. In this case too a negative modality prevails: biopolitics is primarily that which is *not* sovereignty. More than having its own source of light, biopolitics is illuminated by the twilight of something that precedes it, by sovereignty's advance into the shadows.

Nevertheless, it is precisely here in the articulation of the relation between the two regimes that the prospective splitting to which I gestured previously reappears, a split that is destined in this case to invest both the level of historical reconstruction and that of conceptual determination. How are sovereignty and biopolitics to be related? Chronologically or by a differing superimposition? It is said that one emerges out of the background of the other, but what are we to make of such a background? Is it the definitive withdrawal of a preceding presence, or rather is it the horizon that embraces and holds what newly emerges within it? And is such an emergence really new or is it already inadvertently installed in the categorical

framework that it will also modify? On this point too Foucault refuses to respond definitively. He continues to oscillate between the two opposing hypotheses without opting conclusively for either one or the other. Or better: he adopts both with that characteristic, optical effect of splitting or doubling that confers on his text the slight dizziness that simultaneously seduces and disorients the reader.

The steps in which discontinuity seems to prevail are at first sight univocal. Not only is biopolitics other than sovereignty, but between the two a clear and irreversible caesura passes. Foucault writes of that disciplinary power that constitutes the first segment of the *dispositif* that is truly biopolitical: "An important phenomenon occurred in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: the appearance—one should say the invention—of a *new* mechanism of power which had very specific procedures, completely *new* instruments, and *very different* equipment. It was, I believe, *absolutely incompatible* with relations of sovereignty."[46] It is new because it turns most of all on the control of bodies and of that which they do, rather than on the appropriation of the earth and its products. From this side, the contrast appears frontally and without any nuances: "It seems to me that this type of power is the exact, point-for-point opposite of the mechanics of power that the theory of sovereignty described or tried to transcribe."[47] For this reason, it "can therefore *no longer* be transcribed in terms of sovereignty."[48]

What is it that makes biopolitics completely unassimilable to the sovereign? Foucault telescopes such a difference in a formula, justifiably famous for its synthetic efficacy, which appears at the end of *The History of Sexuality:* "One might say that the ancient right to *take* life or *let* live was replaced by a power to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death."[49] The opposition couldn't be any plainer: whereas in the sovereign regime life is nothing but the residue or the remainder left over, saved from the right of taking life, in biopolitics life encamps at the center of a scenario of which death constitutes the external limit or the necessary contour. Moreover, whereas in the first instance life is seen from the perspective opened by death, in the second death acquires importance only in the light radiated by life. But what precisely does affirming life mean? *To make* live, rather than limiting oneself to allowing to live? The internal articulations of the Foucauldian discourse are well known: the distinction—here too defined in terms of succession and a totality of copresence—between the disciplinary apparatus and *dispositifs* of control; the techniques put into action by power with regard first to individual bodies and then of populations as a whole; the

sectors—school, barracks, hospital, factory—in which they drill and the domains—birth, disease, mortality—that they affect. But to grasp in its complexity the affirmative semantics that—at least in this first declension of the Foucauldian lexicon—the new regime of power connotes, we need to turn again to the three categories of *subjectivization, making immanent,* and *production* that characterize it. Linked between them by the same orientation of sense, they are distinctly recognizable in three genealogical branches in which the biopolitical code is born and then develops, which is to say those that Foucault defines as the pastoral power, the art of government, and the police sciences.

The first alludes to that modality of government of men that in the Jewish-Christian tradition especially moves through a strict and one-to-one relation between shepherd and flock. Unlike the Greek or the Roman models, what counts is not so much the legitimacy of power fixed by law or the maintenance of the harmony between citizens, but the concern that the shepherd devotes to protecting his own flock. The relation between them is perfectly unique: as the sheep follow the will of him who leads them without hesitation, in the same way the shepherd takes care of the life of each of them, to the point, when necessary, of being able to risk his own life. But what connotes the pastoral practice even more is the mode in which such a result is realized: that of a capillary direction, that is both collective and individualized, of the bodies and souls of subjects. At the center of such a process is that durable *dispositif* constituted by the practice of confession on which Foucault confers a peculiar emphasis, precisely because it is the channel through which the process of subjectivization is produced of what remains the object of power.[50] Here for the first time the fundamental meaning of the complex figure of subjection is disclosed. Far from being reduced to a simple objectivization, confession refers rather to a movement that conditions the domination over the object to its subjective participation in the act of domination. Confessing—and in this way placing oneself in the hands of the authority of him who will apprehend and judge its truth—the object of pastoral power is subjugated to its own objectivization and is objectivized in the constitution of its subjectivity. The medium of this crisscrossing effect is the construction of the individual. Forcing him into exposing his subjective truth, controlling the most intimate sounds of his conscience, power singles out the one that it subjects as its own object, and so doing recognizes him as an individual awarded with a specific subjectivity:

> It is a form of a power that makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word "subject": subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to.[51]

If the direction of the conscience by the pastors of souls opens the movement of the subjectivization of the object, the conduct of government, which was theorized and practiced in the form of the reason of state, translates and determines the progressive shift of power from the outside to within the confines of that on which it is exercised. Although the Machiavellian principle still preserves a relation of singularity and of transcendence with regard to its own principality, the art of governing induces a double movement of making immanent and pluralization. On the one side, power is no longer in circular relation with itself, which is to say to the preservation or the amplification of its own order, but in relation to the life of those that it governs, in the sense that its ultimate end is not simply that of obedience but also the welfare of the governed. Power, more than dominating men and territories from on high, adheres to their demands, inscribes its own operation in the processes that the governed establish, and draws forth its own force from that of the subjects *[sudditi]*. But to do so, that is, to collect and satisfy all the requests that arrive from the body of the population, power is forced into multiplying its own services for the areas that relate to subjects—from that of defense, to the economy, to that of public health. From here there is a double move that intersects: the first is a vertical sort that moves from the top toward the bottom, placing in continuous communication the sphere of the state with that of the population and families, reaching finally that of single individuals; the other the horizontal, which places in productive relation the practices and the languages of life in a form that amplifies the horizons, improves the services, and intensifies the performance. With respect to the inflection of sovereign power that is primarily negative, the difference is obvious. If sovereign power was exercised in terms of subtraction and extraction of goods, services, and blood from its own subjects, governmental power, on the contrary, is addressed to the subjects' lives, not only in the sense of their defense, but also with regard to how to deploy, strengthen, and maximize life. Sovereign power removed, extracted, and finally destroyed. Governmental power reinforces, augments, and stimulates. With respect to the salvific tendency of the pastoral power, governmental power shifts decisively its attention onto the secular level of health, longevity, and wealth.

Yet in order that the genealogy of biopolitics can be manifested in all its breadth, a final step is missing. This is represented by the science of the police. Police science is not to be understood in any way as a specific technology within the apparatus of the state as we understand it today. It is rather the productive modality that its government assumes in all sectors of individual and collective experience—from justice, to finance, to work, to health care, to pleasure. More than avoiding harm *[mali]*, the police need to produce goods *[beni]*. Here the process of the positive reconversion of the ancient sovereign right of death reaches its zenith. If the meaning of the term *Politik* remains the negative one of the defense from internal and external enemies, the semantics of *Polizei* is absolutely positive. It is ordered to favor life in all its magnitude, along its entire extension, through all its articulations. And, as Nicolas De Lamare wrote in his compendium, there is even more to be reckoned with. The police are given the task of doing what is necessary as well as what is opportune and pleasurable: "In short, life is the object of the police: the indispensable, the useful, and the superfluous. That people survive, live, and even do better than just that: this is what the police have to ensure."[52] In his *Elements of Police,* Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi aims the lens even further ahead: if the object of the police is defined here too as "live individuals living in society," a more ambitious understanding is that of creating a virtuous circle between the vital development of individuals and the strengthening of the forces of the state:[53]

> [T]he police has to keep the citizens happy—happiness being understood as survival, life, and improved living . . . to develop those elements constituitive of individuals' lives in such a way that their development also fosters the strength of the state.[54]

The affirmative character is already fully delineated above, those features (at least from this perspective) that Foucault seems to assign to biopolitics in contrast to the commanding tendency of the sovereign regime. In opposition to it, biopolitics does not limit or coerce *[violenta]* life, but expands it in a manner proportional to its development. More than two parallel flows, we ought to speak of a singular expansive process in which power and life constitute the two opposing and complementary faces. To strengthen itself, power is forced at the same time into strengthening the object on which it discharges itself; not only, but, as we saw, it is also forced to render it subject to its own subjugation *[assoggettamento]*. Moreover, if it wants to stimulate the action of subjects, power must not only presuppose but also produce

the conditions of freedom of the subjects to whom it addresses itself. But—and here Foucault's discourse tends toward the maximum point of its own semantic extension—if we are free *for* power, we are also free *against* power. We are able not only to support power and increase it, but also to resist and oppose power. In fact, Foucault concludes that "where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power."[55] This doesn't mean, as Foucault quickly points out, that resistance is always already subjected to power against which it seems to be opposed, but rather that power needs a point of contrast against which it can measure itself in a dialectic that doesn't have any definitive outcome. It is as if power, in order to reinforce itself, needs continually to divide itself and fight against itself, or to create a projection that pulls it where it wasn't before. This line of fracture or protrusion is life itself. It is the place that is both the object and the subject of resistance. At the moment in which it is directly invested by power, life recoils against power, against the same striking force that gave rise to it:

> Moreover, against this power that was still new in the nineteenth century, the forces that resisted relied for support on the very thing it invested, that is, on life and man as a living being . . . life as a political object was in a sense taken at face value and turned back against the system that was bent on controlling it.[56]

Simultaneously within and outside of power, life appears to dominate the entire scenario of existence; even when it is exposed to the pressure of power—and indeed, never more than in such a case—life seems capable of taking back what had deprived it before and of incorporating it into its infinite folds.

Politics over Life

This, however, isn't Foucault's entire response, nor is it his only. Certainly, there is an internal coherence therein, as is testified by an entire interpretive line, which not only has made itself the standard-bearer of Foucault's position, but which has pushed Foucault's response well beyond his own manifest intentions.[57] Be that as it may, this doesn't eliminate an impression of insufficiency, or indeed of an underlying reservation concerning a definitive outcome. It is as if Foucault himself wasn't completely satisfied by his own historical-conceptual reconstruction or that he believed it to be only partial and incapable of exhausting the problem; indeed, it is bound

to leave unanswered a decisive question: if life is stronger than the power that besieges it, if its resistance doesn't allow it to bow to the pressure of power, then how do we account for the outcome obtained in modernity of the mass production of death?[58] How do we explain that the culmination of a politics of life generated a lethal power that contradicts the productive impulse? This is the paradox, the impassable stumbling block that not only twentieth-century totalitarianism, but also nuclear power asks philosophy with regard to a resolutely affirmative declension of biopolitics. How is it possible that a power of life is exercised against life itself? Why are we not dealing with two parallel processes or simply two simultaneous processes? Foucault accents the direct and proportional relation that runs between the development of biopower and the incremental growth in homicidal capacity. There have never been so many bloody and genocidal wars as have occurred in the last two centuries, which is to say in a completely biopolitical period. It is enough to recall that the maximum international effort for organizing health, the so-called Beveridge Plan, was elaborated in the middle of a war that produced 50 million dead: "One could symbolize such a coincidence by a slogan: Go get slaughtered and we promise you a long and pleasant life. Life insurance is connected with a death command."[59] Why? Why does a power that functions by insuring, protecting, and augmenting life express such a potential for death? It is true that wars and mass destruction are no longer perpetrated in the name of a politics of power *[potenza]*—at least according to the declared intentions of those who conduct these wars—but in the name of the survival itself of populations that are involved. But it is precisely what reinforces the tragic aporia of a death that is necessary to preserve life, of a life nourished by the deaths of others, and finally, as in the case of Nazism, by its own death.[60]

Once again we are faced with that enigma, that terrible unsaid, that the "bio" placed before politics holds for the term's meaning. Why does biopolitics continually threaten to be reversed into thanatopolitics? Here too the response to such an interrogative seems to reside in the problematic point of intersection between sovereignty and biopolitics. But seen now from an angle of refraction that bars an interpretation linearly in opposition to the two types of regime. The Foucauldian text marks a passage to a different representation of their relation by the slight but meaningful semantic slip between the verb "to substitute" (which still connotes discontinuity) and the verb "to complement," which alludes differently to a process of progressive and continuous mutation:

> And I think that one of the greatest transformations that the political right underwent in the nineteenth century was precisely that, I wouldn't say exactly that sovereignty's old right—to take life or let live—was *replaced,* but it came to be *complemented* by a new right which does not erase the old right but which does penetrate it, permeate it.[61]

It isn't that Foucault softens the typological distinction as well as the opposition between the two kinds of power: these are defined as they were previously. It is only that, rather than deploying the distinction along a single sliding line, he returns it to a logic of copresence. From this point of view, the same steps that were read before in a discontinuous key now appear to be articulated according to a different argumentative strategy:

> This power cannot be described or justified in terms of the theory of sovereignty. It is radically heterogeneous and should logically have led to the complete disappearance of the great juridical edifice of the theory of sovereignty. In fact, the theory of sovereignty not only continued to exist as, if you like, an ideology of right; it also continued to organize the juridical codes that nineteenth-century Europe adopted after the Napoleonic codes.[62]

Foucault furnishes an initial explanation of the ideological-functional kind vis-à-vis such a persistence, in the sense that the use of the theory of the sovereign, once it has been transferred from the monarch to the people, would have allowed both a concealment and a juridicization of the *dispositifs* of control put into action by biopower. From here the institution of a double level that is intertwined between an effective practice of the biological kind and a formal representation of juridical character. Contractualist philosophies would have constituted from this point of view the natural terrain of contact between the old sovereign order and the new governmental apparatus, applied this time not only to the individual sphere, but also to the area of population in its totality. And yet, this reconstruction, insofar as it is plausible on the historical level, doesn't completely answer the question on the theoretical level. It is as if between the two models, sovereignty and biopolitics, there passes a relation at once more secret and essential, one that is irreducible both to the category of analogy and to that of contiguity. What Foucault seems to refer to is rather a copresence of opposing vectors superimposed in a threshold of originary indistinction that makes one both the ground and the projection, the truth and the surplus of the other. It is this antinomic crossing, this aporetic knot, that prevents us from interpreting the association of sovereignty and biopolitics in a monolinear form or in the sense of contemporaneity or succession. Nei-

ther the one nor the other restores the complexity of an association that is much more antithetical. In their mutual relation, different times are compressed within a singular epochal segment constituted and simultaneously altered by their reciprocal tension. Just as the sovereign model incorporates the ancient pastoral power—the first genealogical incunabulum of biopower—so too biopolitics carries within it the sharp blade of a sovereign power that both crosses and surpasses it. If we consider the Nazi state, we can say indifferently, as Foucault himself does, that it was the old sovereign power that adopts biological racism for itself, a racism born in opposition to it. Or, on the contrary, that it is the new biopolitical power that made use of the sovereign right of death in order to give life to state racism. If we have recourse to the first interpretive model, biopolitics becomes an internal articulation of sovereignty; if we privilege the second, sovereignty is reduced to a formal schema of biopolitics. The antinomy emerges more strongly with regard to nuclear equilibrium. Do we need to look at it from the perspective of life that, notwithstanding everything, has been able to ensure it or from the perspective of total and mass death that continues to threaten us?

> So the power that is being exercised in this atomic power is exercised in such a way that it is capable of suppressing life itself. And, therefore, to suppress itself insofar as it is the power that guarantees life. Either it is sovereign and uses the atomic bomb, and therefore cannot be power, biopower, or the power to guarantee life, as it has been ever since the nineteenth century. Or, at the opposite extreme, you no longer have a sovereign right that is in excess of biopower, but a biopower that is in excess of sovereign right.[63]

Once again, after having defined the terms of an alternating hermeneutic between two opposing theses, Foucault never opts decisively for one or the other. On the one hand, he hypothesizes something like a return to the sovereign paradigm within a biopolitical horizon. In that case, we would be dealing with a literally phantasmal event, in the technical sense of a reappearance of death—of the destitute sovereign decapitated by the grand revolution—on the scene of life; as if a tear suddenly opened in the reign of immunization (which is precisely that of biopolitics), from which the blade of transcendence once again vibrates, the ancient sovereign power of taking life. On the other hand, Foucault introduces the opposing hypothesis, which says that it was precisely the final disappearance of the sovereign paradigm that liberates a vital force so dense as to overflow and be turned against itself. With the balancing constituted by sovereign power

diminished in its double orientation of absolute power and individual rights, life would become the sole field in which power that was otherwise defeated is exercised:

> The excess of biopower appears when it becomes technologically and politically possible for man not only to manage life but to make it proliferate, to create living matter, to build the monster, and ultimately, to build viruses that cannot be controlled and that are universally destructive. This formidable extension of biopower, unlike what I was just saying about atomic power, will put it beyond all human sovereignty.[64]

Perhaps we have arrived at the point of maximum tension, as well as at the point of potential internal fracture of the Foucauldian discourse. At the center remains the relation (not only historical, but conceptual and theoretical) between sovereignty and politics, or more generally between modernity and what precedes it, between present and past. Is that past truly past or does it extend as a shadow that reaches up to the present until it covers it entirely? In this irresolution there is something more than a simple exchange between a topological approach of the horizontal sort and another, more epochal, of the vertical kind; or we are dealing with both a retrospective and a prospective gaze.[65] There is indecision concerning the underlying meaning of secularization. Is it nothing other than the channel, the secret passage through which death has returned to capture "life" again? Or, on the contrary, was it precisely the absolute disappearance of death, its conclusive death without remainder that sparks in the living a lethal battle against itself? Once again, how do we wish to think the sovereign paradigm within the biopolitical order, and then what does it represent? Is it a residue that is delayed in consuming itself, a spark that doesn't go out, a compensatory ideology or the ultimate truth, because it is prior to and originary of its own installation, its own profound subsurface, its own underlying structure? And when it pushes with greater force so as to resurface (or, on the contrary, when it ultimately collapses), does death rise again in the heart of life until it makes it burst open?

What remains suspended here isn't only the question of the relation of modernity with its "pre," but also that of the relation with its "post." What was twentieth-century totalitarianism with respect to the society that preceded it? Was it a limit point, a tear, a surplus in which the mechanism of biopower broke free, got out of hand, or, on the contrary, was it society's sole and natural outcome? Did it interrupt or did it fulfill it? Once again the problem concerns the relation with the sovereign paradigm: does

Nazism (but also true *[reale]* communism) stand on the outside or inside vis-à-vis it? Do they mark the end or the return? Do they reveal the most intimate linking or the ultimate disjunction between sovereignty and biopolitics? It isn't surprising that Foucault's response is split into lines of argument that are substantially at odds with each other. Totalitarianism and modernity are at the same time continuous and discontinuous, not assimilable and indistinguishable:

> One of the numerous reasons why [fascism and Stalinism] are, for us, so puzzling is that in spite of their historical weakness they are not quite original. They used and extended mechanisms already present in most other societies. More than that: in spite of their internal madness, they used to a large extent the ideas and the devices of our political rationality.[66]

The reason Foucault is prevented from responding less paradoxically is clear: if the thesis of indistinction between sovereignty, biopolitics, and totalitarianism were to prevail—the continuist hypothesis—he would be forced to assume genocide as the constituitive paradigm (or at least as the inevitable outcome) of the entire parabola of modernity.[67] Doing so would contrast with his sense of historical distinctions, which is always keen. If instead the hypothesis of difference were to prevail—the discontinuist hypothesis—his conception of biopower would be invalidated every time that death is projected inside the circle of life, not only during the first half of the 1900s, but also after. If totalitarianism were the result of what came before it, power would always have to enclose and keep watch over life relentlessly. If it were the temporary and contingent displacement, it would mean that life over time is capable of beating back every power that wants to violate it. In the first case, biopolitics would be an absolute power over life; in the second, an absolute power of life. Held between these two opposing possibilities and blocked in the aporia that is established when they intersect, Foucault continues to run simultaneously in both directions. He doesn't cut the knot, and the result is to keep his ingenious intuitions unfinished on the link between politics and life.

Evidently, Foucault's difficulty and his indecision move well beyond a simple question of historical periodization or genealogical articulation between the paradigms of sovereignty and biopolitics to invest the same logical and semantic configuration of the latter. My impression is that such a hermeneutic impasse is connected to the fact that, notwithstanding the theorization of their reciprocal implication, or perhaps because of this, the two terms of life and politics are to be thought as originally distinct

and only later joined in a manner that is still extraneous to them. It is precisely for this reason that politics and life remain indefinite in profile and in qualification. What, precisely, are "politics" and "life" for Foucault? How are they to be understood and in what way does their definition reflect on their relationship? Or, on the contrary, how does their relation impact on their respective definitions? If one begins to think them separately in their absoluteness, it becomes difficult and even contradictory to condense them in a single concept. Not only, but one risks blocking a more profound understanding, relating precisely to the originary and elemental character of that association. It has sometimes been said that Foucault, absorbed for the most part in the question of power, never sufficiently articulated the concept of politics—to the point of substantially superimposing the expressions of "biopower" and "biopolitics." But an analogous observation—a conceptual elaboration that is lacking or insufficient—could be raised as well in relation to the other term of the relation, which is to say that of life; that despite describing the term analytically in its historical-institutional, economic, social, and productive nervature, life remains, nevertheless, little problematized with regard to its epistemological constitution. What is life in its essence and even before that, does life have an essence—a recognizable and describable designation outside of the relation with other lives and with what is not life? Does there exist a simple life—a bare life—or does it emerge from the beginning as formed, as put into form by something that pushes it beyond itself? From this perspective as well, the category of biopolitics seems to demand a new horizon of meaning, a different interpretive key that is capable of linking the two polarities together in a way that is at the same time more limited and more complex.

CHAPTER TWO

The Paradigm of Immunization

Immunity

For my part, I believe I've traced the interpretive key in the paradigm of "immunization" that seems to have eluded Foucault. How and in what sense can immunization fill that semantic void, that interval of meaning which remains open in Foucault's text between the constitutive poles of the concept of biopolitics, namely, biology and politics? Let's begin by observing that the category of "immunity," even in its current meaning, is inscribed precisely in their intersection, that is, on the tangential line that links the sphere of life with that of law. Where the term "immunity" for the biomedical sphere refers to a condition of natural or induced refractoriness on the part of a living organism when faced with a given disease, immunity in political-juridical language alludes to a temporary or definitive exemption on the part of subject with regard to concrete obligations or responsibilities that under normal circumstances would bind one to others. At this point, however, we still remain only at the outermost side of the question: many political terms of biological derivation (or at least of assonance) such as those of "body," "nation," and "constitution" come to mind. Yet in the notion of immunization something more determines its specificity when compared with the Foucauldian notion of biopolitics. It concerns the intrinsic character that forces together the two elements that compose biopolitics. Rather than being superimposed or juxtaposed in an external form that subjects one to the domination of the other, in the immunitary paradigm, *bíos* and *nomos*, life and politics, emerge as the two constituent elements of a single, indivisible whole that assumes meaning from their interrelation.

Not simply the relation that joins life to power, immunity is the power to preserve life. Contrary to what is presupposed in the concept of biopolitics—understood as the result of an encounter that arises at a certain moment between the two components—in this perspective no power exists external to life, just as life is never given outside of relations of power. From this angle, politics is nothing other than the possibility or the instrument for keeping life alive *[in vita la vita]*.

Yet the category of immunization enables us to take another step forward (or, perhaps better, laterally) to the bifurcation that runs between the two principal declinations of the biopolitical paradigm: one affirmative and productive and the other negative and lethal. We have seen how the two terms tend to be constituted in an alternating and reciprocal form that doesn't take into account points of contact. Thus, either power negates life or enhances its development; or violates life and excludes it or protects and reproduces it; objectivizes life or subjectifies it—without any terms that might mediate between them. Now the hermeneutic advantage of the immunitary model lies precisely in the circumstance that these two modalities, these two effects of sense—positive and negative, preservative and destructive—finally find an internal articulation, a semantic juncture that organizes them into a causal relation (albeit of a negative kind). This means that the negation doesn't take the form of the violent subordination that power imposes on life from the outside, but rather is the intrinsically antinomic mode by which life preserves itself through power. From this perspective, we can say that immunization is a negative [form] of the protection of life. It saves, insures, and preserves the organism, either individual or collective, to which it pertains, but it does not do so directly, immediately, or frontally; on the contrary, it subjects the organism to a condition that simultaneously negates or reduces its power to expand. Just as in the medical practice of vaccinating the individual body, so the immunization of the political body functions similarly, introducing within it a fragment of the same pathogen from which it wants to protect itself, by blocking and contradicting natural development. In this sense we can certainly trace back a prototype to Hobbesian political philosophy: when Hobbes not only places the problem of the *conservatio vitae* at the center of his own thought, but conditions it to the subordination of a constitutive power that is external to it, namely, to sovereign power, the immunitary principle has virutally already been founded.

Naturally, we must not confound the objective genesis of a theory with that of its self-interpretation, which obviously occurs later. Hobbes, and with him a large part of modern political philosophy, is not fully cognizant of the specificity (and therefore also of the contrafactual consequences) of the conceptual paradigm that he in point of fact also inaugurates. In order for the power of the contradiction that is implicit in an immunitary logic to come to light, we need to turn away from the level of irreflexive elaboration to that of conscious reflection. In other words, we need to introduce Hegel into the discussion. It has been noted that Hegel was the first to assume the negative not just as the price—an unwanted residue, a necessary penalty—paid for the positive to be realized, but rather as the motor of the positive, the fuel that allows it to function. Of course, Hegel doesn't adopt the term or the concept of immunization as such. The life to which the Hegelian dialectic refers concerns that of reality and of thought in their constitutive indistinctness, rather than that of animal-man assumed as individual and as species (even if the constitution of subjectivity in some of his fundamental texts occurs thanks to a challenge with a death that is also biological).[1] The first knowingly to use such a transition is Nietzsche. When Nietzsche transfers the center of the analysis from the soul to the body—or better, when he assumes the soul as the immunitary form that protects and imprisons the body at the same time—the paradigm acquires its specific critical weight. Here we are dealing not only with the metaphor of a virulent vaccination that Nietzsche imparts to the common man, contaminating him with man's own madness, but also with the interpretation of an entire civilization in terms of self-protection and immunity. All of knowledge and power's *dispositifs* play the role of protective containment in the face of a vital power *[potenza]* that is led to expand without limits. What Nietzsche's judgment might be about such an epochal occurrence—double, ambivalent—we will see shortly. The fact remains, however, that with Nietzsche, the category of immunization has already been completely elaborated.

From that moment on, the most innovative part of twentieth-century culture begins to make implicit use of the paradigm. The negative—that which contradicts order, norms, values—is taken on not only as an indispensable element of human history in all its singular or social configurations that it assumes periodically, but indeed as history's productive impulse. Without that obstacle or lack represented by the negative, the life of the individual and of the species would never find enough energy to develop

on its own. Instead it would remain dominated by the jumble of natural impulses from which it needs to free itself in order to be able to open itself to the sphere of greater performance *[prestazioni]*. Thus Émile Durkheim refers precisely to immunology when considering an ineliminable and functional polarity of human behavior that appeared as pathological in a social environment:

> Smallpox, a vaccine of which we use to inoculate ourselves, is a true disease that we give ourselves voluntarily, yet it increases our chance of survival. There may be many other cases where the damage caused by the sickness is insignificant compared with the immunities that it confers upon us.[2]

But it is perhaps with the philosophical anthropology developed in Germany in the middle of the last century that the lexical horizon in which the dialectical notion of *compensatio* acquires its most explicit immunitarian valence. From Max Scheler to Helmuth Plessner, ending with Arnold Gehlen, the *conditio humana* is literally constituted by the negativity that separates it from itself.[3] It is precisely for this reason that the human is placed above other species that surpass the human on the level of those natural elements required to live. In ways different from Marx, not only can the alienation of man not be reintegrated, but indeed it represents the indispensable condition of our own identity. And so the man whom Herder had already defined as an "invalid of his superior forces" can be transformed into the "armed combatant of his inferior forces," into a "Proteus of surrogates" who is able to turn his own initial lack into a gain.[4] It is precisely these "transcendences in the here and now"—what Gehlen defines as institutions—that are destined to immunize us from the excess of subjectivity through an objective mechanism that simultaneously liberates and deprives *[destituisce]* us.[5]

Yet if we are to recognize the immunitary semantics at the center of modern self-representation, we need to move to the point of intersection between two rather different (albeit converging) hermeneutic lines. The first is that which extends from Freud to Norbert Elias along a theoretical line marked by the knowledge of civilization's necessarily inhibiting character. When Elias speaks of the transformation of hetero-constrictions into self-constrictions that characterize the move from the late-classical period to the modern one, he doesn't simply allude to a progressive marginalization of violence, but rather to its enclosure within the confines of the individual psyche. Thus, while physical conflict is subjected to a social regulation

that becomes always more severe, "at the same time the battlefield, is, in a sense, moved within. Part of the tensions and passions that were earlier directly released in the struggle of man and man, must now be worked out within the human being."[6] This means that on one side the negative, in this case conflict, is neutralized with respect to its most disruptive effects; on the other that the equilibrium arrived at in such a way is for its part marked by a negative that undermines it from within. The life of the ego, divided between the driving power of the unconscious and the inhibiting one of the superego, is the site in which such an immunitary dialectic is expressed in its most concentrated form.

The scene doesn't change if we shift our attention to the outside. As was already noted, this is what results when other lines intersect with the first (albeit less critically). I am referring to the critical route that leads us to Parson's functionalism and Luhmann's systems theory. That Parsons himself linked his own research to the "Hobbesian problem of order" is in this sense doubly indicative of its immunitary declension: first because it directly joins up with the philosopher with whom our genealogy began, namely, Hobbes; and second for the semantic and conceptual slippage that occurs vis-à-vis Hobbes, relative to the overcoming of the acute alternative between order and conflict and the regulated assumption of conflict within order. Just as society needs to integrate into itself that individual who negates its essence, so too is order the result of a conflict that is both preserved and dominated.[7]

Niklas Luhmann is the one who has derived the most radical consequences from immunization, particularly regarding terminology. To affirm, precisely as he does, that "the system does not immunize itself against the no but with the help of the no" or, "to put this in terms of an older distinction, it protects through negation against annihilation," means getting right to the heart of the question, leaving aside the apologetic or at least the neutral connotations with which the author frames it.[8] His thesis that systems function not by rejecting conflicts and contradictions, but by producing them as necessary antigens for reactivating their own antibodies, places the entire Luhmannian discourse within the semantic orbit of immunity.[9] Not only does Luhmann affirm that a series of historical tendencies point to a growing concern to realize a social immunology from the onset of modernity, particularly from the eighteenth century onwards, but he pinpoints "society's specific immunitary system" in the legal system.[10] When the internal development of a true immunological science—beginning at

least with the work of Burnet—doesn't just offer an analogical border to this complex of argumentations but something more, then the immunitary paradigm comes to constitute the neuralgic epicenter between intellectual experiences and traditions of thinking that are rather different.[11] While cognitive scientists such as Dan Sperber theorize that cultural dynamics can be treated as biological phenomena and therefore become subject to the same epidemiological laws that regulate living organisms, Donna Haraway, in critical dialogue with Foucault, comes to argue that "the immune system is a plan for meaningful action to construct and maintain the boundaries for what may count as self and other in the dialectics of Western biopolitics."[12] Similarly, whereas Odo Marquard interprets the aestheticization of postmodern reality as a form of preventive anesthetization, incipient globalization furnishes another area of research, or rather the definitive background to our paradigm.[13] Just as communicative hypertrophy caused by telematics is the reverse sign of a generalized immunization, so too the calls for immunized identities of small states are nothing but the counter-effect or the crisis of an allergic rejection to global contamination.[14]

The new element that I have proposed in this debate concerns what appears to me to be the first systematic elaboration of the immunitary paradigm held on one side by the contrastive symmetry with the concept of community—itself reread in the light of its original meaning—and on the other by its specifically modern characterization.[15] The two questions quickly show themselves to be intertwined. Tracing it back to its etymological roots, *immunitas* is revealed as the negative or lacking *[privativa]* form of *communitas.* If *communitas* is that relation, which in binding its members to an obligation of reciprocal donation, jeopardizes individual identity, *immunitas* is the condition of dispensation from such an obligation and therefore the defense against the expropriating features of *communitas. Dispensatio* is precisely that which relieves the *pensum* of a weighty obligation, just as it frees the exemption *[l'esonero]* of that onus, which from its origin is traceable to the semantics of a reciprocal *munus.*[16] Now the point of impact becomes clear between this etymological and theoretical vector and the historical or more properly genealogical one. One can say that generally *immunitas,* to the degree it protects the one who bears it from risky contact with those who lack it, restores its own borders that were jeopardized by the common. But if immunization implies a substitution or an opposition of private or individualistic models with a form of communi-

tary organization—whatever meaning we may wish to attribute to such an expression—the structural connection with the processes of modernization is clear.

Of course, by instituting a structural connection between modernity and immunization, I do not intend to argue that modernity might be interpretable only through an immunitary paradigm, nor that it is reducible only to the modern. In other words, I do not deny the heuristic productivity of more consolidated exegetical models of use such as "rationalization" (Weber), "secularization" (Löwith), or "legitimation" (Blumenberg). But it seems to me that all three can gain from a contamination with an explicative category, which is at the same time more complex and more profound, one that constitutes its underlying premise. This surplus of sense with respect to the above-mentioned models is attributable to two distinct and linked elements. The first has to do with the fact that while the modern epoch's self-interpretive constructions—the question of technology *[tecnica]* in the first case, that of the sacred in the second, and that of myth in the third—originate in a circumscribed thematic center, or rather are situated on a unique sliding axis, the immunization paradigm instead refers us to a semantic horizon that itself contains plural meanings—for instance, precisely that of *munus.* Investing a series of lexical areas of different provenance and destination, the *dispositif* of its neutralization will prove to be furnished by equal internal articulations, as is testified even today by the polyvalences that the term of immunity still maintains.

But this horizontal richness doesn't exhaust the hermeneutic potential of the category. It also needs to be investigated—and this is the second element noted above—by looking at the particular relation that the category, immunity, maintains with its antonym, community. We have already seen how the most incisive meaning of *immunitas* is inscribed in the reverse logic of *communitas:* immune is the "nonbeing" or the "not-having" anything in common. Yet it is precisely such a negative implication with its contrary that indicates that the concept of immunization presupposes that which it also negates. Not only does it appear to be derived logically, but it also appears to be internally inhabited by its opposite. Certainly, one can always observe that the paradigms of disillusion, secularization, and legitimation—to remain with those cited above—presupposed in a certain way their own alterity: illusion, the divine, and transcendence, respectively. But they also assume precisely that which at various times is consumed, which

then lessens or at least changes into something different. For its part, the negative of *immunitas* (which is another way of saying *communitas*) doesn't only disappear from its area of relevance, but constitutes simultaneously its object and motor. What is immunized, in brief, is the same community in a form that both preserves and negates it, or better, preserves it through the negation of its original horizon of sense. From this point of view, one might say that more than the defensive apparatus superimposed on the community, immunization is its internal mechanism *[ingranaggio]:* the fold that in some way separates community from itself, sheltering it from an unbearable excess. The differential margin that prevents the community from coinciding with itself takes on the deep semantic intensity of its own concept. To survive, the community, every community, is forced to introject the negative modality of its opposite, even if the opposite remains precisely a lacking and contrastive mode of being of the community itself.[17]

But the structural connection between modernity and immunization allows us to take another step forward with reference to the "time" of biopolitics. I noted earlier how Foucault himself oscillates between two possible periodizations (and therefore interpretations) of the paradigm that he himself introduced.[18] If biopolitics is born with the end of sovereignty—supposing that it has really come to an end—this means that the history of biopolitics is largely modern and in a certain sense postmodern. If instead, as Foucault suggests on other occasions, biopolitics accompanies the sovereign regime, constituting a particular articulation or a specific tonality, then its genesis is more ancient, one that ultimately coincides with that of politics itself, which has always in one way or another been devoted to life. With regard to the second case, the question is, why did Foucault open up a new site of reflection? The semantics of immunity can provide us with an answer to this question to the degree in which immunity inserts biopolitics into a historically determined grid. Making use of the immunitary paradigm, one would then have to speak about biopolitics beginning with the ancient world. When does power penetrate most deeply into biological life if not in the long phase in which the bodies of slaves were fully available to the uncontrolled domination of their masters, and when prisoners of war could be legitimately run through with a victor's sword? And how can the power of life and death exercised by the Roman paterfamilias with respect to his own children be understood if not biopolitically?[19] What distinguishes the Egyptian agrarian politics or the politics of hygiene and

health of Rome from protective procedures and the development of life set in motion by modern biopower? The only plausible response would, it seems to me, have to refer to the intrinsic immunitarian connotations of the latter, which were absent in the ancient world.

If one moves from the historical to the conceptual level, the difference appears even more evident. Consider the greatest philosopher of antiquity, Plato. In perhaps no one more than Plato can we identify a movement of thought that would seem to be oriented toward biopolitics. Not only does he take eugenic practices that Sparta adopted with respect to frail babies, and more generally with regard to those not seen as suitable for public life, as normal, indeed even as expedient, but—and this is what matters more—he enlarges the scope of political authority to include the reproductive process as well, going so far as to recommend that methods of breeding for dogs and other domestic animals be applied to the reproduction of offspring *(paidopoiia* or *teknopoiia)* of citizens or at least to the guardians *[guardiani]:*

> It follows from our conclusions so far that sex should preferably take place between men and women who are outstandingly good, and should occur as little as possible between men and women of a vastly inferior stamp. It also follows that the offspring of the first group shouldn't [reproduce]. This is how to maximize the potential of our flock. And the fact that all this is happening should be concealed from everyone except the rulers themselves, if the herd of guardians is to be as free as possible from conflict.[20]

Some have noted that passages of this sort—anything but rare if not always so explicit—may well have contributed to a biopolitical reading that Nazi propaganda took to an extreme.[21] Without wanting to introduce the rantings of Bannes or Gabler regarding the parallels between Plato and Hitler, it's enough merely to refer to the success of Hans F. K. Günther's *Platon als Hüter des Lebens* in order to identify the interesting outcome of a hermeneutical line that also includes authors such as Windelband.[22] When Günther interprets the Platonic *ekloge* in terms of *Auslese* or *Zucht* (from *züchten*), that is, as "selection," one cannot really speak of an out-and-out betrayal of the text, but rather of a kind of forcing in a biological sense that Plato himself in some way authorizes, or at a minimum allows (at least in *The Republic,* in *Politics,* and in *Laws,* unlike in the more avowedly dualistic dialogues). Undoubtedly, even if Plato doesn't directly state what happens to "defective" babies with an explicit reference to infanticide or to their

abandonment, nevertheless, when seen in the context of his discourses, one can clearly infer Plato's disinterest toward them; the same holds true for the incurably ill, to whom it's not worthwhile devoting useless and expensive care.[23] Even if Aristotle tends to moderate the deeply eugenic and thanatopolitical sense of these texts, it remains the case that Plato revealed himself as sensitive to the demand for keeping pure the *genos* of the guardians and more generally of the governors of the polis according to rigid Spartan customs handed down by Critias and Senophone.[24]

Should we conclude from Plato's proximity to a biopolitical semantics that one can trace a Greek genesis for biopolitics? I would be careful in responding affirmatively, and not only because the Platonic "selection" does not have a specific ethnoracial inflection, nor more precisely a social one, but instead an aristocratic and aptitudinal one. Moreover, instead of moving in an immunitary direction, one that is oriented to the preservation of the individual, Plato's discourse is clearly directed to a communitarian sense, extended namely to the good of the *koinon*. It is this collective, public, communal, indeed immunitary demand that keeps Plato and the entire premodern culture more generally external to a completely biopolitical horizon. In his important studies on ancient medicine, Mario Vegetti has shown how Plato harshly criticizes the dietetics of Herodicus and Dione, precisely for this lacking, individualistic, and therefore necessarily impolitical tendency.[25] Contrary to the modern biocratic dream of medicalizing politics, Plato stops short of politicizing medicine.

Naturally, having said this, it's not my intention to argue that no one before modernity ever posed a question of immunity. On a typological level, the demand for self-preservation, strictly speaking, is far more ancient and long-lasting than the modern epoch. Indeed, one could plausibly claim that it is coextensive with the entire history of civilization from the moment that it constitutes the ultimate precondition, or better, the first condition, in the sense that no society can exist without a defensive apparatus, as primitive as it is, that is capable of protecting itself. What changes, however, is the moment one becomes aware of the question, and therefore of the kind of responses generated. That politics has always in some way been preoccupied with defending life doesn't detract from the fact that beginning from a certain moment that coincides exactly with the origins of modernity, such a self-defensive requirement was identified not only and simply as a given, but as both a problem and a strategic option. By this it is understood that all civilizations past and present faced (and in some way

solved) the needs of their own immunization, but that it is only in the modern ones that immunization constitutes its most intimate essence. One might come to affirm that it wasn't modernity that raised the question of the self-preservation of life, but that self-preservation is itself raised in modernity's own being *[essere]*, which is to say it invents modernity as a historical and categorical apparatus able to cope with it. What we understand by modernity therefore in its complexity and its innermost being can be understood as that metalanguage that for a number of centuries has given expression to a request that originates in life's recesses through the elaboration of a series of narrations capable of responding to life in ways that become more effective and more sophisticated over time. This occurred when natural defenses were diminished; when defenses that had up to a certain point constituted the symbolic, protective shell of human experience were lessened, none more important than the transcendental order that was linked to the theological matrix. It is the tear that suddenly opens in the middle of the last millennium in that earlier immunitarian wrapping that determines the need for a different defensive apparatus of the artificial sort that can protect a world that is constitutively exposed to risk. Peter Sloterdijk sees the double and contradictory propensity of modern man originating here: on the one side, protected from an exteriority without ready-made shelter, on the other, precisely because of this, forced to make up for such a lack with the elaboration of new and ever stronger "immunitary baldachins," when faced with a life not only already exposed *[denudata]* but completely delivered over to itself.[26]

If that is true, then the most important political categories of modernity are not be interpreted in their absoluteness, that is, for what they declare themselves to be, and not exclusively on the basis of their historical configuration, but rather as the linguistic and institutional forms adopted by the immunitary logic in order to safeguard life from the risks that derive from its own collective configuration and conflagration. That such a logic expresses itself through historical-conceptual figures shows that the modern implication between politics and life is direct but not immediate. In order to be actualized effectively, life requires a series of mediations constituted precisely by these categories. So that life can be preserved and also develop, therefore, it needs to be ordered by artificial procedures that are capable of saving it from natural risks. Here passes the double line that distinguishes modern politics; on one side, from that which precedes it, and, on the other, from the condition that follows it. With regard to the first, modern

politics already had a clear biopolitical tendency, in the precise sense that it is emphasized, beginning with the problem of *conservatio vitae*. Yet differently with respect to what will happen in a phase that we will call for now second modernity, the relationship between politics and life circulates through the problem of order and through historical-conceptual categories—sovereignty, property, liberty, power—in which it is innervated. It is this presupposition of order with respect to living subjectivity from which it objectively is generated that determines the aporetic structure of modern political philosophy; indeed, the fact that its response to the question of self-preservation from which it is born emerges not only as deviated but, as we will see soon enough, as also self-contradictory, is the consequence or the expression of a dialectic that is already in itself antinomic, as is the immunitary dialectic. If modern political philosophy is given the task of protecting life, which is always determined negatively, then the political categories organized to express it will end up rebounding against their own proper meanings, twisting against themselves. And that notwithstanding their specific contents: the pretense of responding to an immediacy—the question of *conservatio vitae*—is contradictory to the mediations, which are precisely the concepts of sovereignty, property, and liberty. That all of them at a certain point in their historical-semantic parabola are reduced to the security of the subject who appears to be the owner or beneficiary, is not to be understood either as a contingent derivation or as a destiny fixed beforehand, but rather as the consequence of the modality of immunity through which the Modern thinks the figure of the subject.[27] Heidegger more than anyone else understood the essence of the problem. To declare that modernity is the epoch of representation, that is, of the *subjectum* that positions itself as an *ens in se substantialiter completum* vis-à-vis its own object, entails bringing it back philosophically to the horizon of immunity:

> Representation is now, in keeping with the new freedom, a going forth—from out of itself—into the sphere, first to be made secure, of what is made secure . . . The *subjectum,* the fundamental certainty, is the being-represented-together-with—made secure at any time—of representing man together with the entity represented, whether something human or non-human, i.e. together with the objective.[28]

Yet to link the modern subject to such a horizon of immunitary guarantees also means recognizing the aporia in which the same experience remains captured: that of looking to shelter life in the same powers *[potenze]* that interdict its development.

Sovereignty

The conception of sovereignty constitutes the most acute expression of such a power. In relation to the analysis initiated by Foucault, sovereignty is understood not as a necessary compensatory ideology vis-à-vis the intrusiveness of control *dispositifs* nor as a phantasmal replica of the ancient power of death to the new biopolitical regime, but as the first and most influential that the biopolitical regime assumes. That accounts for its long persistence in a European juridical-political lexicon: sovereignty isn't before or after biopolitics, but cuts across the entire horizon, furnishing the most powerful response to the modern problem of the self-preservation of life. The importance of Hobbes's philosophy, even before his disruptive categorical innovations, resides in the absolute distinctness by which this transition is felt. Unlike the Greek conception—which generally thinks politics in the paradigmatic distinction with the biological dimension—in Hobbes not only does the question of *conservatio vitae* reenter fully in the political sphere, but it comes to constitute by far its most prevalent dimension. In order to qualify as such, to deploy in its forms, life must above all be maintained as such, be protected as such, and be protected from the dissipation that threatens it. Both the definition of natural right, that is, what man can do, and that of natural law, that is, what man must do, account for this original necessity:

> The Right of Nature, which Writers commonly call Jus Naturale, is the Liberty each man hath, to use his own power, as he will himselfe, for the preservation of his own Nature; that is to say, of his own Life; and consequently, of doing any thing, which in his own Judgement, and Reason, hee shall conceive to the aptest means thereunto.[29]

As for natural law, it is "a Precept, or generall Rule, found out by Reason, by which a man is forbidden to do that, which is destructive of his life, or taketh way the means of preserving the same, and to omit, that, by which he thinketh it may be best preserved.[30]

Already the setting up of the argumentation situates it in a clearly biopolitical frame. It's not by chance that the man to whom Hobbes turns his attention is one characterized essentially by the body, by its needs, by its impulses, and by its drives. And when one even adds the adjective "political," this doesn't qualitatively modify the subject to which it refers. With respect to the classic Aristotelian division, the body, considered politically, remains closer to the regions of *zōē* than to that of *bíos;* or better, it is situated

precisely at the point in which such a distinction fades and loses meaning. What is at stake, or, more precisely, what is in constant danger of extinction, is life understood in its materiality, in its immediate physical intensity. It is for this reason that reason and law converge on the same point defined by the pressing demands of preserving life. But what sets in motion the argumentative Hobbesian machine is the circumstance that neither one nor the other is able by itself to achieve such an objective without a more complex apparatus in condition to guarantee it. The initial attempt at self-preservation *(conatus sese praeservandi)* is indeed destined to fail given the combined effects of the other natural impulses that accompany and precisely contradict the first, namely, the inexhaustible and acquisitive desire for everything, which condemns men to generalized conflict. Although it tends to self-perpetuation, the fact is that life isn't capable of doing so autonomously. On the contrary, it is subjected to a strong counterfactual movement such that the more life pushes in the direction of self-preservation, the more defensive and offensive means are mobilized to this end, given the fundamental equality among men, all of whom are capable of killing each other and thus, for the same reason, all capable of being killed:

> And therefore, as long as this naturall Right of every man to every thing endureth, there can be no security to any man, (how strong or wise soever he be), of living out the time, which Nature ordinarily alloweth men to live.[31]

It is here that the immunitary mechanism begins to operate. If life is abandoned to its internal powers, to its natural dynamics, human life is destined to self-destruct because it carries within itself something that ineluctably places it in contradiction with itself. Accordingly, in order to save itself, life needs to step out from itself and constitute a transcendental point from which it receives orders and shelter. It is in this interval or doubling of life with respect to itself that the move from nature to artifice is to be positioned. It has the same end of self-preservation as nature, but in order to actualize it, it needs to tear itself from nature, by following a strategy that is opposed to it. Only by negating itself can nature assert its own will to live. Preservation proceeds through the suspension or the alienation *[estraneazione]* of that which needs to be protected. Therefore the political state cannot be seen as the continuation or the reinforcement of nature, but rather as its negative converse. This doesn't mean that politics reduces life to its simple biological layer—that it denudes it of every qualitative form,

as one might argue only by moving Hobbes to a lexicon in which he doesn't belong. It is no coincidence that he never speaks of "bare life," but on the contrary, in all his texts, implies it in terms that go well beyond simply maintaining life. If in *De Cive* he argues that "[B]ut by safety must be understood, not the sole preservation of life in what condition soever, but in order to its happiness," in *Elements* he stresses that with the judgment *(Salus populi suprema lex esto)* "must be understood, not the mere preservation of their lives, but generally their benefit and good," to conclude in *Leviathan* that "by safety here is not meant a bare preservation, but also all other contentments of life, which every man by lawful industry, without danger or hurt to the Commonwealth, shall acquire to himself."[32]

Nor does this mean that the category of life in the modern period replaces that of politics, with progressive depoliticization as its result. On the contrary, once the centrality of life is established, it is precisely politics that is awarded the responsibility for saving life, but—and here is the decisive point in the structure of the immunitary paradigm—it occurs through an antinomic *dispositif* that proceeds via the activation of its contrary. In order to be saved, life has to give up something that is integral to itself, what in fact constitutes it principal vector and its own power to expand; namely, the acquisitive desire for everything that places itself in the path of a deadly reprisal. Indeed, it is true that every living organism has within it a sort of natural immunitary system—reason—that defends it from the attack of external agents. But once its deficiencies, or rather its counterproductive effects, have been ascertained, it is substituted with an induced immunity, which is to say an artificial one that both realizes and negates the first. This occurs not only because it is situated outside the individual body, but also because it now is given the task of forcibly containing its primordial intensity.

This second immunitary (or better, meta-immunitary) *dispositif,* which is destined to protect life against an inefficient and essentially risky protection, is precisely sovereignty. So much has been said about its pactional inauguration and its prerogatives that it isn't the case to return to them here. What appears most relevant from our perspective is the constitutively aporetic relation that ties it to the subjects to whom it is directed. Nowhere more than in this case is the term to be understood in its double meaning: they are subjects of sovereignty to the extent to which they have voluntarily instituted it through a free contract. But they are subjects to sovereignty because, once it has been instituted, they cannot resist it for precisely the

same reason: otherwise they would be resisting themselves. Because they are subjects of sovereignty, they are subjected to it. Their consensus is requested only once, after which they can no longer take it back.

Here we can begin to make out the constitutively negative character of sovereign immunization. It can be defined as an immanent transcendence situated outside the control of those that also produced it as the expression of their own will. This is precisely the contradictory structure that Hobbes assigns to the concept of representation: the one representing, that is, the sovereign, is simultaneously identical and different with respect to those that he represents. He is identical because he takes their place *[stare al loro posto]*, yet different from them because that "place" remains outside their range. The same spatial antinomy is seen temporally, that is, that which the instituting subjects declare to have put in place eludes them because it logically precedes them as their own same presupposition.[33] From this point of view, one could say that the immunization of the modern subject lies precisely in this exchange between cause and effect: he, the subject, can be presupposed, self-insured in Heidegger's terms, because he is already caught in a presupposition that precedes and determines him. It is the same relation that holds between sovereign power and individual rights. As Foucault explains it, these two elements must not be seen in an inversely proportional relationship that conditions the enlargement of the first to the shrinking of the second or vice versa. On the contrary, they mutually implicate themselves in a form that makes the first the complementary reverse of the other: only individuals who are considered equal with others can institute a sovereign that is capable of legitimately representing them. At the same time, only an absolute sovereign can free individuals from subjection to other despotic powers. As a more recent, discriminating historiography has made clear, absolutism and individualism, rather than excluding or contradicting each other, implicate each other in a relation that is ascribable to the same genetic process.[34] It is through absolutism that individuals realize themselves and at the same time negate themselves; presupposing their own presupposition, they are deprived insofar as they are constituted as subjects from the moment that the outcome of such a founding is nothing other than that which in turn constructs them.

Behind the self-legitimating account of modern immunization, the real biopolitical function that modern individualism performs is made clear. Presented as the discovery and the implementation of the subject's autonomy, individualism in reality functions as the immunitary ideologemme

through which modern sovereignty implements the protection of life. We shouldn't lose sight of any intermediate passage in this dialectic. We know that in a natural state men also relate to each other according to a modality of the individual that leads to generalized conflict. But such a conflict is still always a horizontal relation that binds them to a communal dimension. Now, it is exactly this commonality—the danger that derives to each and every one—that is abolished through that artificial individualization constituted precisely by the sovereign *dispositif*. Moreover, the same echo is to be heard in the term "absolutism," not only in the independence of power from every external limit, but above all in the dissolution projected onto men: their transformation into individuals, equally absolute by subtracting from them the *munus* that keeps them bound communally. Sovereignty is the not being *[il non essere]* in common of individuals, the political form of their desocialization.

The negative of *immunitas* already fills our entire frame: in order to save itself unequivocally, life is made "private" in the two meanings of the expression. It is privatized and deprived of that relation that exposes it to its communal mark. Every external relationship to the vertical line that binds everyone to the sovereign command is cut at the root. Individual literally means this: to make indivisible, united in oneself, by the same line that divides one from everyone else. The individual appears protected from the negative border that makes him himself and not other (more than from the positive power of the sovereign). One might come to affirm that sovereignty, in the final analysis, is nothing other than the artificial vacuum created around every individual—the negative of the relation or the negative relation that exists between unrelated entities.

Yet it isn't only this. There is something else that Hobbes doesn't say explicitly, as he limits himself to letting it emerge from the creases or the internal shifts of the discourse itself. It concerns a remnant of violence that the immunitary apparatus cannot mediate because it has produced it itself. From this perspective, Foucault seizes on an important point that is not always underlined with the necessary emphasis in the Hobbesian literature: Hobbes is not the philosopher of conflict, as is often repeated in regard to "the war of every man against every man," but rather the philosopher of peace, or better of the neutralization of conflict, from the moment that the political state needs preemptively to insure against the possibility of internecine warfare.[35] Yet the neutralization of conflict doesn't completely provide for its elimination, but instead for its incorporation in the immunized

organism as an antigen at once necessary to the continuous formation of antibodies. Not even the protection that the sovereign assures his subjects is exempt. Especially here is manifested the most strident form of antibody. Concurrently, in the order of instruments adopted to mitigate the fear of violent death that all feel toward the other, it remains a fear that is more acceptable because it is concentrated on one objective (though not for this reason essentially different from the one already overcome). In a certain sense, the asymmetric condition intensifies this fear, a condition in which the subject *[suddito]* finds himself vis-à-vis a sovereign who preserves that natural right deposited by all the other moments of the entrance into the civil state. What occurs from this, as a result, is the necessary linking of the preservation of life with the possibility—always present even if rarely utilized—of the taking away of life by the one who is also charged with insuring it. It is a right precisely of life and death, understood as the sovereign prerogative that cannot be contested precisely because it has been authorized by the same subject that endures it. The paradox that supports the entire logic lies in the circumstance that the sacrificial dynamic is unleashed not by the distance, but, on the contrary, by the assumed identification of individuals with the sovereign who represents them with their explicit will. Thus, "nothing the Soveraign Representative can doe to a subject, on what pretense soever, can properly be called an Injustice, or Injury: because every Subject is Author of every act the Soveraign doth."[36] It is exactly this superimposition between opposites that reintroduces the term of death in the discourse of life:

> And therefore it may and does often happen in Common-wealths, that a Subject may be put to death, by the command of the Soveraign Power, and yet neither doe the other wrong: As when Jeptha caused his daughter to be sacrificed: In which, and the like cases, he that so dieth, had Liberty to doe the action, for which he is neverthelesse, without Injury put to death. And the same holdeth also in a Soveraign Prince, that putteth to death an Innocent Subject.[37]

What emerges here with a severity that is only barely contained by the exceptional character in which the event appears circumscribed is the constitutive antinomy of the sovereign immunization, which is based not only on the always tense relationship between exception and norm, but on its normal character of exception (because anticipated by the same order that seems to exclude it). This exception—the liminal coincidence of preservation and capacity to be sacrificed of life—represents both a remainder

that cannot be mediated and the structural antinomy on which the machine of immunitary mediation rests. At the same time, it is the residue of transcendence that immanence cannot reabsorb—the prominence of the "political" with respect to the juridical with which it is also identified—and the aporetic motor of their dialectic. It is as if the negative, keeping to its immunitary function of protecting life, suddenly moves outside the frame and on its reentry strikes life with uncontrollable violence.

Property

The same negative dialectic that unites individuals to sovereignty by separating them invests all the political-juridical categories of modernity as the inevitable result of their immunitary declension. This holds true in the first instance for that of "property." Indeed, one can say that property's constitutive relevance to the process of modern immunization is ever more accentuated with respect to the concept of sovereignty. And this for two reasons. First, thanks to the originary antithesis that juxtaposes "common" to "one's own" *[proprio]*, which by definition signifies "not common," "one's own" is as such always immune. And second, because the idea of property marks a qualitative intensification of the entire immunitary logic. As we just observed, while sovereign immunization emerges transcendent with respect to those who also create it, that of proprietary immunization adheres to them—or better, remains within the confines of their bodies. It concerns a process that conjoins making immanent *[immanentizzazione]* and specialization: it is as if the protective apparatus that is concentrated in the unitary figure of sovereignty is multiplied to the degree that sovereignty, once multiplied, is installed in biological organisms.

At the center of the conceptual transition will be found the work of John Locke. Here, just as in Hobbes, what is at stake is the preservation of life (*preservation of himself, desire of self-preservation* [trans: in English]), which Locke from the beginning declares to be "the first and strongest God Planted in Men,"[38] but in a form that conditions it to the presence of something, precisely the *res propria*, that contemporaneously arises from and reinforces it.

> For the desire, strong desire of Preserving his Life and Being having been Planted in him, as a Principle of Action by God himself, Reason, which was the Voice of God in him, could not but teach him and assure him, that pursuing that natural Inclination he had to preserve his Being, he followed the Will of his Maker, and therefore had the right to make use of those

> Creatures, which by his Reason or Senses he could discover would be serviceable thereunto. And thus Man's Property in the Creatures, was founded upon the right he had, to make use of those things, that were necessary or useful to his Being.[39]

The right of property is therefore the consequence as well as the factual precondition for the permanence in life. The two terms implicate each other in a constitutive connection that makes of one the necessary precondition of the other: without a life in which to inhere, property would not be given; but without something of one's own—indeed, without prolonging itself in property—life would not be able to satisfy its own primary demands and thus it would be extinguished. We mustn't lose sight of the essential steps in the argument. Locke doesn't always include life among the properties of the subject. It is true that in general he unifies *lives, liberties, and estates* [trans: in English] within the denomination of property, so that he can say that "civil goods are life, liberty, bodily health and freedom from pain, and the possession of outward things, such as lands, money, furniture, and the like."[40] But in other passages property assumes a more restricted sense, one that is limited to material goods to which life doesn't belong. How does one explain such an incongruence? I believe that to understand them less in obvious fashion, these two enunciative modalities should not be juxtaposed but integrated and superimposed in a singular effect of sense: life is contemporaneously inside and outside property. It is within from the point of view of having—as part of the goods with which everyone is endowed *[in dotazione]*. But beyond that, life is also the all of the subject if one looks at it from the point of view of being. Indeed, in this case it is property, any kind of property, that is part of life. One can say that the relationship and the exchange, which from time to time Locke sets up between these two optics, define his entire perspective. Life and property, being and having, person and thing are pressed up together in a mutual relation that makes of one both the content and the container of the other. When he declares that the natural state is a state of "Liberty to dispose, and order, as he lists, his Person, Actions, Possession, and his whole property, within the Allowance of those Laws under which he is; and therein not to be subject to the arbitrary Will of another, but freely to follow his own," on the one hand, he inscribes property in a form of life expressed in the personal action of an acting subject; on the other, he logically includes subject, action, and liberty in the figure of "one's own."[41] In this way it

emerges as an "inside" that is inclusive of an "outside" that in turn subsumes it within.

The resulting antinomy will be found in the logical difficulty of placing property before the ordering regime that institutes it. Unlike in Hobbes (but also differently than Grozio and Pufendor), Locke's notion of property precedes sovereignty, which instead is ordered to defend it.[42] It is the presupposition and not the result of social organization. Yet—and here appears the question with which Locke himself explicitly begins—what if property is not rooted in a form of interhuman relation, in which property finds its own foundation within a world in which it is given in common? How can the common make itself "one's own" and "one's own" subdivide the common? What is the origin of "mine," of "yours," and of "his" in a universe of everyone? It is here that Locke impresses on his own discourse that biopolitical declension that folds it in an intensely immunitarian sense:

> Though the Earth, and all inferior Creatures 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, are 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 joyned to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his Property.[43]

Locke's reasoning unravels through concentric circles whose center does not contain a political-juridical principle, but rather an immediately biological reference. The exclusion of someone else cannot be established except as part of the consequential chain that originated in the metaphysical proviso of bodily inclusion. Property is implicit in the work that modifies what is naturally given as work, which in turn is included in the body of the person who performs it. Just as work is an extension of the body, so is property an extension of work, a sort of prosthesis that through the operation of the arm connects it to the body in the same vital segment; not only because property is necessary for the material support of life, but because its prolongation is directed to corporeal formation. Here another transition is visible, indeed, even a shift in the trajectory with respect to the subjective self-insurance identified by Heidegger in the modern *repraesentatio:* the predominance over the object isn't established by the distance that separates it from the subject, but by the movement of its incorporation. The body is the primary site of property because it is the location of the first property, which is to say what each person holds over himself *[ha su se stesso]*. If the world was given

to us by God in common, the body belongs solely to the individual who at the same time is constituted from it and who possesses it before any other appropriation, which is to say in originary form. It is in this exchange—together both a splitting and a doubling—between being (a body) and having one's own body that the Lockean individual finds its ontological and juridical, its onto-juridical foundation for every successive appropriation. Possessing one's own corporeal form *[persona],* he owns all his performances, beginning with the transformation of the material object, which he appropriates as transitive property. From that moment every other individual loses the right over it, such that one can be legitimately killed in the case of theft. Seeing how through work the appropriate object is incorporated into the owner's body, it then becomes one with the same biological life, and is defended with the violent suppression of the one that threatens it as the object has now become an integral part of his life.

Already here the immunitary logic seizes and occupies the entire Lockean argumentative framework: the potential risk of a world given in common—and for this reason exposed to an unlimited indistinction—is neutralized by an element that is presupposed by its same originary manifestation because it is expressive of the relation that precedes and determines all the others: the relation of everyone with himself or herself in the form of personal identity. This is both the kernel and the shell, the content and the wrapping, the object and the subject of the immunitary protection. As property is protected by the subject that possesses it, a self-protecting capacity, preserved by the subject through his *proprium* and of that *proprium* through himself (through the same subjective substance), extends, strengthens, and reinforces it. Once the proprietary logic is wedded to a solid underpinning such as belonging to one's own body, it can now expand into communal space. This is not directly negated, but is incorporated and recut in a division that turns it inside out into its opposite, in a multiplicity of things that have in common only the fact of being all one's own to the degree they have been appropriated by their respective owners:

> From all which it is evident, that though the things of Nature are given in common, yet Man (by being Master of himself, and *Proprietor of his Person,* and the Actions or Labour of it), had still in himself the great foundation of Property; and that which made up the great part of what he apllyed to the Support or Comfort of his being, when Invention and Arts had improved the conveniences of Life, was perfectly his own, and did not belong in common to others.[44]

Earlier I noted that we are dealing with an immunitary procedure that is much more potent than that of Hobbes because it inheres in the same form—though one could say in the material—of the individual. The increment of functionality that derives from it is nonetheless paid with a corresponding intensification of the contradiction on which the entire system rests, which is no longer situated in the point of connection and tension between individuals and the sovereign, as in the Hobbesian model, but in the complex relation that moves between subjectivity and property. What is at stake isn't only a question of identity or of difference—the divergence that is opened in the presupposed convergence between the two poles—but also and above all in the displacement of their prevalent relation. It is defined generally according to the following formulation: if the appropriated thing depends on the subject who possesses it such that it becomes one with the body, the owner in turn is rendered as such only by the thing that belongs to him—and therefore he himself depends on it. On the one hand, the subject dominates the thing in the specific sense that he places it within his domain. But, on the other hand, the thing in turn dominates the subject to the degree in which it constitutes the necessary objective of his acquisitive desire *[tensione]*. Without an appropriating subject, no appropriated thing. But without any appropriated thing, no appropriating subject—from the moment it that doesn't subsist outside of the constitutive relation with it. In this way, if Locke can hold that property is the continuation of subjective identity—or the extension of subjective identity outside itself—one sooner or later can respond that "with private property being incorporated in man himself and with man himself being recognized as its essence . . . carries to its logical conclusion the denial of man, since man himself no longer stands in an external relation of tension to the external substance of private property, but has himself become the essence of private property": its simple appendage.[45] We must not lose track of the reversible features that unite both conditions in one movement. It is precisely the indistinction between the two terms—as is originally established by Locke—that makes the one the *dominus* of the other, and which therefore constitutes them in their reciprocal subjection.

The point of transition and inversion between the two perspectives—from the mastery of the subject to that of the thing—is situated in the private *[privato]* character of appropriation.[46] It is through it that the appropriating act becomes at the same time exclusive of every other act, thanks to the thing itself: the privacy *[privatezza]* of possession is one with the

subtraction *[privazione]* that specifies in whom privacy is not shared with the legitimate owner, which means the entire community of nonowners. From this point of view—not an alternative to, but speculative of the first—the negative clearly begins to prevail over the positive, or better, to manifest itself as its internal truth. It is "one's own" that is not common, that does not belong to others. The passive sense of every appropriation subtracts from every other one the appropriative *jus* toward the thing that has already been appropriated in the form of private property. But then also in the active sense, such that the progressive increase in individual property causes a progressive decrease in the goods that are at the disposition of others. Internecine conflict, exorcized from within the proprietary universe, in this way is clearly moved outside its confines, in the formless space of non-property. It is true that in principle Locke institutes a double limit to the increase of property in the obligation to leave for others the things necessary for their maintenance *[conservazione]* and in the prohibition of appropriating for oneself what isn't possible to consume. But then he considers it inoperative at the moment when goods become commutable into money and therefore infinitely capable of being accumulated without fearing that they might be lost.[47] From that point on, private property conclusively breaks down the relation of proportionality that regulates the relation of one to another, but it also weakens that which unites the owner of property to himself. This occurs when property, both private and subtractive *[privativa]*, begins to be emancipated (from the body from which it seems to depend) to take on a configuration of purely juridical stamp. The intermediate point of this long process is constituted by the breaking of the link, introduced by Locke, between property and work. As we know, it was precisely this that joins *proprium* within the confines of the body. When such a connection begins to be considered as no longer necessary—according to a reasoning set in motion by Hume and perfected by modern political economy—one witnesses a true and particular desubstantialization of property, theorized in its most accomplished form in the Kantian distinction between *possessio phaenomenon* (empirical possession) and *possessio noumenon* (intelligible possession), or, as it is also defined, *detentio* (possession without possession). At this point, what will be considered truly, even definitively, one's own is only that which is distant from the body of him who juridically possesses it. It is not physical possession that testifies to complete juridical possession. Originally thought within an indissoluble

link with the body that works, property is already defined by its extraneousness to its own sphere.

> I can only call a corporeal thing or an object in space mine, when even though in physical possession of it, I am able to assert that I am in possession of it in another real non-physical sense. Thus, I am not entitled to call an apple mine merely because I hold it in my hand or possess it physically; but only when I am entitled to say "I possess it, although I have laid it out of my hand, and wherever it may lie.[48]

Distance is the condition, the testimonial of the duration of possession for a temporality that goes well beyond the personal life to whose preservation it is also ordered. Here already the contradiction implicit in proprietary logic fully emerges. Separated from the thing that it also inalienably possesses, the individual proprietor remains exposed to a risk of emptying out that is far more serious than the threat that he had tried to immunize himself from by acquiring property, precisely because it is the product of acquiring property. The appropriative procedure, represented by Locke as a personification of the thing—its incorporation in the proprietor's body—lends itself to be interpreted as the reification of the person, disembodied of its subjective substance. It is as if the metaphysical distance of modern representation were restored through the theorization of the incorporation of the object, but this time to the detriment of a subject who is isolated and absorbed by the autonomous power of the thing. Ordered to produce an increment in the subject, the proprietary logic inaugurates a path of inevitable desubjectification. This is a wild oscillation logic in the movement of self-refutation that seizes all the biopolitical categories of modernity. Here too in this case, but in a different form, with a result that converges with that of sovereign immunization, the proprietary paradigm's immunitary procedure is able to preserve life only by enclosing it in an orbit that is destined to drain it of its vital element. Where before the individual was displaced *[destituito]* by sovereign power that he himself instituted, so now too does the individual proprietor appear expropriated by the same appropriative power.

Liberty

The third immunitary wrapping of modernity is constituted by the category of liberty *[libertà]*.[49] As was already the case for those of sovereignty and property, and perhaps in a more pronounced manner, its historical-

conceptual sequence is expressed by the general process of modern immunization, in the double sense that it reproduces its deportment and amplifies its internal logic. This may sound strange for a term so obviously charged with accents so constitutively refractory for every defensive tonality, and if anything oriented in the sense of an opening without reserve to the mutability of events. But it is precisely in relation to such a breadth of horizon—still protected in its etymon—that is possible to measure the process of semantic tightening and also of loss of meaning *[prosciugamento]* that marks its successive history.[50] Both the root *leuth* or *leudh*—from which originates the Greek *eleutheria* and the Latin *libertas*—and the Sanskrit root *frya,* which refers instead to the English freedom and the German *Freiheit,* refer us to something that has to do with an increase, a non-closing *[dischiudimento],* a flowering, also in the typically vegetative meaning of the expression. If then we consider the double semantic chain that descends from it—which is to say that of love (*Lieben, lief,* love, as well as, differently, *libet* and *libido*) and that of friendship (friend, *Freund*)—we can deduce not only a confirmation of this original affirmative connotation: the concept of liberty, in its germinal nucleus, alludes to a connective power that grows and develops according to its own internal law, and to an expansion or to a deployment that unites its members in a shared dimension.

It is with respect to such an originary inflection that we should interrogate the negative reconversion that the concept of liberty undergoes in its modern formulation. It's certainly the case that from the beginning the idea of "free" *[libero]* logically implicates the contrastive reference to an opposite condition, that of the slave, understood precisely as "non-free."[51] But such a negation constitutes, more than the presupposition or even the prevailing content of the notion of liberty, its external limit: even though it is tied to an inevitable contrary symmetry, it isn't the concept of slave that confers significance on that of the free man, but the reverse. As it both refers to the belonging to a distinct people and to humanity in general, what has prevailed in the qualification of *eleutheros* has always been the positive connotation with respect to which the negative constitutes a sort of background or contour lacking an autonomous semantic resonance. And, as has repeatedly been brought to light, this relation is inverted in the modern period, when it begins to assume increasingly the features of a so-called negative liberty, with respect to that defined instead as "positive," as in "freedom from." What nevertheless has remained obscured in the ample literature is the fact that both meanings understood in this way—

compared to their initial meaning—in fact emerge within a negative horizon of meaning. If we assume the canonical distinction as Isaiah Berlin elaborates it, indeed not only does the first liberty—understood negatively as an absence of interference—but also the second, which he reads positively, appear quite distant from the characterization, both affirmative and relational, fixed at the origin of the concept:

> The "positive" sense of the word "liberty" derives from the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master. I wish my life and decisions to depend upon myself, *not* on external forces of whatever kind. I wish to be the instrument of my own, not of other men's, acts of will. I wish to be a subject, *not* an object . . . I wish to be somebody *not nobody.*[52]

The least that one can say, in relation to such a definition, is that it is manifestly unable to think liberty affirmatively in the modern conceptual lexicon of the individual, in terms of will and subject. It is as if each of these terms—and still more when placed together—irresistibly pushes liberty close to its "not," to the point of dragging it inside itself. Qualifying liberty—understood as the mastery of the individual subject over himself—is his not being disposed to, or his not being at the disposition of others. This oscillation or inclination of modern liberty toward its negative gives added significance to an observation of Heidegger's, according to which "not only are the individual conceptions of positive freedom different and ambiguous, but the concept of positive freedom as such is indefinite, especially if by positive freedom we provisionally understand the not-negative *[nicht negative]* freedom."[53] The reason for such a lexical exchange, which makes the positive, rather than affirmative, simply a nonnegative, ought to be sought in the break, which is implicit in the individualistic paradigm, of the constitutive link between liberty and otherness (or alteration).[54] It is that which encloses liberty in the relation of the subject with himself: he is free when no obstacle is placed between him and his will—or also between his will and its realization. When Thomas Aquinas translated the Aristotelian *proairesis* with *electio* (and the *boulēsis* with *voluntas*), the paradigmatic move is largely in operation: liberty will rapidly become the capacity to realize that which is presupposed in the possibility of the subject to be himself—not to be other than himself. Free will as the self-establishment of a subjectivity that is absolutely master of its own will. From this perspective, the historical-conceptual relation comes fully into view, which joins such a conception of liberty with other political categories of modernity,

from that of sovereignty to that of equality. On the one hand, only free subjects can be made equal by a sovereign who legitimately represents them. On the other hand, such subjects are themselves conceived as equally sovereign within their own individuality—obliged to obey the sovereign because they are free to command themselves and vice versa.

The immunitary outcome—but one might also say the presupposition—of such a move cannot be avoided. In the moment in which liberty is no longer understood as a mode of being, but rather as a right to have something of one's own—more precisely the full predominance of oneself in relation to others—the subtractive or simply the negative sense is already destined to characterize it ever more dominantly. When this entropic process is joined to the self-preserving strategies of modern society, the overturning and emptying of ancient communal liberty *[libertates]* into its immune opposite will be complete. If the invention of the individual constitutes the medial segment of this passage—and therefore the sovereign frame in which it is inscribed—its absolutely prevailing language is that of protection. From this point of view, we need to be careful in not distorting the real sense of the battle against individual or collective *immunitates* fought on the whole by modernity. It isn't that of reducing but of intensifying and generalizing the immunitary paradigm. Without losing its typically polyvalent lexicon, immunity progressively transfers its own semantic center of gravity from the sense of "privilege" to that of "security." Unlike the ancient *libertates*, conferred at the discretion of a series of particular entities—classes, cities, bodies, convents—modern liberty consists essentially in the right of every single subject to be defended from the arbiters that undermine autonomy and, even before that, life itself. In the most general terms, modern liberty is that which insures the individual against the interference of others through the voluntary subordination to a more powerful order that guarantees it. It is here that the antinomical relation with the sphere of necessity originates that ends by reversing the idea of liberty into its opposites of law, obligation, and causality. In this sense it is a mistake to interpret the assumption of constricting elements as an internal contradiction or a conceptual error of the modern theorization of liberty. Instead, it is a direct consequence: necessity is nothing other than the modality that the modern subject assumes in the contrapuntal dialectic of its own liberty, or better, of liberty as the free appropriation of "one's own." The famous expression according to which the subject in chains is free is to be interpreted in this way—not in spite of but in reason of: as the self-dissolving

effect of a liberty that is ever more overcome by its purely self-preserving function.

If for Machiavelli "a small part of the people wish to be free in order to command, but all the others who are countless, desire liberty in order to live in safety," Hobbes remains the most consequential and radical theoretician of this move: liberty preserves itself or preserves the subject that possesses it, losing itself and as a consequence losing the subject to the extent the subject is a subject of liberty.[55] That in him liberty is defined as "the absence of all impediments to action, that are not contained in the nature and the intrinsic quality of the agent," means that it is the negative result of a mechanical game of force within which its movement is inscribed and which therefore in the final analysis coincides with its own necessity.[56] In this way—if he who puts liberty to the test can do nothing other than what he has done—his de-liberation *[de-liberazione]* has the literal sense of a renouncing indeterminate liberty and of enclosing liberty in the bonds of its own predetermination:

> Every Deliberation is then sayd to end when that whereof they Deliberate is either done, or thought impossible; because till then wee retain the liberty of doing, or omitting according to our Appetite, or Aversion.[57]

As for Locke, the immunitary knot becomes ever more restrictive and absolute: as was already seen, it doesn't move through the direct subordination of individuals to the sovereign—on the contrary, their relation now begins to include a right of resistance—but rather through the dialectic of a preserving self-appropriation. It is true that, with respect to Hobbes's surrender of liberty, liberty for Locke is inalienable, but exactly for the same reasons we find in Hobbes, which is to say because it is indispensable to the physical existence of he who possesses it.

Consequently, it emerges as joined in an indissoluble triptych formed with property and life. On more than one occasion, Hobbes connects liberty and life, making the first a guarantee for the permanence of the second. Locke pushes even more resolutely in this direction. Indeed, liberty is "so necessary to, and closely joyned with a Man's Preservation, that he cannot part with it, but by what forfeits his Preservation and Life together."[58] Certainly, liberty isn't only a defense against the infringements of others; it is also the subjective right that corresponds to the biological-natural obligation to preserve oneself in life under the best possible conditions. That it is enlarged to include all other individuals according to the precept that no

one "ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty, or Possessions" doesn't alter the strictly immunitary logic that underpins the entire argument, which is to say the reduction of liberty to preserving life is understood as the inalienable property that each one has of himself.[59]

Beginning with such a drastic semantic resizing, which makes of liberty the biopolitical coincidence between property and preservation, its meaning tends to be stabilized ever nearer the imperative of security, until it coincides with it. If for Montesquieu political liberty "consists in security, or, at least, in the opinion that we enjoy security," it is Jeremy Bentham who takes the definitive step: "What means liberty? . . . Security is the political blessing I have in view; security as against malefactors, on the one hand, security as against the instruments of government on the other."[60] Already here the immunization of liberty appears as definitively actualized according to the dual direction of defense by the state and toward [the state]. But what qualifies it better still in its antinomical effects is the relation that is installed with its logical opposite, namely, coercion. The point of suture between the expression of liberty and what negates it from within—one could say between exposition and imposition—is constituted exactly by the demand for insurance *[assicurativa]:* it is what calls forth that apparatus of laws which, though not directly producing liberty, constitute nonetheless the necessary reversal: "Where there is no coercion, neither is there security . . . That which lies under the name of Liberty, which is so magnificent, as the inestimable and unreachable work of the Law, is not Libertà but security."[61] From this point of view, Bentham's work marks a crucial moment in the immunitary reconversion to which modern political categories seem to entrust their own survival. The preliminary condition of liberty is to be singled out in a control mechanism that blocks every contingency in the *dispositif* that anticipates it beforehand. The design of the famous Panopticon expresses most spectacularly this oscillation in meaning excavated in the heart of liberal culture.

As we know, it was Foucault who furnished a biopolitical interpretation of liberalism that would bring to light the fundamental antinomy on which it rests and which reproduces its power. To the degree that it isn't limited to the simple enunciation of the imperative of liberty but implicates the organization of conditions that make this effectively possible, liberalism contradicts its own premises. Needing to construct and channel liberty in a nondestructive direction for all of society, liberalism continually risks destroying what it says it wants to create.

> Liberalism, as I understand it, this liberalism that can be characterized as the new art of governing that is formed in the eighteenth century, implies an intrinsic relation of production/destruction with regard to liberty... With one hand it has to produce liberty, but this same gesture implies that with the other hand it must establish limitations, checks, coercions, obligations based on threats, etc.[62]

This explains, within the liberal governmental framework, the tendency to intervene legislatively, which has a contrafactual result with respect to the original intentions: it isn't possible to determine or define liberty except by contradicting it. The reason for such an aporia is obviously to be found in liberty's logical profile. But it is also revealed more tellingly when we consider the biopolitical frame in which Foucault from the beginning had placed it. Earlier Hannah Arendt gathered together the fundamental terms: "For politics, according to the same philosophy [of liberalism], must be concerned almost exclusively with the maintenance of life and the safeguarding of its interests. Now, where life is at stake all action is by definition under the sway of necessity, and the proper relation to take care of life's necessities."[63] Why? Why does the privileged reference to life force liberty into the jaws of necessity? Why does the rebellion of liberty against itself move through the emergence of life? Arendt's response, which in singular fashion adheres to the Foucauldian interpretive scenario, follows the passage, within the biopolitical paradigm, from the domain of individual preservation to that of the species:

> The rise of the political and social sciences in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has even widened the breach between freedom and politics: for government, which since the beginning of the modern age had been identified with the total domain of the political, was now considered to be the appointed protector not so much of freedom as of the life process, the interests of society and its individuals. Security remained the decisive criterion, but not the individual's security against "violent death," as in Hobbes (where the condition of all liberty is freedom from fear), but a security which should permit an undisturbed development of the life process of society as a whole.[64]

The stipulation is of particular interest: it is the same culture of the individual—once immersed in the new horizon of self-preservation—that produces something that moves beyond it in terms of vital complex process. But Arendt doesn't make the decisive move that Foucault does, which consists in understanding the relation between individual and totality in terms

of a tragic antinomy. When Foucault notes that the failure of modern political theories is owed neither to theory nor to politics but to a rationality that forces itself to integrate individuals within the totality of the state, he touches on the heart of the question.[65] If we superimpose his discourse on that elaborated by the anthropologist Luis Dumont regarding the nature and the destiny of individual modernism, we have a confirmation that takes us even further in the direction we are moving here. Asking after the reason first for the nationalistic and then the totalitarian opening *[sbocco]* of liberal individualism (which represents a further jump in quality), Dumont concludes that the political categories of modernity "function," which is to say they discharge the self-preserving function of life to which they are subordinated, including their own opposite or vice versa, or incorporating themselves in it. At a certain point, the culture of the individual also incorporates that which in principle is opposed to it, which is to say the primacy of all on the parts which it gives the name of "olism." The pathogenic effect that ever more derives from it is, according to Dumont, due to the fact that, when placed against its opposite, extraneous paradigms, such as those of individualism and "olism," these intensify the ideological force of their own representations so much that they give rise to an explosive mix.[66]

Tocqueville is the author who seems to have penetrated most deeply into this self-dissolving process. All of his analyses of American democracy are traversed by a modality that recognizes both the inevitability and the epochal risk of such a process. When he delineates the figure of the *homo democraticus* in the point of intersection and friction between atomism and massification, solitude and conformity, and autonomy and heteronomy, he does nothing other than recognize the entropic result of a parabola that has at its uppermost point precisely that self-immunization of liberty in which the new equality of conditions reflects itself in a distorted mirror.[67] To hold—as he does with the unparalleled intensity of a restrained pathos—that democracy separates man "from his contemporaries . . . it throws him back forever upon himself alone, and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart," or that "equality places men side by side, unconnected by any common tie," means to have understood deeply (and with reference to its origin), the immunitary loss of meaning that afflicts modern politics.[68] At the moment when the democratic individual, afraid not to know how to defend the particular interests that move him, ends up surrendering "to the first master who appears," the itinerary will already be set in motion, one not so different from another which will

push biopolitics nearer its own opposite, that of thanatopolitics: the herd, opportunistically domesticated, is already ready to recognize its willing shepherd.[69] At the end of the same century, it is Nietzsche who will be the most sensitive witness to such a process. As for freedom—a concept that seemed to Nietzsche to be "yet more proof of instinctual degeneration," he no longer has any doubt: "There is no one more inveterate or thorough in damaging freedom than liberal institutions."[70]

CHAPTER THREE

Biopower and Biopotentiality

Grand Politics

It's no coincidence that the preceding chapter closed with the name of Nietzsche. He, more than anyone else, registers the exhaustion of modern political categories and the consequent disclosing of a new horizon of sense. We already gestured to him in the brief genealogy first sketched of the immunitary paradigm, but that reference isn't enough to restore the strategic relevance that his thought has for my own analysis generally. Nietzsche isn't simply the one who brings the immunitary lexicon to its full development, but is also the one who makes evident its negative power, the uncontrollable nihilistic dissipation in meaning that pushes it in a self-dissolving direction. This is not to say that he is able to escape it, to withdraw himself completely from its growing shadow. Indeed, we will see that for an important part of his perspective, it will result in reproducing and making it more powerful than before.[1] Yet this doesn't erase the deconstructive force his work exercises on other texts with regard to modern immunization, which prefigures the lines of a different conceptual language.

The reasons why such a language, irrespective of its presumed affiliations, has never been elaborated, nor even fully deciphered, are many, not the least of which is the enigmatic character that increasingly comes to characterize Nietzsche's writing. My impression, nevertheless, is that these reasons refer on the whole to the missing or mistaken characterization of its internal logic or, better perhaps, its basic tonality of logic, that only today, precisely from the categorical scenario utilized by Foucault, can be seen in

all its import. I am alluding not only to the two interventions that Foucault dedicated to Nietzsche—even if the second, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," more than any other (because it centered on the genealogical method), brings us directly to the question at hand: precisely how far does the Foucauldian analysis move within the biopolitical orbit? It is precisely the point of gravitation or the paradigmatic axis from which Nietzsche's entire production, with its internal twists and fractures, which begins to reveal a semantic nucleus that is inaccessible in the interpretive frames in which it has been placed until now. Otherwise, how would it be possible that something, let's call it a decisive stitch in the conceptual material, escaped our attention: that Nietzsche has been read not only in heterogeneous but in mutually opposing terms (even before he was *totus politicus* for some on the "right" or the left" and radically impolitical for others?)[2] Without even arriving at his more recent interpreters, if we simply compare Löwith's thesis that "this political perspective stands not at the margins of Nietzsche's philosophy but rather at its middle" with that of Georges Bataille, according to which "the movement of Nietzsche's thought implicates a defeat of the diverse possible foundations for contemporary politics," we can understand the *impasse* from which Nietzschean literature still seems unable to extricate itself.[3] Probably it is because both the "hyperpolitical" and the "impolitical" readings clash with mirror-like results within the notion of "politics"; Nietzsche's text is explicitly extraneous to such a notion, favoring instead another and different conceptual lexicon that today we can best describe as "biopolitical."

It is with respect to such a conclusion that Foucault's essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" opens a significant tear in perspective.[4] In it Foucault essentially thematizes the opacity of the origin, the interval that separates the origin from itself, or better, from that which is presupposed in it as perfectly conforming to its intimate essence. Thus, what is put up for discussion isn't only the linearity of a history destined to substantiate the conformity of the origin to the end—the finality of the origin and the originality of the end—but also the entire conceptual foundation on which such a conception is based. The entire Nietzschean polemic vis-à-vis a history that is incapable of coming to terms with its own nonhistorical layer—and therefore to extend to itself that thorough historicization that it demands be applied to everything but itself—takes aim at the presumptive airs of universality on behalf of conceptual figures born as a result of specific demands to which it is tied in both their logic and development. When Nietzsche

sees in the origin of things not the identity, unity, or purity of an uncontaminated essence, but rather the laceration, the multiplicity, and the alteration of something that never corresponds to that which it declares to be; when he discerns the tumult of bodies and the proliferation of errors as well as the usurpation of sense and vertigo of violence behind the ordered succession of events and the network of meanings in which they seem to consist; when, in short, he traces the dissociation and the contrast in the heart itself of their apparent conciliation, he profoundly questions the entire regulating form that European society has for centuries given itself. Furthermore, he interrogates the exchange that has often been verified, between cause and effect, function and value, and reality and appearance. This is true not only for modern juridical-political categories, beginning with equality, which practically all of the Nietzschean corpus contests, to that of liberty, deprived of its presumed absoluteness and reduced to the constitutive aporia that reverses it into its opposite, to law *[diritto]* itself, identified in its original semblance of naked command. It is especially true for the entire *dispositif* that constitutes both the analytic paradigm and the normative scenario of these categories, namely, that self-legitimating narrative according to which the forms of political power appear to be the intentional result of the combined will of single subjects united in a founding pact. When Nietzsche describes the state—which is to say the most developed juridical and political construct of the modern epoch—as "some horde or other of blond predatory animals, a race of conquerors and masters which, itself organized for war and with the strength to organize others, unhesitatingly lays its fearful paws on a population which may be hugely superior in numerical terms but remains shapeless and nomadic," one can consider "that sentimentalism which would have it begin with a 'contract'" liquidated.[5]

From these first annotations the thread that links them to the proposed hermeneutic activated a century afterwards by Foucault is already clear. If an individual subject of desire and knowledge is withdrawn from and antecedent to the forms of power that structure it; if what we call "peace" is nothing but the rhetorical representation of relations of force that emerge periodically out of continuous conflict; if rules and laws are nothing other than rituals destined to sanction the domination of one over another—all the instruments laid out by modern political philosophy are destined to reveal themselves as simultaneously false and ineffective. False, or purely apologetic, because they are incapable of restoring the effective dynamics

in operation behind their surface figures. Ineffective because, as we saw in the preceding chapter, they bump up more and more violently against their own internal contradictions until they break apart. What breaks apart, precisely, more than the single categorical seams, is the logic itself of the mediation on which they depend, no longer able to hold or to strengthen a content that is in itself elusive of any formal control. What that content might be for Nietzsche is well known: it concerns the *bíos* that gives it the intensely biopolitical connotation in Nietzsche's discussion, to which I've already referred. All of Nietzschean criticism has accented the vital element—life as the only possible representation of being.[6] Nevertheless, what has a clear ontological relevance is always interpreted politically; not in the sense of any form that is superimposed from the outside onto the material of life—it is precisely this demand, experienced in all its possible combinations by modern political philosophy, which has been shown to be lacking in foundation. But, as the constitutive character of life itself, life is always already political, if by "political" one intends not what modernity wants—which is to say a neutralizing mediation of immunitary nature—but rather an originary modality in which the living *is* or in which being *lives.* Far from all the contemporary philosophies of life to which his position is from time to time compared, this is the manner in which Nietzsche thinks the political dimension of *bíos:* not as character, law, or destination of something that lives previously, but as the power that informs life from the beginning in all its extension, constitution, and intensity. That life as well as the will to power—according to the well-known Nietzschean formulation—doesn't mean that life desires power nor that power captures, directs, or develops a purely biological life. On the contrary, they signify that life does not know modes of being apart from those of its continual strengthening.

To grasp the characteristic trait that Nietzsche alludes to in the expression "grand politics," we need to look precisely at the indissoluble web of life and power *[potenza]:* in the double sense that living as such is only strengthened internally and that the power is imaginable only in terms of a living organism. Here as well emerges the essential sense of the Nietzschean project for constructing a "new party of life," less tied to contextual contingencies. Leaving aside the prescriptive, troubling contents with which he from time to time thought to fill them, what matters here in relation to our argument is the distance such a reference constitutes with regard to every mediated, dialectical, and external modality that seeks to understand the relation between politics and life. In this sense, we begin to see how

much Nietzsche himself will say about it in *Beyond Good and Evil,* though such an observation could also be extended to his entire body of work. It is "in all essentials a *critique of modernity,* not excluding the modern sciences, modern arts, and even modern politics, along with pointers to a contrary type that is as little modern as possible—a noble, Yes-saying type."[7] Apart from the problematic identity of the kind prefigured by Nietzsche, what remains beyond any doubt is its polemical objective: modernity as the formal negation, or negative form, of its own vital content. What unifies his logical, aesthetic, and political categories is precisely the constitutive antinomy that wants to assume, preserve, and develop an immediate, what Nietzsche will call "life" through a series of mediations objectively destined to contradict them (because in fact they are obligated to negate their character of immediacy). From here the rejection not of this or of that institution, but of the institution, insofar as it is an institution and thus separated from and therefore given to destroying that power of life that it has also been charged with safeguarding. In a paragraph titled appropriately enough "Critique of Modernity," Nietzsche states that "our institutions are no longer any good: this is universally accepted. But it is not their fault, it is *ours.* Once we have lost all the instincts from which institutions grow, we lose the institutions themselves because we are no longer good enough for them."[8] What produces such a self-dissolving effect is the incapacity of modern institutions—from party to parliament to the state—to relate directly to life and therefore their tendency to slip into the same vacuum that such an interval of difference creates. This is separate from the political position chosen beforehand: what matters, negatively, is its not being biopolitical—the scission that opens between the two terms of the expression in a form that wrings *bíos* from politics and an originary politicity from life, or better, from its constitutive power.

From here, in the affirmative reversal of such a negativity, the positive meaning of "grand politics" emerges:

> The *grand* politics places physiology above all other questions—it wants to *rear [züchten]* humanity as a whole, it measures the range of the races, of peoples, of individuals according to . . . the guarantee of life they carry within them. Inexorably it puts an end to everything that is degenerate and parasitical to life.[9]

Before confronting with the requisite attention the most problematic part of the passage, that one relative to parasitic and degenerative pathology, let's linger over the passage's overall meaning. We know the emphasis Nietzsche

placed on physiological studies in opposition to every form of idealistic thought. From this point of view, the placement of psychological studies in a culture is clear, and more so given the language strongly influenced by Darwin (despite whatever the relevant distinctions that separate Nietzsche from Darwin in a form that we will have occasion to examine in detail).[10] But we are not concerned only with Darwin. What Nietzsche wants to assert is that, at least beginning from a certain moment that coincides with the irreversible crisis of the modern political lexicon, the only politics not reduced to the mere preservation of already existing institutions is the one that confronts the problem of life from the perspective of the human species and of the mobile thresholds that define it, by contiguity or difference, with respect to other living species. Contrary to the presuppositions of modern individualism, the individual—which Nietzsche vindicates and exalts in its character of exceptionality—cannot be thought except against the backdrop of large ethnosocial aggregates that always emerge by way of contrast.

Nevertheless, this first consideration of method doesn't completely answer the question that Nietzsche poses, one that calls into question something whose extraordinary scope and ambivalent effects we are only able to make out today. It concerns the idea that the human species is never given once for all time, but is susceptible, in good and evil, to being molded in forms for which we do not have an exact knowledge, but which nevertheless constitute for us both an absolute risk and an inalienable challenge. "Why," Nietzsche asks himself in a crucial passage, "shouldn't we realize in man what the Chinese are able to do with the tree, so thus it produces on one side roses and on another pears? These natural processes of the *selection of man,* for example, which until now have been exercised in an infinitely slow and awkward way, could be taken over by man himself."[11] Rather than being disconcerted by the irregular approach of linking man to plant (not to mention that of breeding), what we need to foreground is Nietzsche's precocious understanding that in the centuries to come the political terrain of comparison and battle will be the one relative to redefining the human species in a scenario of progressive displacement of its borders with respect to what is not human, which is to say, on the one hand to the animal and on the other to the inorganic.

So too the central emphasis attributed to the body against its "disparagers" has to be traced back to the specificity to the biopolitical lexicon in the sense of the species. Naturally, a comprehensive polemic emerges that takes aim against a philosophical, spiritualistic, or abstractly rational tradition. We

recall that reason just as soul is an integral part of an organism that has its unique expression in the body, which in turn doesn't weigh indifferently in the deconstruction of the most influential metaphysical categories. However, to reread the entire history of Europe through "the underlying theme of the body" is an option that cannot be truly understood outside of an established biopolitical lexicon. Certainly, using a physiological terminology in politics is anything but original. Still, the absolute originality of the Nietzschean text resides in the transferral of the relation between state and body from the classical level of analogy or metaphor, in which the ancient and modern tradition positions it, to that of an effectual reality: no politics exists other than that *of* bodies, conducted *on* bodies, *through* bodies. In this sense, one can rightly say that physiology, which Nietzsche never detaches from psychology, is the very same material of politics. It is its pulsating body. But if we are to reveal all of the political pregnancy of the body, we must also examine it from another angle, not only that of the physiological declination of politics, but also that of the political characterization of physiology. If the body is the material of politics, politics—naturally, in the sense that Nietzsche confers on the expression—takes the form of the body. It is this "form"—there is no life that isn't in some way formed, thus a "form of life"—that keeps Nietzsche distant from any type of biological determinism, as Heidegger well understood.[12] Not only because every conception of the body presupposes a later philosophical orientation, but because the body is constituted according to the principle of politics—struggle as the first and final dimension of existence. Struggle outside oneself, toward other bodies, but also within as the unstoppable conflict among its organic components. Before being in itself *[in-sé]*, the body is always *against*, even with respect to itself. In this sense, Nietzsche can say that "every philosophy that ranks peace above war" is "a *misunderstanding of the body.*"[13] This is because in its continual instability the body is nothing but the always provisional result of the conflict of forces that constitute it.

We know how much the Nietzschean conception of the body has weighed on contemporary biological and medical theories in authors such as Roux, Mayer, Foster, and Ribot.[14] Our perspective emphasizes, however, that all of them derive from Nietzsche the dual principle that the body is produced by determinate forces and that such forces are always in potential conflict among them.[15] It is not a *res extensa*, substance or material, but the material site of such a conflict and of the conditions of domination and

subjection, and hierarchy and resistance, that from time to time determine it. From here it is a short distance to the essentially political and hence biopolitical semantics that the same definition of life assumes.

> One could define life as a durable form of *process* of *determinations of force* in which different forces in conflict grow in unequal measure. In this sense there is an opposition in obeying: one's own force is in fact not lost. In the same way, in commanding, we have to admit that the absolute force of the adversary is not defeated, absorbed, or dissolved. "To command" and "to obey" are complementary forms of the struggle.[16]

It is precisely because the power of single opponents is never absolute; he that provisionally loses always has a way of exerting his own residual forces such that the battle never ends. The battle never ends with a definitive victory or unconditional surrender. In the body neither sovereignty—the utter domination of another—nor the equality among many exists as they are perennially engaged in mutually overtaking each other. The uninterrupted polemic that Nietzsche wages against modern political philosophy has precisely to do with such a presupposition: if the battle within the single body is in itself infinite; if bodies therefore cannot distance themselves from the principle of struggle because struggle is the same form as life: how then can the order that conditions the survival of subjects to the neutralization of the conflict be realized? What condemns modern political concepts to ineffectuality is exactly this split between life and conflict—the idea of preserving life through the abolition of conflict. One could say that the heart of Nietzsche's philosophy will be found in his rebuttal of such a conception, which is to say in the extreme attempt to bring again to the surface that harsh and profound relation that holds together politics and life in the unending form of struggle.

Counterforces

From these initial considerations it is already clear that Nietzsche, without formulating the term, anticipated the entire biopolitical course that Foucault then defined and developed: from the centrality of the body as the genesis and termination of sociopolitical dynamics, to the founding role of struggle and also of war, to the configuration of juridical-institutional orders, to finally the function of resistance as the necessary counterpoint to the deployment of power. One can say that all the Foucauldian categories are present in a nutshell in Nietzsche's conceptual language: "War is another

matter"—so Nietzsche notes in the text that functions as the definitive balance sheet of his entire work. "Being *able* to be an enemy, *being* an enemy—perhaps that presupposes a strong nature; in any case, it belongs to every strong nature. It needs objects of resistance; hence it *looks for* what resists: the *aggressive pathos* belongs just as necessary to strength as vengefulness and rancor belong to weakness."[17] Nevertheless, this passage already leads to an analytic landscape not limited to foreshadowing the Foucauldian theorization of biopolitics, but which in some ways also moves beyond it, or better, enriches it with a conceptual structure that contributes to untangling the underlying antinomy to which I referred in the opening chapter: to that immunitary paradigm that represents the peculiar figure of Nietzschean biopolitics. According to Nietzsche, reality is constituted by a complex of forces counterposed in a conflict that never ends conclusively because those who lose always maintain a potential of energy, which is able not only to limit the power of those who dominate, but, at times, to reverse the predominance in their own favor.

In Nietzsche's text, this systemic description, so to speak, is characterized by a tonality that is anything but neutral, but which is indeed decidedly critical: in the sense that once the play of forces has been defined from the objective point of view of quantity, assessing their quality remains open. Such forces, in short, are not in the least equivalent, so that it matters a great deal in a given phase which of these expands and which, on the contrary, contracts. Indeed, it is precisely on this that the larger trend depends—the "health," to adopt Nietzsche's lexicon—of the totality constituted by their struggle. There are forces that create and others that destroy; forces that strengthen and others that diminish; forces that stimulate and others that debilitate. Yet the peculiar characteristic of the Nietzschean logic is that the most important distinction between these forces doesn't pass through their constructive or destructive effect, but rather involves a more profound distinction, relative to the more or less original character of the forces themselves. The question of immunization bears upon this aspect, not only the objective emphasis that it comes to assume, but also the explicitly negative connotation that Nietzsche gives immunity, in an opposite trend to the positive connotation that modern philosophy has conferred upon it. Such a hermeneutic difference or even deviation doesn't relate to the preserving, salvific role that it exercises toward life—Nietzsche acknowledges it in the same way as does Hobbes—but instead to its logical-

temporal arrangement in relation to the origin. To say this in the most concise way possible: while for Hobbes the immunitary demand comes first—it is the initial passion that moves men dominated by fear—for Nietzsche such a demand for protection is second with respect to another more original impulse, constituted we know by the will to power. It isn't that life doesn't demand its own preservation—otherwise the subject of every possible expansion would vanish—but it is in a form that, in contrast to all the modern philosophies of *conservatio,* is subordinated to the primary imperative of development, with respect to which it is reduced to a simple consequence:

> Physiologists need to think twice before putting the instinct of "preservation" as the cardinal instinct of an organic being. Above all, what lives wants to *give vent to* its own force; "preservation" is only one of the consequences of that.[18]

Here we are concerned with an argument to which Nietzsche himself assigns such prominence that he situates it exactly at the point of rupture with the entire tradition that precedes him: not only, he essentially adopts it against the philosopher to whom he otherwise is closest (even from this perspective), namely, "consumptive Spinoza":[19]

> The wish to preserve oneself is the symptom of a condition of distress, of a limitation of the really fundamental instinct of life, which aims at *the expansion of power,* and wishing for that, frequently risks and even sacrifices self-preservation.[20]

The text cited above appears even more clear-cut than the preceding one: preservation isn't to be considered only incidental and derivative with respect to the will to power, but in latent contradiction to it. And this is because the strengthening of the vital organism doesn't suffer limits or reductions, but, on the contrary, because it tends continually to move beyond and transgress them. It moves as a vortex or a flame, disrupting or burning every defensive partition, every liminal diaphragm, every border of definition. It crosses what is diverse and joins what is separate until it absorbs, incorporates, and devours everything that it meets. Life isn't only bound to overcome every obstacle that it comes up against, but is, in its own essence, the overcoming of the other and finally of itself: "And this secret life itself told me: 'Behold,' it said, '*I am that which must always overcome itself.*' "[21] By now Nietzsche's discourse bends in an ever more extreme

direction, which seems to include its own contrary in a powerful self-deconstructive movement. Identifying life with its own overcoming means that it is no longer "in itself"—it is always projected beyond itself. But if life always pushes outside itself, or admits its outside within it, which is to say, to affirm itself, life must continually be altered and therefore be negated insofar as it is life. Its full realization coincides with a process of extroversion or exteriorization that is destined to carry it into contact with its own "not"; to make of it something that isn't simply life—neither only life nor life only—but something that is both more than life and other than life: precisely *not* life, if for "life" we understand something that is stable, as what remains essentially identical to itself. Nietzsche translates this intentionally paradoxical passage into the thesis that "human existence is merely an uninterrupted past tense, a thing that lives by denying and consuming itself, by opposing itself."[22] It is the same reason for which in *Beyond Good and Evil* he can write both that "life is *essentially* a process of appropriating, injuring, overpowering the alien and the weaker, oppressing, being harsh, imposing your own form, incorporating, and at least, the very least, exploiting" and simultaneously that life brings to the foreground "the feeling of fullness, of power that wants to overflow, the happiness associated with a high state of tension, the consciousness of a wealth that wants to make gifts and give way."[23]

At the bottom of such a conceptual tension, or indeed bipolarity, which seems to push Nietzsche's discourse in diverging directions, is a presupposition that is to be made explicit. Once again Nietzsche—in contrast to the largely dominant paradigm of modern anthropology, but also differently from the Darwinian conception of "struggle for existence"—holds that "in nature it isn't extreme angst that dominates, but rather superabundance and profusion pushed to the absurd."[24] Life doesn't evolve from an initial deficit but from an excess, which provides its double-edged impulse. On the one hand, it is dedicated to imposing itself over and incorporating everything that it meets. On the other hand, once it has been filled to the brim with its own acquisitive capacity, it is prone to tip over, dissipating its own surplus of goods, but also itself, what Nietzsche will define as "the bestowing virtue."[25] Here one already begins to glimpse the most troubling aspects of Nietzschean discourse: entrusted to itself, freed from its restraints, life tends to destroy and to destroy itself. It tends to dig a crevasse on every side as well as within, one into which life continually threatens to slip. Such a self-dissolving tendency isn't to be understood as a defect of nature

or as a breach that is bound to damage an initial perfection. Nor is it an accident or the beginning that suddenly rises up or penetrates into life's domain. Rather, it is the constitutive character of life. Life doesn't fall in an abyss; rather, *it is* the abyss in which life itself risks falling. Not in a given moment, but already at the origin, from the moment that that abyss is nothing other than the interval of difference that withdraws the origin from every identifying consistency: the in/origineity of the origin that the Nietzschean genealogy ultimately traced to the source of being-in-life. In order to find an image or a conceptual figure of such a *deficiency for excess,* it is enough simply to return to one of the primary and most recurrent categories for Nietzsche, namely, that of the Dionysian. The Dionysian is life itself in absolute (or dissolute) form, unbound from any presupposition, abandoned to its original flow. Pure presence and therefore unrepresentable as such because it is without form, in perennial transformation, in the continuous overcoming of its own internal limits, of every principle of individuation and of separation between beings, genus, and species, but simultaneously of its external limits, that is, of its own categorical definition. How do we determine what not only escapes determinacy, but is also the greatest power of indeterminacy? And then do we differentiate what overwhelms all identities—and therefore all differences—in a sort of infinite metonymical contagion, that doesn't withhold anything, in a continual expropriation of everything distinct and the exteriorization of everything within? We can see in the Dionysian—understood as the in/original dimension of life in its entirety—the trace or the prefiguration of the common *munus* in all of its semantic ambivalence; as the donative elision of individual limits, but also as the infective and therefore destructive power of itself and the other. It is delinquency both in the literal significance of a lack and in the figurative sense of violence. Pure relation and therefore absence or implosion of subjects in relation to each other: a relation without subjects.

Against this possible semantic declension, against the vacuum of sense that opens at the heart of a life that is ecstatically full of itself, the general process of immunization is triggered, which coincides in the final analysis with all of Western civilization, but which finds in modernity its most representative space: "The democratization of Europe is, it seems, a link in the chain of those tremendous *prophylactic measures* which are the conception of modern times."[26] Nietzsche is the first not only to have intuited the absolute importance of immunization, but to have reconstructed its entire history in its genesis and internal articulations. Certainly, other authors—

from Hobbes to Tocqueville—recognized the onset of immunization first in the fear of violent death and then in the demand for protection with respect to the danger of individual passions that are highly combustible. But the absolute specificity of the Nietzschean perspective with regard to antecedent and successive diagnoses lies, on the one hand, in the return of the immunitary paradigm to its originary biological matrix, and, on the other, in the capacity to reconstruct critically the negative dialectic of the paradigm. As to the first, we note that Nietzsche refers all of the *dispositifs* of knowledge, which are apparently directed to the search for truth, to the function of preservation. Truth he defines as a lie—today we would say ideology—more suitable for sheltering us from that originary fracture of sense that coincides with the potentially unlimited expansion of life.[27] The same is true for the logical categories, from that of identity, to cause, to non-contradiction—all understood as biological instruments necessary to facilitate survival. They serve to save our existence from what is most unbearable about it; to create the minimal conditions to orient ourselves in a world that has no origin or end. They construct barriers, limits, and embankments with respect to that common *munus* that both strengthens and devastates life, pushing it continuously beyond itself. The procedures of reason raise up an immunitary *dispositif* against that vortex that in essence we are; against the trans-individual explosion of the Dionysian and against the contagion that derives from it, one that aims at restabilizing meaning and at redrawing lost boundaries, filling up the empty spaces deepened by the power of "outside." That outside is brought inside, or at least faced and then neutralized in the same way that what is open is contained and delimited in its most terrifying effects of incalculability, incomprehension, and unpredictability. Initially the Apollonian principle of individuation works to do this. Then, beginning with the grand Socratic therapy, followed by the entire Christian-bourgeois civilization (with an increasingly intensive and exclusive restorative expression) the following is attempted: to block the fury of becoming, the flow of transformation, the risk of metamorphosis in the "framework" of prevision and prevention.[28]

If this is the anesthetic or prophylactic role of the forms of knowledge, the same holds true for power and for the juridical and political institutions that flank moral and religious codes, reinforcing them in a logic of mutual legitimation. Above all, these institutions are born from ancestral fear, but are always secondary with respect to the originary will to power that grips man in a way unknown to other animals: "If one considers that

man was for many hundreds of thousands of years an animal in the highest degree accessible to fear," it seems clear that the only way of mastering it is to construct the great immunitary involucres intended to protect the human species from the explosive potential that is implicit in its instinct for unconditional affirmation.[29] From Greek civilization onwards, institutions constructed by men "grow out of precautionary measures designed to make them safe from one another and from their inner *explosivity*."[30] The state is organized above all to defuse such explosivity, as, after all, modern political philosophy had already argued in a line of reasoning that saw in it the only way to master an otherwise lethal interindividual conflict. Nevertheless, it is precisely with regard to this last passage that Nietzsche grafts the change of theoretical paradigm that places him not only outside of that interpretive lineage, but in direct contrast with it: "The state is a prudent institution for the protection of individuals against one another," he admits, but then soon after adds, "if it is completed and perfected too far it will in the end enfeeble the individual and, indeed, dissolve him—that is to say, thwart the original purpose of the state in the most thorough way possible."[31] Evidently, what is at stake is not only the ability of the state to protect but more generally the overall evaluation of the immunitary logic, which Nietzsche diametrically reverses with respect to the substantially positive one of modern anthropology.

The thesis he advances is that such a logic cures illness *[male]* in a self-contradictory form because it produces a greater illness than the one it wanted to prevent. This occurs when the decided-upon compensation, with respect to the preceding vital order, is so considerable as to create a new and more deadly disequilibrium. Just as the state homologizes through forced obedience the same individuals that it intended to free, so too do all the systems of truth, which are also necessary for correcting harmful errors and superstitions, create new and more oppressive semantic blocks that are destined to obstruct the energetic flow of existence. In both of these cases, therefore, the stability and the duration that immunitary programs assure wind up inhibiting that innovative development that they need to stimulate. Impeding the possible dissolution of the organism, they also stop its growth, condemning it to stasis and impoverishment. This is the reason why Nietzsche defines morality, religion, and metaphysics simultaneously as both medicine and disease. Not only, but as diseases stronger than the medicines that work against them because they are produced for the same use: "[T]he worst sickness of mankind originated in the way in

which they have combated their sicknesses, and what seemed to cure has in the long run produced something worse than that which it was supposed to overcome."[32]

With Nietzsche we are already in a position to reconstruct the entire diagram of immunization. Immunity, because it is secondary and derivative with respect to the force that it is intent on fighting, always remains subaltern to it. Immunity negates the power of negation, at least what it considers as such. Yet it is precisely because of this that immunity continues to speak the language of the negative, which it would like to annul: in order to avoid a potential evil, it produces a real one; it substitutes an excess with a defect, a fullness with a emptiness, a plus with a minus, negating what it affirms and so doing affirming nothing other than its negation. It is what Nietzsche means by the key concept of "resentment," which he identifies with all forms of resistance or of vengeance, and which is contrasted with the originary affirmative forces of life:

> For millennia this instinct for revenge has dominated humanity to such an extent that metaphysics, psychology and historical representation, and above all morality are marked by it. Wherever man has thought, even there, he has also inoculated the bacillus of revenge into things.[33]

Perhaps nowhere more than here does Nietzsche penetrate so deeply into the countereffective logic of the immunitary paradigm. Furthermore, Nietzsche explicitly recognizes this as the force—weakness is also a force, albeit one that degenerates from the will to power—that characterizes the entire process of civilization. If, as often happens, we do have full knowledge of it, this is because knowledge, just like all cognitive apparatuses, is also its product. Yet what counts even more is the mode in which this force acts—or, more precisely, "reacts." Just as in every medical immunization, immunization here too injects an antigenic nucleus into the social body, which is designed to activate protective antibodies. Doing so, however, it infects the organism in preventive fashion, weakening its primogenital forces: it risks killing what it is meant to keep alive. Nevertheless, it is what the ascetic priest or the pastor of souls does with regard to the sick flock: "He brings salves and balsam, there is no doubt; but he needs to wound before he can cure; then, in relieving the pain he has inflicted, *he poisons the wound.*"[34] More than a force that defends itself from a weakness, it is a weakness that draws off the force, draining it from within, separating it from itself. As Deleuze observed, the reactive force acts via decomposition and deviation,

subtracting its power from the active force in order to appropriate some and to divert it from its originary destination.[35] So doing, however, it incorporates a force that is already exhausted, thwarting its capacity to react. This force continues to react, but in a debilitated form that isn't an active response, but rather a response without action, an action that is purely imaginary. Establishing itself within the organism, be it individual or collective that it aspires to defend, the organism itself is brought to ruin. Having destroyed the active forces in order to assimilate their power, nothing remains except to direct the poison point within, until it has destroyed itself as well.

Double Negation

What has been delineated above is a paradigm of great internal complexity. Not only forces and weaknesses clash and become entangled in a knot that doesn't allow for a stable distinction to be made, but what was a force can be weakened to such an extent that it turns into its opposite, just as an initial weakness can, at a certain moment, assume the form of a force that takes possession of power. Furthermore, the same element can simultaneously constitute a force for some and a weakness for others. This happens in Christianity as well and in religion generally, which the few use instrumentally to impose their own domination over the many and which is therefore destined to reinforce the former to the detriment of the latter. In addition, it also furnishes the latter with the means to retaliate on another level against the former and to drag them down into the same vortex. Something similar can be said for art and in particular for music. They can serve as potent stimulants for our senses according to the originary meaning of the term "aesthetic"; but they can also become a sort of subtle "anesthetic" with respect to the traumas of existence. This is what happens to music of the Romantic period until Wagner. Not any different, finally, is the double *[doppia]*, or better divided *[sdoppiata]*, reading that Nietzsche proposes of juridical-political institutions, beginning with that of the state; from one perspective, the state is seen as the necessary bulwark against destructive conflicts, and from another it is a mechanism that inhibits vital energies that have been completely scattered. Moreover, the entire process of civilization implies consequences that are reciprocally antinomic—precisely those that concern facilitating and weakening life. And doesn't Nietzsche define history as something useful and yet harmful? In short, to live, man needs in different situations (but at times in the same situations) both one

thing and its opposite. He needs the historian and the nonhistorian, truth and lies, memory and forgetfulness, and health and disease, not to mention the dialectic between the Apollonian and the Dionysian into which all the other bipolarities finally devolve.

Such an ambivalence, or even aporeticity of judgment, derives from the mutability of perspective with which one views a given phenomenon, not to mention the always variable contingency in which it is situated. But digging deeper, the ambivalence is rooted in a contradiction that is as it were structural, according to which immunization, on the one hand, is necessary to the survival of any organism, but, on the other, is harmful because, blocking the organism's transformation, it impedes biological expansion. This in turn derives from the fact to which Nietzsche repeatedly draws attention, namely, that preservation and development, to the degree they are implicated in an indissoluble connection—that is, if something doesn't keep itself alive, it cannot develop—are in latent opposition when placed on another terrain, namely, the one decisive for the will to power. Not only, Nietzsche argues. In fact, what "is useful in relation to the acceleration of the rhythm of development is a 'use' which is different from that which refers to the maximum establishment and possible durability of what is developed," but "what is useful to the *duration* of the individual can become a disadvantage for its strength and its splendor, which is to say that what preserves the individual can hold it and block its development."[36] Development presupposes duration, but duration can delay or impede development. Preservation implies expansion, but expansion compromises and places preservation at risk. Here already the indissolubly tragic character of the Nietzschean perspective comes into view, not only because the effects are not directly referred back to their apparent cause, but because the wrinkle of a real autonomy opens between the one and the others: the survival of a force opposes the project of strengthening it. Limiting itself to survival, it weakens itself, flows back, and, to use the key word in Nietzschean semantics, *degenerates,* which is to say moves in the direction opposite its own generation. On the other hand, however, must we necessarily draw the paradoxical conclusion that to expand vitally, an organism has to cease to survive? Or, at a minimum, that it must face death?

This is the most extreme point of our inquiry, the conceptual intersection before which Nietzsche finds himself. In the course of his work (and frequently in the same texts), Nietzsche furnishes two kinds of responses, which sometimes appear to be superimposed, while at other moments

seem to be incompatible. A good part of the question plays out in Nietzsche's difficult relation with Darwinian evolution, or better with what he, not always correctly, considers as such. We already know that Nietzsche rejects the idea of an initial deficit that would push men to struggle for their survival according to a selection that is destined to favor the fittest. He overturns this "progressive" reading with a different approach that—interpreting the origin of life in terms of exuberance and prodigality—anticipates conversely a discontinuous series of increments and decrements that are governed not by a selective adaptation but rather by the struggle within the will to power: of the reduction of the will to power for some and of its increase for others. But rather than being to the advantage of the strong and best, as Darwin would have it (at least the Darwin reread by Nietzsche through Spencer), this redounds to the benefit of the weak and the worst:

> What surprises me more than anything else when contemplating the grand destinies of man is to have always before my eyes the opposite of what Darwin with his school sees or *wants* to see: natural selection in favor of the stronger, the more gifted, the progress of the species. One can touch with one's hand the exact opposite: the elimination of cases to the contrary, the uselessness of types that are highly successful, the inevitable victory of the average and even of those *below* average.[37]

The reason for such a qualitative decrease is found, on the one hand, in the preponderance of the number of those less endowed with respect to the superior few and, on the other hand, in the organized strategy put in motion by the former against the latter. While the weak, gripped by fear, tend to protect themselves against the traps surrounding them (and by this increase them), the strong continually put their life on the line, for example, in war, exposing life to the risk of an early dissolution. What results finally is a process of degeneration that continually accelerates given that the remedies utilized form part of the same process: medicines implicated in the same disease that they intend to cure, which are constituted ultimately by the same poison. This is the dialectic of immunization that Nietzsche continually linked to decadence and to which he gave the name nihilism, especially in his later works.[38] Nihilism includes within itself the instruments by which it overcomes itself, beginning precisely with the category of decadence. Thus nihilism conceptually appears to be insurmountable: modernity doesn't have different languages apart from immunization, which is constitutively negative.

Not even Nietzsche is able to escape from such a conceptual constraint (and from this point of view Heidegger wasn't wrong in keeping him on this side of nihilism, or at least on its meridian). Indeed, he remains utterly implicated in at least one conspicuous vector of immunization. It is true that Nietzsche intends to oppose that process of immunitary degeneration which, rather than strengthening the organism, has the perverse effects of dehabilitating it further. The substitution of the will to power for the struggle for survival as both the ontogenetic and philogenetic horizons of reference constitutes the clearest confirmation. And yet precisely such a negation of immunization situates Nietzsche (or at least this Nietzsche) within its recharging mechanism. Negating the immunitary negation, Nietzsche undoubtedly remains the prisoner of the same negative lexicon. Rather than affirming his own perspective, Nietzsche limits himself to negating the opposite, remaining, so to speak, subaltern to it. Just as happens in every logic of the reactive type, whose structurally negative modality Nietzsche so effectively deconstructs, his critique of modern immunization responds to something that logically precedes it. The same idea of degeneration *(Entartung),* from which Nietzsche derives the means of developing the antidote, has an intrinsically negative configuration: it is the contrary of generation, a generation folded upon itself and perverted—not an affirmative, but the negative of a negative, typical after all of the antigenic procedure. It isn't by coincidence that the more Nietzsche is determined to fight the immunitary syndrome, the more he falls into the semantics of infection and contamination. All the themes of purity, integrity, or perfection that obsessively return (even autobiographically) have this unmistakably reactive tonality, which is to say doubly negative toward a rampant impurity that constitutes the discourse's true *primum:*

> As has always been my wont—extreme uncleanliness *[Lauterkeit]* in relation to me is the presupposition of my existence; I perish under unclean conditions—I constantly swim and bathe and splash, as it were, in water—in some perfectly transparent and resplendent element . . . My whole *Zarathustra* is a dithyramb on solitude or, if I have been understood, on *cleanliness [Reinheit].*[39]

Not only, but Nietzsche presents the degeneration as both the cause and the effect of the progressive contagion of the uncontaminated by the contaminated. It is these latter who, in order to reject the positive force of their own power, contaminate the former, and so swiftly extend the infected

areas to the point that the decadence against which Nietzsche exhorts us to fight—more than a disease that can be easily eliminated as such—is unquestionably the advancing line of the contagion:

> Decadence is not something one can combat: it is absolutely necessary and belongs to every epoch and every people. What needs to be fought against with all one's strength is the contagion of the healthy parts of the organism.[40]

We cannot avoid the hyperimmunitary direction that this critique of immunization adopts. To refrain from an excess of protection—from the weaker species' obsession with self-preservation—protection is needed from their contagion. A stronger and more impenetrable barrier must be constructed, stronger than the one already in place. In so doing, the separation between the healthy and sick parts will be rendered definitive, where the biological distinction, or better opposition, between the physiological and the pathological has a transparent social meaning: "Life itself doesn't recognize either solidarity or 'equality of rights' among the healthy and diseased parts of an organism: the latter need to be lopped off or the whole will perish."[41] It would be superfluous to indicate to the reader the numerous passages in which Nietzsche insists on the necessity of preservation. More useful would be to accentuate the rigid disjunction Nietzsche makes between different classes, and in particular between the race of masters and slaves. His exaltation of incommunicable castes in India speaks volumes on the subject. What is to be emphasized here is the categorical contrast that also emerges vis-à-vis modern political philosophy: Nietzsche opposes liberal individualism and democratic universalism's *homo aequalis* to the premodern *homo iearchicus,* which serves to confirm the regressive and restorative character of this axis in the Nietzschean discourse. Moreover, the favorable citations of de Boulainviller, which a biopolitical Foucault quotes on more than occasion, move in the same antimodern direction.[42] De Boulainviller is one of the first to have contested the lexicon of sovereignty and of the one and indivisible nation in favor of an irreducible separation between conflicting classes and races. That Nietzsche's racism is of the horizontal or diagonal kind, in which he discriminates between diverse populations or makes a break within the same national community, is an undecidable question in the sense that he moves from one level to another according to the texts in question and the circumstances in which he is writing. But what deserves our attention in the conceptual profile sketched

here is the obvious contradiction with regard to the thesis of originary abundance, of a zero-sum game according to which the elevation of the one is directly proportional to the coercion, and indeed the elimination, of others:

> The crucial thing about a good and healthy aristocracy, however, is that it . . . has no misgivings in condoning the sacrifice of a vast number of people who must *for its sake* be oppressed and diminished into incomplete people, slaves, tools.[43]

Of course, Nietzsche's position, as some have observed, isn't an isolated one when seen against the background of his time.[44] Accents of the sort can be found not only in conservative thought, but even in the liberal tradition, where reference is made to the destiny of extra-European peoples subject to colonization and racial exploitation. But what makes it relevant for our analysis is its intense biopolitical tonality. What is undoubtedly in question in this sacrificial balance, in which one level must necessarily drop down so that another can rise up, isn't only power, prestige, or work, but life itself. In order for life's biological substance to be intensified, life must be marked with an unyielding distinction that sets it against itself: life against life, or, more severely, the life of one against the nonlife of others: "What is *life*?—Life—that is: continually shedding something that wants to die."[45] Not only is life to be protected from the contagion of death, but death is to be made the mechanism for life's contrastive reproduction. The reference to the elimination of parasitic and degenerative species comes up again in all its crudeness, contained in the text I cited earlier on grand politics. That it concerns refusing to practice medicine on the incurable, or indeed of eliminating them directly; of impeding the procreation of unsuccessful biological types; or of urging those suffering from irreversibly hereditary traits to commit suicide—all of this can be interpreted as an atrocious link in the gallery of horrors running from the eugenics of the nineteenth century to the extermination camps of the twentieth. Personally, I share the hermeneutic option of not softening (either metaphorically or literally) passages and expressions of the sort, which Nietzsche himself shares with authors such as Lombroso, Emerson, Lapogue, Gumplowicz, and still others: for an implacable border divides human life, one that conditions the pleasure, knowledge, and power of the few to the struggle as well as the death of the many. If anything, the open question remains how

to reconstruct the internal logic that pushes Nietzschean biopolitics into the shelter of its thanatopolitical contrary.

My impression is that such logic is firmly associated with that immunitary semantics against which Nietzsche too, from another point of view, struggles with clearly contradictory results. The epicenter of such a contradiction can be singled out in the point of intersection between a tendency to biologize existence and another, contrary and speculative, one, which is based on the existentialization or the purification of what also refers to the dimension of life. Or better: functionalizing the former so as to fulfill the latter. It is as if Nietzsche simultaneously moves in two opposite but convergent directions toward one objective: as we have already seen, on the one hand, he associates the metaphysical construct, which the theo-philosophical tradition defines as a "soul," to the body's biology; on the other hand, he withdraws the body from its natural degradation through an artificial regeneration that is capable of restoring its original essence. Only when *bíos* is forcibly brought back into the circle of *zōē* can *bíos* overcome itself in something that pushes it beyond itself. It isn't surprising that Nietzsche seeks the key to such a paradoxical move in the same Plato around whom his deconstruction turns. This is possible to the degree that Nietzsche substitutes a metaphysical Plato, the one of the separation and opposition of body and soul, for a biopolitical Plato. In this sense, he can argue that the true Platonic republic is a "state of geniuses," which is actualized through the elimination of lives that do not meet the required standards. At the center of the Platonic project, therefore, are the demands to maintain the purity of the "race of guardians" and through them to save the entire "human herd" from degenerative contagion. Leaving aside the legitimacy of similar interpretations of Plato—whose thanatopolitical folds we have seen, or will have occasion to see shortly—what counts most here at the end of our discourse is the intensely immunitary attitude that subtends the question. Not only is the solution to the degenerative impulse sought in the blocking of becoming, in a restoration of the initial condition, or in a return to a perfection of what is integral, pure, and permanent. Rather, such a restoration, or physical and spiritual reintegration (spiritual because it is physical), is strictly conditioned by the incorporation of the negative, both in the lethal sense of the annihilation of those that do not deserve to live, and in the sense of the crushing of the originary dimension of animality of those who remain. When Nietzsche insists on the definitive zoological connotation of

terms such as *Züchtung* [breeding] or *Zähmung* [domestication], he is determined to assert (against the entire humanist culture) that man's vital potential lies in that profound belonging to what is still not, or is no longer, human, to something that constitutes for the human both the primogenital force and the specific negation. Only when man undergoes the same selective treatment applied to animals or to greenhouse plants will he be able to cultivate the self-generating capacity that degeneration has progressively consumed.

When this Platonism, now reversed by a biopolitical key, comes into contact with the contemporary theories on degeneration of Morel and of Faré—of whom I'll speak at length in the next chapter—the results appear to be devastating. Thus it isn't entirely unfounded to see in *this* Nietzsche, on the one hand, the nihilistic apex of nineteenth-century social Darwinism, and, on the other, that conceptual passage toward the eugenic activism that will be tragically on display in the next century.[46] Its specific axis of ideological elaboration emerges in the confluence of Galton's criminal pathology and the animal sociology of authors such as Espinas and Schneider.[47] If the origin of the criminal act lies more deeply in the biological conformity (and therefore in the genetic patrimony of the one who commits the crime than in a free individual choice), it's clear that punishment cannot but be characterized by both prevention and finality, relative not to the single individual but to the entire hereditary line from which it comes. Such a line, when not broken, is destined to be transmitted to its descendants. But this first superimposition between the mentally ill and the criminal involves a second and more extreme superimposition between the human and the animal species. From the moment that man appears bound by an unbreakable system of biological determinism, he can be reclaimed by his animal matrix from which he wrongly believes to have been emancipated (precisely on the strength of that distortion or perversion, civilization, which is nothing other than continual degeneration). Seen from this angle, we are well beyond the metaphor of the animal that originated with Hobbes, the man who is a wolf toward his equals. Taken literally, the wolf-man isn't actually what remains of a superior type already under attack, or better, one inhabited by another kind of inferior animal destined to devour him from within: the parasite, the bacillus, or the tick that sucks his blood and transmits it, now poisoned, to the rest of the species. With regard to such a biological risk (which is *therefore* also political), there can only be a similarly biopolitical

response in the lethal sense in which such a term is reversed in the nihilist completion of the immunitary dialectic. Once again in question is the generation of the negation of degeneration, the effectuation of life in death:

> A sick person is a parasite on society. Once one has reached a certain state it is indecent to live any longer . . . Create a new kind of responsibility, the physicians, to apply in all cases where the highest interest of life, of *ascending* life, demands that degenerating life be ruthlessly pushed down and aside—for example in the case of the right to procreate, the right to be born, the right to live.[48]

Posthuman

Nonetheless, this isn't Nietzsche's last or only word on the subject. Certainly, it is the origin of a discursive line that is unequivocal in its conclusions and its effects of sense, whose categorical extraneousness from the most destructive results of nineteenth-century eugenics it would be arduous to demonstrate. But this line ought not to be separated from another perspective that is irreducible to the first, and indeed whose underlying inspiration runs contrary to it. The internal point of distinction between these two different semantics is to be found in the perspective that Nietzsche assumes with regard to the process of biological decadence, which is defined in terms of degeneration or of passive nihilism. How does one behave toward it? By trying to stop it, to slow it down, to hold it in check through immunitary *dispositifs* that are the same and contrary to those that it itself activated (and ultimately responsible for the decline under way); or, on the contrary, to push it toward completion, and so doing provoke its self-destruction? By erecting new and ever denser protective barriers against the wide-ranging contagion, or rather encouraging it as the means to the dissolution of the old organic equilibrium and therefore the occasion for a new morphogenetic configuration? By tracing more markedly the lines of separation between social classes, groups, and races to the point of conditioning the biological development of the one to the violent reduction of the others? Or instead by trying to find in their difference the productive energy for common expansion?

In the preceding paragraphs, we became familiar with Nietzsche's first response to these questions, along with its ideological presuppositions and the thanatopolitical consequences. Without being able to establish any chronological sequence between the two, it's opportune at this stage to

note that at a certain point (that contrasts with and is superimposed upon his response), he appears to follow another track. The supporting idea is that only by accelerating what will nevertheless take place can one liberate the field for new affirmative powers *[potenze]*. Every other option—restorative, compensative, resistant—creates a worse stalemate than before:

> Even today there are still parties which dream of the crab-like *retrogression* of all things as their goal. But no one is free to be a crab. It is no use: we *have* to go forwards, i.e. *step by step further* in décadence (—this being *my* definition of modern "progress"...). You can *check* this development and, by checking it, dam up, accumulate degeneration itself, making it more vehement and *sudden:* no more can be done.[49]

Implicit in such expressions is the perspective (not extraneous to what will take the name of "eternal return") that, if a parabolic incline is continually increased, it ends up meeting itself in circular fashion at the point from which it began to move, returning again toward the top. It is exactly here that Nietzsche begins to deconstruct the hyperimmunitary machine that he himself set in motion against the debilitating effects of modern immunization. Where before he emphasized a strategy of containment, now enters another of mobilization and the unleashing of energy. Force, even reactive force, is unstoppable in itself: it can only recoil against itself. When pushed to a point of excess, every negation is destined to negate itself. After having annihilated everything that it encounters, negation cannot but fight against its own negativity and reverse itself in the affirmative. As Deleuze rightly argues, at the origin of this conceptual passage isn't the masked propensity for the dialectic (a sort of reverse Hegelianism), but rather the definitive release from its machinery: affirmation is not the synthetic result of a double negation, but instead the freeing of positive forces, which is produced by the self-suppression of the negation itself. As soon as the immunitary rejection, what Nietzsche calls "reaction," becomes intense enough to attack the same antibodies that provoked the rejection, the break with the old form becomes inevitable.

Of course, this seems to contradict what was said about the irreversibility of degeneration. In part it does, but only if we lose sight of the subtle line of reasoning that implies the possibility of its own reversal. As is customary for an author who distrusts the objectivity of the real, the question is one of perspective. The self-deconstruction of the immunity paradigm that Nietzsche operates (that runs counter to his eugenic aim) doesn't rest on a weakening of the vitalistic project, nor on an outright abandonment of

the degenerative hypothesis. At stake isn't the centrality of the biopolitical relation between health and illness, but a different conception of one and the other and therefore of their relation. What fails in this more complex inflection of Nietzschean thought is the dividing line that separates them in the metaphysically presupposed form of the absolute distinction between good and evil. In this sense, then, Nietzsche can declare that "there is no health as such, and all attempts to define a thing that way have been wretched failures . . . there are innumerable healths of the body . . . and the more we abjure the dogma of the 'equality of men,' the more must the concept of a *normal* health along with a normal diet and the normal course of an illness, be abandoned by medical men."[50] Yet, if it isn't possible to settle on a canon of perfect health; if it isn't the norm that determines health, but health that creates its own norms in a manner that is increasingly plural and reversible—then every person has a different idea of health and therefore it inevitably follows that even an all-engaging definition of illness isn't possible. And not only in the logical sense that, if one doesn't know what health is, a stable conception of illness cannot be determined *[profilare]*, but in the biopolitical sense as well because health and illness are in a relation that is more complex than their simple exclusion. Illness, in short, isn't only the contrary of health, but is its presupposition, its means, and its path; illness is the something from which health originates and that it carries within as its inalienable internal component. No true health is possible that doesn't take in *[comprenda]*—in the dual sense of the expression: to know and to incorporate—illness:

> Finally, the great question would still remain whether we can really *dispense with* illness—even for the sake of our virtue—and whether our thirst for knowledge and self-knowledge in particular does not require the sick soul as much as the healthy, and whether, in brief, the will to health alone, is not a prejudice, cowardice, and perhaps a bit of very subtle barbarism and backwardness.[51]

At stake in this polemic against a will to health, one incapable of confronting its own opposite (and therefore also itself), is the challenge the relation between life and death continually presents to health. There's no need to imagine such a challenge as the battle between two juxtaposed forces, as a besieged city defending itself from an enemy intent on penetrating and conquering it. Not that an image of the sort is extraneous to the profound logic of Nietzschean discourse, as clearly results from its explicitly eugenic side. But, as has been said, such an image doesn't exhaust

the logic. Indeed, one can assert that the extraordinary force of Nietzsche's work resides exactly in its intersection and contradiction of another analytic trajectory, which is situated within itself (and not worlds apart from it). The figure that emerges here is of a superimposition by way of contrast, all of whose logical passages (both in their succession and in their copresence) need to be recognized. We have seen how Nietzsche contests modernity's immunitary *dispositifs* not through negation, but instead by moving immunization from the institutional level to that of actual *[effettiva]* life; needing to be protected from the excess or the dispersion of life, no longer in the sense of a formal political order, but in the survival of the species as a whole. In a philogenetic framework of growing degeneration, such a possibility is conditioned both by the isolation and by the fencing in of those areas of life that are still whole with respect to the advancing contamination on the part of the weak whose life is ending, as well as by the reduction of the sick (in Malthusian fashion) in favor of the healthy. Nonetheless, we have seen how this prescription constitutes nothing other than the first hyperimmunitary or thanatopolitical stratum of the Nietzschean lexicon.

A second categorical vector draws alongside and is joined with it, one that moves in a direction that diverges from the first, or perhaps better, one that allows for a different reading. More than a revision, this vector moves through a semantic deferral of the preceding categories, beginning with that of "health" and "illness," bursting their nominal identity and placing them in direct contact with their contrary logic.[52] From this perspective (and with respect to the metaphor of the besieged city), the danger is also biological; it is no longer the enemy that makes an attempt on life from the outside, but the enemy is now life's own propulsive force. For this reason "the Greeks were certainly not possessed of a square and solid healthiness;—their secret was to honour even sickness as a god if only it had *power.*"[53] Being "dangerously healthy, ever again health" means that this kind of health must necessarily traverse the sickness which it seems to fight.[54] Health is not separate from the mortal risk that runs through it, pushing it beyond itself, continuously updating its norms, overthrowing and re-creating rules for life. The result is a reversal that occurs by an intensification of the defensive and offensive logic that governs the eugenic strategy: if health is no longer separable from sickness; if sickness is part of health—then it will no longer be possible to separate the individual and social body according to insurmountable lines of prophylaxis and hierarchy. The entire immunitary semantic now seems to be rebutted, or perhaps better, to be

reinterpreted in a perspective that simultaneously strengthens and overturns it, that confirms it and deconstructs it.

A paragraph in *Human, All Too Human* titled "Ennoblement through Degeneration" condenses in brief turns of phrase the entire trajectory that I've reconstructed to this point. At its center will be found the community held together by the equality of conditions and participation based on a shared faith. More than possible risks from the outside, what undermines the community's vitality is its stability: the more the community is preserved intact, the more the level of innovation is reduced. The greatest danger that the community faces is therefore its own preventive withdrawal from danger. Once immunized, the community doesn't run any risk of wounding, but it is precisely for this reason that it seals itself off blocking from within any possibility of relation with the outside and therefore any possibility of growth. Avoiding degeneration (according to the eugenic prescriptions of perfect health), the result is that the community loses its own self-generating potential. No longer capable of creating conditions of growth, it folds in upon itself. Saving it from such a decline are individuals who, free from the syndrome of self-preservation, are more inclined to experiment, although for the same reason they are biologically weaker. Disposed as they are to increasing the good that they possess (as well as their own vital substance), sooner or later they are bound not only to risk their lives, but also to damage the entire community. It is precisely here in the clench of this extreme risk, that the point of productive conjunction between generation and innovation is produced:

> It is precisely at this injured and weakened spot that the whole body is as it were *inoculated* with something new; its strength must, however, be as a whole sufficient to receive this new thing into its blood and to assimilate it. Degenerate natures are of the highest significance wherever progress is to be effected.[55]

This might seem to be mere theater for someone who elsewhere harps on defending the health of races and of individuals from the contagion of those who have degenerated. In reality, as we've already had occasion to discuss, the step in question is understood less as a distancing from the immunitary paradigm, and more as immunity's opening to its own communal reverse, to that form of self-dissolving gift giving that *communitas* names. The vocabulary that Nietzsche adopts indicates a similar semantic overlapping, which is situated precisely in the point of confluence between the lexicons of an immunity and community. I'm not speaking only of the

identification of the new with infection, but also of the nobilizing effects produced by inoculation. Just as in the body of the community, so too in that of the individual, "the educator has to inflict injuries upon him, or employ the injuries inflicted on him by fate, and when he has thus come to experience pain and distress something new and noble can be inoculated into the injured places. It will be taken up into the totality of his nature, and later the traces of its nobility will be perceptible in the fruits of his nature."[56]

Clearly, the language Nietzsche adopts is immunitarian, that of vaccination—a viral fragment is placed into the individual or collective organism, which it is intended to strengthen. But the logic that underpins it is not directed to preserving identity or to simple survival, but rather to innovation and alteration. The difference between the two levels of discourse (and the slippage of one into the other) lies in the mode of understanding the relation with the "negative," and even before that with its own definition. That for which Nietzsche recommends the inoculation isn't an antigen destined to activate the antibodies, nor is it a sort of supplemental antibody intent on fortifying the defensive apparatus of the immunitary system. In short, it isn't a lesser negative used preventively to block the path of a greater negative. All of this is part of that dialectical procedure that Nietzsche criticizes as reactive and to which he poses instead a different modality according to which what is considered evil *[male]* upon first view (suffering, the unexpected, danger) is considered positively as characterizing a more intense existence. From this perspective, the negative not only is in turn detained, repressed, or rejected, but it is affirmed as such: as what forms an essential part of life, even if, indeed precisely because, it continually endangers it, pushing it on to a problematic fault line *[faglia]* to which it is both reduced and strengthened. Nietzsche sees the same role of philosophy—at least of that philosophy capable of abandoning the system of illusions to which it itself has contributed and so doing setting itself adrift—as a sort of voluntary intoxication. No longer the protecting Mother, but the Medusa that one cannot look upon without experiencing the lacerating power of unbearable contradictions. In this sense, the real philosopher "puts himself at risk," because he singles out the truth of life in something that continually overtakes it, in an exteriority that can never be completely interiorized, dominated, or neutralized in the name of other more comforting or obliging truths.[57]

Can we give the name of community to this exteriority with regard to the immunitary systems within which we endlessly seek refuge, just as Georges Bataille dared to do in his own time against an interpretive tendency oriented in the opposite direction?[58] Without wanting in any way to twist a philosophy whose entire layers and internal levels of contradiction I have tried to reconstitute, we can say that a series of texts induce a cautious, affirmative response. I am not referring only to those grouped around the theme of donation—of the "bestowing virtue"—whose deconstructive character cannot be avoided with respect to every appropriative or cumulative conception of the will to power.[59] Nor am I referring to those visionary passages concerning the "stellar friendship," also extended especially to those who are far removed and remote from us, even our enemies.[60] Rather, it concerns splinters, flashes of thought that are capable of suddenly illuminating (if only for an instant) that profound and enigmatic nexus between *hospes* and *hostis* (one that is situated at the origin of the Western tradition in a knot that we have still not been able to unravel). Certainly, all of this carries us along to the semantic threshold of that common *munus* whose opposite pole we have glimpsed.

Yet, if we adopt a more complex perspective, it is also the center, the incandescent nucleus of *immunitas*. In order to see it more clearly, we need to understand donation and also the friendship with the enemy not in an ethical sense (which would be completely extraneous to the Nietzschean lexicon, constitutively immune *[refrattario]* from all altruistic rhetoric), nor in a properly anthropological sense, but in a radically ontological sense. In Nietzsche, donation is not an opening to another man, but if anything to the other *of* man or also *from* man. It is the alteration of the self-belonging that an anything but exhausted humanistic tradition has attributed to man as one of the most proper to him of his essential properties—against which the Nietzschean text reminds us that man is still not, nor will ever be, what he considers himself to be. His being resides beyond this or beyond that side of the identity with himself. And indeed, he is not even a being as such, but a becoming that carries together within itself the traces of a different past and the prefiguration of a new future. At the center of this conceptual passage lies the theme of metamorphosis. With regard to the "retarding elements" of every species that is intent on constructing ever new means of preservation (who are determined to last as long as possible), the *Übermensch* (or however we may want to translate the expression) is characterized

by an inexhaustible power of transformation. He literally is situated outside of himself, in a space that is no longer (nor was it ever) that of man as such. It isn't so important to know where or what he will become, because what he connotes is precisely becoming, a breaking through, a moving beyond his proper topos. It isn't that his life doesn't have form; it isn't a "form of life." Rather, it bears upon a form that itself is in perpetual movement toward a new form, traversed by an alterity from which it emerges simultaneously divided and multiplied.

In this sense, Nietzsche, the hyperindividualist, can say that the individual, the one undivided *[l'indiviso],* doesn't exist—that it is contradicted from its coming into the world by the genetic principle according to which "two are born from one and one from two."[61] It is no coincidence that birth, procreation, and pregnancy constitute perhaps the most symbolically charged figure of Nietzschean philosophy, one Nietzsche characterizes as falling under the sign of a painful delivery. This occurs because no term more than childbirth refers the theme of donation to its concrete biological dimension, which otherwise is simply metaphorical or classically intersubjective. Childbirth isn't only an offer of life, but it is the effective site in which a life makes itself two, in which it opens itself to the difference with itself according to a movement that in essence contradicts the immunitary logic of self-preservation. Against every presupposed interiorization, it exposes the body to the split that always traverses it as an outside of its inside, the exterior of the interior, the common of the immune. This holds true for the individual body, but also for the collective body, which emerges as naturally challenged, infiltrated, and hybridized by a diversity that isn't only external, but also internal. It is so for the *ethnos* and for the *genos,* that is, for the race that, despite all the illusions of eugenics, is never pure in itself, as well as for the species.[62] It is precisely with respect to the species, to what Nietzsche defines as human in order to distinguish it essentially from all the others, that he pushes the deconstruction or conversion of the immunitary paradigm farther and deeper into its opposite. Certainly, its superimposition with the animal sphere can be and has been interpreted in the most varied of ways. Undoubtedly, the sinister reference to "the beast of prey" or to "the breeding animal" contains within it echoes and a tonality that are attributable to the more deterministic and aggressive tendencies of social Darwinism. But in the animalization of man something else is felt that appears to mark more the future of the human species and less the ancestral past. In Nietzsche, the animal is never interpreted as the

obscure abyss or the face of stone from which man escapes. On the contrary, it is tied to the destiny of "after-man" (as we could hazard translating *Übermensch*). It is his future not less than his past, or perhaps better, the discontinuous lines along with which the relationship between past and future assumes an irreducible configuration vis-à-vis all those that have preceded him. It's not by accident that the destiny of the animal is enigmatically connected *through* man to him who can exceed him in power and wisdom—to a man who is capable of redefining the meaning of his own species no longer in humanistic or anthropological terms, but in anthropocentric or biotechnological terms:

> What are the profound transformations that must derive from the theories according to which one asserts that there is no God that cares for us and that there is no eternal moral law (humanity as atheistically immoral)? That we are animals? That our life is transitory? That we have no responsibility? The wise one and the animal will grow closer and produce a new type [of human].[63]

Who or *what* this new "type" is naturally remains indeterminate, and not just for Nietzsche. But certainly Nietzsche understands (indeed, he was the first to seize with an absolute purity of a gaze) that we are at the threshold beyond which what is called "man" enters into a different relationship with his own species—beyond which, indeed, the same species becomes the object and the subject of a biopolitics potentially different from what we know because it is in relation not only to human life, but to what is outside life, to its other, to its after. The animalization of man in Nietzsche contains these two signs, which are perilously juxtaposed and superimposed: taken together, they form the point where a biopolitics precipitates into death and where the horizon of a new politics of life, which I outline here, begins.

CHAPTER FOUR

Thanatopolitics (The Cycle of *Genos*)

Regeneration

Michel Foucault was the first to provide us with a biopolitical interpretation of Nazism.[1] The force of his reading with respect to other possible readings lies in the distance he takes up with respect to all modern political categories. Nazism constitutes an irreducible protrusion for the history that precedes it because it introduces an antinomy that went unrecognized until then in its figure and in its effects. It is summarized in the principle that life defends itself and develops only through the progressive enlargement of the circle of death. Thus the paradigms of sovereignty and biopolitics, which seemed at a certain point to diverge, now experience a singular form of indistinction that makes one both the reverse and the complement of the other. Foucault locates the instrument of this process of superimposition in racism. Once racism has been inscribed in the practices of biopolitics, it performs a double function: that of producing a separation within the biological *continuum* between those that need to remain alive and those, conversely, who are to be killed; and that more essential function of establishing a direct relation between the two conditions, in the sense that it is precisely the deaths of the latter that enable and authorize the survival of the former. But that isn't all. In order to get to the bottom of the constitutively lethal logic of the Nazi conception [of life], we need to take a final step. Contrary to much of what we have been led to believe, such a conception doesn't concentrate the supreme power of killing only in the hands of the leader *[capo]*—as happens in classical dictatorships—but rather distributes it in equal parts to the entire social body. Its absolute newness lies

in the fact that everyone, directly or indirectly, can legitimately kill everyone else. But if death as such (and here is the unavoidable conclusion of this line of "reasoning") constitutes the motor of development of the entire mechanism—which is to say that it needs to produce it in ever greater dimensions, first with regard to the external enemy, then to the internal, and then lastly to the German people themselves (as Hitler's final orders make perfectly clear)—then the result is an absolute coincidence of homicide and suicide that places it outside of every traditional hermeneutics.

Nevertheless, Foucault's interpretation isn't completely satisfying. I spoke earlier of the discontinuity that the interpretation aims at instituting in the modern conceptual lexicon.[2] Yet, the category assigned to fix more precisely the point of caesura of Nazi experience for history preceding it (namely, that of biopolitics) winds up constituting the part of their union: "Nazism was in fact the paroxysmal development of the new power mechanisms that had been established since the eighteenth century."[3] Certainly, Nazism carries the biopolitical procedures of modernity to the extreme point of their coercive power, reversing them into thanatological terms. But the process remains within the same semantics that seemed to have lacerated it. It extends onto the same terrain from which it appeared to tear itself away. In the Foucauldian reading, it is as if the tear were subjected to a more profound continuity that reincorporates its precision: "Of course Nazism alone took the play between the sovereign right to kill and the mechanisms of biopower to this paroxysmal point. But this play is in fact inscribed in the workings of all States."[4] Even if Foucault ultimately doubts such an affirmation, the comparison is by now established: even with its unmistakably new features, Nazism has much in common biopolitically with other modern regimes. The assimilation of Nazism to communism is even stronger; that too is traced back to a racist matrix and therefore to the notion of biopower that the matrix presupposes. We are already quite far from the discontinuist approach that seems to motivate Foucault's interpretation. It is as if, despite its contiguous and progressive steps, the generality of the framework prevails over the singularity of the Nazi event: both vertically in relation to the modern era and horizontally with regard to the communist regime. If the latter has a biopolitical context and if both inherit it from recent history, the power of rupture that Foucault had conferred on his own analysis is diminished or indeed has gone missing.[5]

It is precisely the comparison with communism (activated by the unwieldy category of totalitarianism) that allows us to focus on the absolute

specificity of Nazi biopolitics.[6] Although the communist regime, in spite of its peculiarity, originates nonetheless in the modern era—its logic, its dynamics, and its wild swings in meaning—the Nazi regime is radically different. It isn't born from an exasperated modernity but from a decomposed modernity. If we can assert that communism always "carries out" *[realizzi]* one of its philosophical traditions (even in an aggravated form), nothing of the sort can be said of Nazism. Yet this is nothing more than a half-truth, which ought to be completed as follows: Nazism does not, nor can it, carry out a philosophy because it is an actualized *[realizzata]* biology. While the transcendental of communism is history, its subject class, and its lexicon economic, Nazism's transcendental is life, its subject race, and its lexicon biological. Certainly, the communists also believed that they were acting on the basis of a precise scientific vision, but only the Nazis identified their vision with the comparative biology of human races and animals. It is from this perspective that Rudolph Hess's declaration needs to be understood in the most restricted sense, according to which "National Socialism is nothing but applied biology."[7] In reality, Fritz Lenz, along with Erwin Baur and Eugen Fischer, used the expression for the first time in the successful manual *Rassenhygiene,* in a context in which they refer to Hitler as "the great German doctor" able to take "the final step in the defeat of that historicism and in the recognition of values that are purely biological.[8] In another influential medical text, Rudolph Ramm expressed his views similarly, asserting that "unlike any other political philosophy or any other party program, National Socialism is in agreement with natural history and the biology of man."[9]

We need to be careful not to lose sight of the utterly specific quality of this explicit reference to biology as opposed to philosophy. It marks the true breaking point with regard not only to a generic past, but also with respect to modern biopolitics. It's true, of course, that the political lexicon has always adopted biological metaphors, beginning with the long-standing notion of the state as body. And it is also true, as Foucault showed, that beginning with the eighteenth century the question of life progressively intersects with the sphere of political action. Yet both occurred thanks to a series of linguistic, conceptual, and institutional mediations that are completely missing in Nazism: every division collapses between politics and biology. What before had always been a vitalistic metaphor becomes a reality in Nazism, not in the sense that political power passes directly into the hands of biologists, but in the sense that politicians use biological processes as

criteria with which to guide their own actions. In such a perspective we cannot even speak of simple instrumentalization: it isn't that Nazi politics limited itself to adopting biomedical research of the time for legitimizing its ends. They demanded that politics be identified directly with biology in a completely new form of biocracy. When Hans Reiter, speaking in the name of the Reich in occupied Paris, proclaimed that "this mode of thinking biologically needs to become little by little that of all the people," because at stake was the "substance" of the same "biological body of the nation," he understood well that he was speaking in the name of something that had never been part of a modern categorical lexicon.[10] "We find ourselves at the beginning of a new epoch," writes another ideo-biologist of the regime, Hans Weinert. "Man himself," Weinert continues, "recognizes the laws of life that model it individually and collectively; and the National Socialist state was given the right, insofar as it is in its power, to influence human becoming as the welfare of the people and the state demand."[11]

As long as we speak of biology, however, we remain on a level of discourse that is far too general. In order to get to the heart of the question, we need to focus our attention on medicine. We know the role that Nazi doctors played in the extermination effected by the regime. Certainly, the availability of the medical class for undertaking forms of thanatopolitics also occurred elsewhere—think of the role of psychiatrists in the diagnosis of mental illness for dissidents in Stalin's Soviet Union or in the vivisection practiced by Japanese doctors on American prisoners after Pearl Harbor. But it isn't simply about that in Nazi Germany. I am not speaking solely about experiments on "human guinea pigs" or anatomical findings that the camps directly provided prestigious German doctors, but of the medical profession's direct participation of in all of the phases of mass homicide: from the singling out of babies and then of adults condemned to a "merciful" death in the T4 program, to the extension of what was called "euthanasia" to prisoners of war, to lastly the enormous *therapia magna auschwitzciense:* the selection on the ramp leading into the camp, the start of the process of gassing, the declaration of being deceased, the extraction of gold from the teeth of the cadavers, and supervision of the procedures of cremation. No step in the production of death escaped medical verification. According to the precise legal disposition of Victor Brack, head of the Second "Euthanasia" Department of the Reich Chancellery, only doctors had the right to inject phenol into the heart of victims or to open the gas valve. If ultimate power wore the boots of the SS, supreme *auctoritas* was dressed

in the white gown of the doctor. Zyklon-B was transported to Birkenau in Red Cross cars and the inscription that stood out in sharp relief at Mauthausen was "cleanliness and health." After all, it was the personal doctor to the *Euthanasie Programm* who constructed the gas chambers at Belzec, Sobibór, and Treblinka.

All of this is already well known and documented in the acts of the legal proceedings against those doctors believed to have been directly guilty of murder. But the paltry sentences with respect to the enormity of their acts testify to the fact that the underlying problem isn't so much determining the individual responsibility of single doctors (as necessary as that is), but defining the overall role that medicine played in Nazi ideology and practices. Why was the medical profession the one that adhered unconditionally to the regime, far surpassing any other? And why was such an extensive power of life and death conferred on doctors? Why was the sovereign's scepter given just to them—and before that the book of the clergyman as well? When Gerhard Wagner, führer of German doctors *[Reichsärzteführer]* before Leonardo Conti, stated that the physician "should go back to his origins, he should again become a priest, he should become a priest and physician in one," he does nothing other than state that the judgment over who is to be kept alive and who is to be condemned to death is vested in the physician and solely in the physician, that it is he and only he who possesses the knowledge of what qualifies as a valid life endowed with value, and therefore is able to fix the limits beyond which life can be legitimately extinguished.[12] Introducing *Das ärztliche Ethos* [The physician's ethos], the work of the great nineteenth-century doctor Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland, the head of Zyklon-B distribution at Auschwitz, Joachim Mrugowsky spoke of "the doctor's divine mission," and "the priest of the sacred flame of life."[13] In the no-man's-land of this new theo-biopolitics, or better theo-zoo-politics, doctors really do return to be the great priests of Baal, who after several millennia found themselves facing their ancient Jewish enemies, whom they could now finally devour at will.

We know that the Reich knew well how to compensate its doctors, not only with university professorships and honors, but also with something more concrete. If Conti was promoted directly under Himmler, the surgeon Karl Brandt, who had already been commissioned in operation "Euthanasia," became one of the most powerful men of the regime, subordinate only to the supreme authority of the Führer in his subject area, which was the unlimited one of the life and death of everyone (without dwelling on

Irmfried Eberl, promoted at thirty-two to commandant of Treblinka). Does this mean that all German doctors (or only those who supported Nazism) were simple butchers in white gowns? Although it would be convenient to think so, in reality this wasn't the case at all. Not only was German medical research one of the most advanced in the world (Wilhelm Hueper, father of American oncology, asked the Nazi minister of culture Bernhard Rust if he might return to work in the "new Germany"), but what's more the Nazis had launched the most powerful campaign of the period against cancer, restricting the use of asbestos, tobacco, pesticides, and colorants, encouraging the diffusion of organic vegetables and vegetarian cuisine, and alerting everyone to the potentially carcinogenic effects of X-rays. At Dachau, while the chimney smoked, biological honey was produced. In addition, Hitler himself detested smoking, was a vegetarian and an animal lover, besides being scrupulously attentive to questions of hygiene.[14]

What does all of this suggest? The thesis that emerges is that between this therapeutic attitude and the thanatological frame in which it is inscribed isn't a simple contradiction, but rather a profound connection; to the degree the doctors were obsessively preoccupied with the health of the German body, they made *[operare]* a deadly incision, in the specifically surgical sense of the expression, in its body. In short, and although it may seem paradoxical, it was in order to perform their therapeutic mission that they turned themselves into the executioners of those they considered either nonessential or harmful to improving public health. From this point of view, one can justifiably maintain that genocide was the result not of an absence, but of a presence, of a medical ethics perverted into its opposite.[15] It is no coincidence that the doctor, even before the sovereign or the priest, was equated with the heroic figure of the "soldier of life."[16] In corresponding fashion, Slavic soldiers who arrived from the East were considered not only adversaries of the Reich, but "enemies of life." It isn't enough to conclude, however, that the limits between healing and killing have been eliminated in the biomedical vision of Nazism. Instead we need to conceptualize them as two sides of the same project that makes one the necessary condition of the other: it is only by killing as many people as possible that one could heal *[risanare]* those who represented the true Germany. From this perspective it even appears plausible that at least some Nazi doctors actually believed that they were respecting the substance, if not the form, of the Hippocratic oath that they had taken, namely, not to harm in any way the patient *[malato]*. It's only that they identified the patient as the German

people as a whole, rather than as a single individual. Caring for that body was precisely what required the death of all of those whose existence threatened its health. It's in this sense that we are forced to defend the hypothesis put forward earlier that the transcendental of Nazism was life rather than death, even if, paradoxically, death was considered the only medicine able to safeguard life. In Telegram Number 71 sent from his bunker in Berlin, Hitler ordered the destruction of the conditions of subsistence for the German people who had proven themselves too weak. Here the limit point of the Nazi antinomy becomes suddenly clear: the life of some, and finally the life of the one, is sanctioned only by the death of everyone.

At this point the question that opened the chapter presents itself again. Unlike all the other forms past and present, why did Nazism propel the homicidal temptation of biopolitics to its most complete realization? Why does Nazism (and only Nazism) reverse the proportion between life and death in favor of the latter to the point of hypothesizing its own self-destruction? The answer I would put forward refers again to the category of immunization because it is only immunization that lays bare the lethal paradox that pushes the protection of life over into its potential negation. Not only, but it also represents in the figure of the autoimmune illness the ultimate condition in which the protective apparatus becomes so aggressive that it turns against its own body (which is what it should protect), leading to its death. That this interpretive key captures better the specificity of Nazism is demonstrated on the other side by the particularity of the disease against which it intended to defend the German people. We aren't dealing with any ordinary sort of disease, but with an infective one. What needed to be avoided at all cost was the contagion of superior beings by those who are inferior. The regime propagated the fight to the death against the Jews as the resistance put up by the body (and originally the healthy blood) of the German nation against the invading germs that had penetrated within and whose intent it was to undermine the unity and life of the German nation itself. We know the epidemiological repertoire that the ideologues of the Reich adopted when portraying their supposed enemies, but especially the Jews: they are in turn and simultaneously "bacilli," "bacteria," "parasites," "viruses," and "microbes."[17] It is also true, as Andrzej Kaminski remembers, that Soviet detainees were sometimes designated with the same terms. And certainly the characterization of the Jews as parasites is part of the secular history of anti-Semitism. Nonetheless, such a definition acquires a different valence in the Nazi vocabulary. Here too it is

as if what to a certain point remained a weighty analogy now actually took form: the Jews didn't *resemble* parasites; they didn't behave *as* bacteria—they *were* bacteria who were to be treated as such. In this sense, Nazi politics wasn't even a proper biopolitics, but more literally a *zoopolitics,* one expressly directed to human animals. Consequently, the correct term for their massacre—anything but the sacred "holocaust"—is "extermination": exactly the term used for insects, rats, and lice. *Soziale Desinfektion* it was called. "*Ein Laus, Ein Tod*"—a louse is your death was written on a washroom wall at Auschwitz, next to the couplet "*Nach dem Abort, vor dem Essen, Hände waschen, nicht vergessen*" (After the latrine, before eating, wash your hands, do not forget).[18]

It is for this reason that we need to award an absolute literality to the words Himmler addressed to the SS stationed at Kharkov according to which "anti-Semitism is like disinfestations. Keeping lice away is not an ideological question—it is a question of cleanliness."[19] And after all, it was Hitler himself who used an immunological terminology that is even more precise: "The discovery of the Jewish virus is one of the greatest revolutions of this world. The battle that we fight every day is equal to those fought in the last century by Pasteur and Koch."[20] We shouldn't blur the difference between such an approach, which is specifically bacteriological, with another that is simply racial. The final solution waged against the Jews has just such a biological-immunitarian characterization. Indeed, the gas used in the camps passed through shower tubes that were allocated for disinfections, but only that disinfecting the Jews seemed impossible from the moment that they were considered the bacteria from which one needed to rid oneself. The identification between men and pathogens reached such a point that the Warsaw ghetto was intentionally constructed in a zone that was already contaminated. And so, according to the modalities of a prophecy realized, the Jews fell victim to the same disease that was used to justify their ghettoization: finally they had become *really* infected and therefore were now agents of infection.[21] Accordingly, doctors had the right to exterminate them.

Degeneration

In the autoimmunitarian paroxysm of the Nazi vision, generalized homicide is therefore understood as the instrument for regenerating the German people. But this in turn is made necessary by a degenerative tendency that appears to undermine vital forces. The titles of two widely read books in the middle of the 1930s are indicative of such a syllogism: they are *Volk in*

Gefahr [Nation in danger] by Otto Helmut and *Völker am Abgrund* [Peoples on the precipice] by Friedrich Burgdörfer.[22] The task of the new Germany is that of saving the West from the threat presented by a growing degeneration. The prominence of this category—which we have already come across in Nietzsche—in the Nazi ideological machine should in no way be downplayed. It constitutes the conceptual passageway through which the biopolitics of the regime could present itself as the prosecution, and indeed the completion, of a discourse that circulated widely in the philosophical, juridical, and even medical culture of the period. Originally relative to the elimination of a thing with respect to the genus to which it belongs, the concept of degeneration progressively takes on an increasingly negative valence that assimilates it to terms such as "decadence," "degradation," and "deterioration," though with a specific biological characterization.[23] Thus, if in Buffon it still connotes the simple environmental variation of a organism with respect to the general features of his race—what Lamarck considered nothing other than a successful adaptation—Benedict-Augustin Morel's *Traité des dégénérescences* moves it decisively in a psychopathological direction.[24] The element that signals the change with respect to its original meaning isn't to be found only in the shift from anatomy to bioanthropology, but rather in the move from a static to a dynamic semantic: more than something given, the degenerative phenomenon is a *process* of dissolution. Produced by the intake of toxic agents, it can lead in a few generations to sterility and therefore to the extinction of a specific line. All of the multiple tests that were conducted on the subject between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the next do nothing but reintroduce (in more or less the same arguments) the same schema: having only with difficulty survived the struggle for existence, the degenerate is he who carries imprinted within him the physical and psychological wounds in a form that is forced to become exponentially aggravated in the move from father to son. When in the 1880s Magnan and Legrain will transpose them to a clinical environment, the definition has already established its constitutive elements:

> Degeneration *[dégénérescence]* is the pathological state of being that, in comparison with generations closer to it in time, is constitutively weakened in its psychophysical resistance and only realizes in an incomplete manner the biological conditions of the hereditary struggle for life. This weakening that is translated into permanent stigma is essentially progressive, except for possible regeneration. When this life doesn't survive, it more or less rapidly leads to the annihilation of the species.[25]

Naturally, in order for the category to pass over into Nazi biopolitics, a series of cultural mediations will be needed—from Italian criminal anthropology to French hereditary theory, to a clear-cut racist reconversion of Mendelian genetics. But the most salient features are present in it, beginning with the enfolding of pathology into abnormality. What characterizes the degenerate above all is his distance from the norm: if the degenerate in Morel already expresses his deviation from the normal type, for Italian Giuseppe Sergi "it is impossible to find an invariable norm for his behavior in him."[26] What is intended here by "norm"? In the first instance it would seem a quality of the biological sort—the potentiality of a given organism for vital development understood both from a physical and a psychological point of view. Regarding precisely that, as the Englishman Edwin Ray Lankester makes clear, "degeneration can be defined as a gradual mutation in the structure in which the organism is able to adapt itself to less various and more complex conditions of life."[27] This doesn't mean that soon after a slippage in the definition of norm occurs from the morphogenetic level to that of the anthropological. The biological abnormality is nothing but the sign of a more general abnormality that links the degenerate subject to a condition that is steadily differentiated with regard to other individuals of the same species. But a second categorical move follows the first, which is destined to move abnormality from the intraspecies dimension to the limits of the human itself. To say that the degenerate is abnormal means pushing him toward a zone of indistinction that isn't completely included in the category of the human. Or perhaps better, it means enlarging the latter category so as to include its own negation: the non-man in man and therefore the man-animal *[uomo-bestia]*.[28] It is the Lombrosian conception of "atavism," in which all the possible degenerations are accounted for, that performs the function of the excluding inclusion. It is configured as a sort of biohistorical anachronism that reverses the line of human evolution until it has brought it back in contact with that of the animal. Degeneration is the animal element that reemerges in man in the form of an existence that isn't properly animal or human, but exactly their point of intersection: the contradictory copresence between two genera, two times, two organisms that are incapable of producing a unity of the person and consequently for the same reason incapable of forming a juridical subjectivity. The ascription of the degenerate type to an ever vaster number of social categories—alcoholics, syphilitics, homosexuals, prostitutes, the obese, even to the urban proletariat itself—reinstates the sign of this uncontrollable exchange between biological

norm and juridical-political norm. What appears as the social result of a determinate biological configuration is in reality the biological representation of a prior political decision.

More than any other, the theory of heredity makes clear the improper exchange between biology and law *[diritto]*. At the same time that Morel's essay was published, Prosper Lucas's *Traité* appeared from the same Parisian editor, Ballière, on "natural heredity in the state of health and disease of the nervous system," followed at a distance of twenty years by Théodule Ribot's *L'hérédité: Étude psychologique sur ses phénomènes, ses lois, ses causes, ses conséquences.*[29] At the center of these texts, and of many others that followed, is a clear shift in perspective from that of the individual (understood in a modern sense as the subject of law and of judgment *[decisione]*), to the line of descent in which he constitutes only the final segment. A vertical relation linking fathers and sons and through them with their ancestors is substituted for the solidarity or the horizontal competition between brothers that is typical of liberal-democratic societies. Contrary to what pedagogical and social theories (inspired by the notion of equality) put forward, the difference that separates individuals appears insurmountable. Both somatic and psychological features are predetermined at birth according to a biological chain that neither individual will nor education can break. Just as for virtue and fortune, so too hereditary malformations take on the aspect of an inevitable destiny: no one can escape from oneself; no one can break the chain that inexorably ties one to one's past; no one can choose the direction of one's own life. It is as if death grabs life and holds it tightly: "Heredity governs the world," concludes Doctor Apert. "The living act, but the dead speak in them and make them what they are. Our ancestors live in us."[30] Life is nothing but the result of something that precedes it and defines it in all its movements. The Lombrosian figure of the "born delinquent" constitutes the most celebrated expression: as the ancient wisdom of the myth teaches us, the faults of the father always devolve upon their sons. Law *[diritto]*, which precisely originates in myth, can do nothing but model its procedures on this first law, which is stronger than any other because it is rooted in the most profound reasons of biology and blood. In Lucas's definition, heredity is "a *law*, a *force*, and a *fact*."[31] More precisely, it is a law that has the irresistible force of fact; it coincides with its own facticity.

Here emerges the reversal of the relation between *nomos* and *bíos* to which I referred earlier: what in reality is the effect is represented as the cause and vice versa. André Pichot has drawn our attention to the fact that

the economic-juridical notion of heredity (which is apparently calculated using biological heredity) constitutes instead its foundation.[32] After all, the Latin term *hereditas* doesn't designate what is left to one's descendants at the moment of death. It is only from 1820 on that the word begins to be applied by analogy to the area of the transmission of biological characteristics. Proof of this will be found in the fact that the classic hereditary monarchy, which also refers to descent based on blood ("blue blood"), doesn't depend on a genetic type of conception, but rather on a juridical protocol that responds to a determinate social order. Motivated less by biology, the obligation of dynastic succession was also justified by arguments of a theological nature—the divine right of kings. In order for such a process to be secularized, however, we need to wait first for the birth of natural law and positive law; not, however, without a different tradition inserting itself between the two, namely, that originating in Calvinism (which reintroduces the idea of divine predestination that is applied to every individual). What needs to be highlighted is that post-Darwinian hereditary theory is situated exactly at the point of antinomic confluence between these two trajectories; on one side, it completely secularizes the dynastic tradition of the aristocratic sort; on the other, it reproduces the dogma of predestination in biopolitical terms. When the embryologist August Weismann defines germinative plasma, he will arrive at a singular form of "biological Calvinism" according to which the destiny of the living being is completely preformed—naturally, with the variant that the soul is not immortal, but rather blood, which is transmitted immutably through the bodies of successive generations.

This line of reasoning is grafted onto the theory of degeneration until it becomes its own presupposition: On the one hand, the degenerative process spreads via the transmission of hereditary characteristics. If blood that is inherited cannot be modified genetically (according to the theo-biological principle of germinative plasma), why then does the organic deficiency increase exponentially in the passage from father to son, until one arrives at sterility and the extinction of the hereditary line? On the other hand: if in the space of a few generations dissolution is inevitable, why then should one fear the phenomenon spreading? The answer has to do with the idea of contagion: degenerative pathology doesn't only multiply metonymically within the same body in a series of interrelated diseases, but spreads irresistibly from one body to the next. We can say that degeneration is always degenerative. It reproduces itself intensely and extends from inside to outside

and vice versa. This contaminating power of an internal transmutation and of an external transposition is in fact its most characteristic feature. For this to be so, it must follow that it is *both* hereditary and contagious, which is to say contagious on the vertical level of lineage as well as on the horizontal level of social communication. What creates the difficulty is precisely this copresence: according to Weismann's law, if the germinative plasma cannot be modified, then it isn't susceptible to contagion. If instead it is a potential vehicle for contamination (as the theory of expanded degeneration would have it), this shows that the genetic structure is not unalterable. This logical difficulty, which has produced some confusion between contagious diseases (tuberculosis and syphilis, for example) and hereditary diseases, has been met by the intermediate thesis that the same tendency to contract the disease *[contagio]* can be hereditary. Thus, the external infection occurs thanks to internal predisposition and the internal predisposition thanks to an external infection. That degeneration is spread through hereditary transmission or through contagion matters less. In any case, what counts is the construction of the immunitary apparatus intent on blocking its advance. Some decades later, the illustrious German professors Fischer and Verschuer will split the research area in two: the first will study the blood of different ethnic groups, the second the hereditary lines of monozygote twins. Josef Mengele will produce the operative synthesis in his laboratory at Auschwitz.

Was such an outcome inevitable? Was it implicit in the logic of the category of degeneration? The answer isn't a simple yes. But that it has an immunitarian timbre is made evident by its explicitly reactive valence. Reactive, however, doesn't necessarily mean reactionary. I am referring not only to the important fact that many, who were not exponents of the Catholic right as well as progressive and socialist authors, make reference to such a category. What joins them all together fundamentally is the idea that degenerative pathology isn't simply the negative result of progress, but that one derives from the other. Not by chance the genesis of degenerative pathology is located in the years immediately following the French Revolution, when natural selection begins to be weakened by a protective stance with regard to the weakest parts of society. The classist connotation of such a line of argument (when not racist) is clear. But that doesn't cancel out a series of other vectors that seem to push the concept in the opposite direction, especially the conviction that a return to the past isn't possible (to simple, natural selection), but rather that one needs to have recourse to a series of

artificial interventions (in particular the hypothesis of an unavoidable spread of the degenerative process in all social sectors and environments). Born in a part, degeneration winds up involving the whole. It is a global sickness that continually expands not only among inferior races, but also among superior ones. It is precisely the alleged connection with the dynamics of modernization—from industrialization to urbanization—that seems to tie it to the destiny of the bourgeois and intellectual classes.

As I noted, Lombroso had insisted earlier on the mysterious and worrying connection that exists between genius and madness: genius, insofar as it is a deviation from the norm, is a sophisticated form of degenerative neurosis. But it is the Hungarian doctor of Jewish origin Maximilian Südfeld, known to the larger public as Max Nordau, who more than any other localizes degeneration in the intellectual sphere. In his book dedicated to *Entartung,* Pre-Raphaelites, Parnassians, Nietzscheans, Zolians, Ibsenians, and so on are all included in this category—all assimilated on the typological level to those who "satisfy their insane instincts with the assassin's knife or with the dynamite's fuse rather than with pen or paintbrush."[33] It is impossible not to see the thread that ties similar evaluations with future Nazi lucubrations with regard to degenerate art. The point I want to emphasize will be found in the fact that if all of modern art is declared to be degenerate, then in corresponding fashion this indicates that degeneration has the same aesthetic nervature as is presupposed in the same category of "decadentism."

That degeneration, on the other hand, isn't only negative—or better, that it is a minus sign that can, from another point of view, be turned into a plus—comes across in a text that seems to move radically against it, but instead expresses an element that was from the beginning latent in the concept. I am referring to Gina Ferrero Lombroso's *I vantaggi della degenerazione* [The advantages of degeneration]. After stating the premise that "no clear line separates progressive characteristics from regressive characteristics in animals, that is, degeneration from evolution," she asks herself "if many of the phenomena held to be degenerate are not instead evolutionary, useful rather than damaging manifestations of the adaptation the human body makes to the conditions in which it lives."[34] Not only, but Lombroso takes another step forward that places it in a particular arrangement that lies within the immunitary paradigm. As was the case for Nietzsche in his more radical stage, this doesn't actually have an exclusionary or neutralizing character, but rather assumes and valorizes the different, the dissimilar,

and the abnormal inasmuch as they are innovative and transformative powers of reality. Therefore, when Lombroso refers explicitly to the "immunity produced by the diseases suffered," she can conclude that

> the degenerates are those who fuel the sacred torch of progress; to them is given the function of evolution, of civilization. Like bacteria of fermentation, they assume the office of decomposing and reconstructing institutions; the uses that they make of their time activate the material exchange of this highly complex organism that is human society.[35]

This citation restores to degeneration all of the category's breadth as well as its paradoxical characteristics. It implies both the biological inalterability of being and its continual modification. Fixedness and movement, identity and transformation, concentration and dissemination: all are extended along a line that superimposes nature and society, conservation and innovation, immunization and communication, and they seem to rebound against themselves and to turn into their opposite, after which they once again return *[riasssestarsi]* to their initial coordinates. They oscillate from the part to the whole and back again. The idea of degeneration, which is broad enough that it includes the entire civilized world, at a certain point closes around its own sacrificial object, drastically separating it from the healthy type, pushing it toward a destiny of expulsion and annihilation. More than theories, however, artistic practices register this singular rotation of sense.[36] Already the Zolian cycle of Rougon-Macquart and the dramas of Ibsen, or in Italy De Roberto's *I viceré* or Mastriani's *I vermin,* constitute a figurative laboratory of considerable expressive depth.[37] But the works that, perhaps more than any others, account for such a semantic circuit are three texts that follow one another in the short arc of a decade, namely, Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde, and Bram Stoker's *Dracula.* The trajectory they seem to follow moves away from superimposition to the progressive splitting between light and shadow, health and sickness, and the norm and abnormality (all placed in a narrative framework that calls forth in detail the degenerative syndrome that was moving across the society of the time): from the scenario of a degraded and tentacle-like metropolis to the paroxysmal centrality of blood, to the battle to the death between doctor and monster.

What characterizes the three stories, however, is the growing lag between the intention of the protagonist and that of reality, which the texts both hide and allow to emerge. The more the protagonist wants to free himself from the degeneration that he carries within, projecting it outside himself,

the more the result is an excess of death that bursts on the scene, swallowing him up. Thus, in Stevenson's text, Jekyll, a doctor in legal medicine, attempts to immunize himself from his own worst features through the biochemical construction of another self. "And thus fortified, as I supposed on every side, I began to profit by the strange immunities of my position."[38] But the alien creature quickly escapes from the control of its creator and takes possession of his body. It is another, but generated by the ego and so destined to reenter there. A "he," an "animal," a "brute," which, however, is impossible to isolate because he is one with himself, with his body, his blood, and his flesh:[39]

> This was the shocking thing . . . that that insurgent horror was knit to him closer than a wife, closer than any eye; lay caged in his flesh, where he heard it mutter and felt it struggle to be born; and at every hour of weakness, and in the confidence of slumber, prevailed against him and deposed him out of life.[40]

Controlled, kept, domesticated by ever larger doses of the antidote, the monstrous double (which is the same subject seen in back light) finally gains the upper hand over him who has tried to dominate him and carries him into the vortex. The degenerate is none other than the doctor himself, both his shadow and his ultimate truth. The only way to stop him is to put him to death *[dargli la morte]*, killing in the same act that self with whom he always coincides.

In the second story, that of Wilde, the divergence between self and other is accentuated. The double is no longer within the body of the subject, as was the case in Jekyll-Hyde, but is objectified in a portrait that both mirrors and betrays the original. It is what degenerates in his place—every time that he behaves in a debased way. The detachment from the real, which is to say from the constitutive alteration of the subject, is represented by the pall wrapped around the painting in order to hide it from everyone. Thus, the decay of the painted image—the projection of evil *[male]* outside itself—keeps death at a distance, ensuring the immortality of the subject. But, as in the previous case, the doubling cannot last for long. The mechanism breaks down and the image again assumes the face. The painted degeneration is in reality his own: "Upon the walls of the lonely locked room where he had spent so much of his boyhood, he had hung with his own hands the terrible portrait whose changing features showed him the real degradation of his life, and in front of it had draped the purple-and-gold pall as a curtain."[41] The final blow that Dorian delivers to the "monstrous

soul-life" inevitably returns to hit him, who has already been transformed into the image of the monster.[42] It is he who lies on the ground, dead "with a knife in his heart."[43] The killing of death—the autoimmunitary dream of man—reveals itself once again to be illusory: it can't do anything except reverse itself in the death of the same killer.

With *Dracula* the relationship between reality and its mythological representation moves decisively in favor of the latter. The forces of good appear to be posed frontally against those of evil in a project of definitive immunization against disease. The demon is projected outside the mind that has created it. He encapsulates in himself all of the characteristics of the degenerate—he is no longer the other in man, but the other from man *[dall'uomo]*. Both wolf, bat, and bloodsucker, he is above all the *principle of contamination*. Not only does he live on the blood of others, but he reproduces by multiplying himself in his victims. Just as in future manuals of racial hygiene, the ultimate crime committed is the biological one of the transmission of infected blood. He carried contamination, namely, Transylvania, into London homes; he immersed the other in the same *[nello stesso]* and consigned the same to the other. The championing of contemporary degenerative theory is so absolute that the text cannot fail to cite the relevant authors: "The Count is a criminal and of criminal type. Nordau and Lombroso would so classify him."[44] Just like the degenerate, he is not a true man, but has human features. He doesn't have an image, but continually changes appearance. He is not a type but a countertype. He belongs to the world of the "non"—no longer alive, he is still and above all else "undead," repulsed by life and by death into an abyss that cannot be bridged. He is an already dead, a half dead, a living dead, just as other vampires some fifty years later will be designated with the yellow star on their arms. His killing, with a stake through the heart and the head cut off, has the characteristics of salvific death that will be shortly enlarged liberally to include millions of "degenerates." To put an end to the "man that was," to that "carnal and unspiritual appearance," to the "foul Thing," means freeing not only those whom he threatens, but also himself, giving him finally back to that death to which he belongs and which he carries within him without being able to taste it:[45]

> But of the most blessed of all, when this now Un-Dead be made to rest as true dead, then the soul of the poor lady whom we love shall again be free . . . So that, my friend, it will be a blessed hand for her that shall strike the blow that sets her free.[46]

Eugenics

The eugenics movement will take up the task of translating these kinds of literary hallucinations into reality; the movement will flare up in the opening years of the 1900s as a purifying fire across the entire Western world (countered only by the Catholic church and the Soviet Lissenkim).[47] With respect to the theory of degeneration and its folds and internal antinomies, eugenics marks both a positive result and a sharp reduction in complexity. We need only draw the necessary conclusions: if civilized peoples are exposed to progressive degeneration, the only way to save them is by reversing the direction of the process that is under way, to remove what produces the disease that corrupts it so as to reinstate it in the horizon of goodness, health, and perfection. The substitution of the positive prefix "eu" with that of the negative "de" directly expresses this reconstructive intention. But the simplicity of the move doesn't explain a dual dislocation, above all from the descriptive level (where we find degenerative semantics) to that of the prescriptive. What was understood as a given or a process becomes with eugenics a project and a program of intervention; consequently, it moves from nature to artifice. While degeneration remains a natural phenomenon, completely within the sphere of *bíos,* the eugenic procedure is characterized by the technical *[tecnica],* which is certainly applied to life, but in a form that intends precisely to modify spontaneous development. In truth, the discourse of eugenics (more than that of nature as such) declares that it wants to correct procedures that have negatively influenced the course of nature. It begins with those social institutions and with those protective practices with regard to individuals who are biologically speaking inadequate with respect to natural selection (and which, if left to its own devices, natural selection would eliminate). The thesis variously repeated in all the texts in question is that artificial selection has no other purpose than that of restoring a natural selection that has been weakened or nullified by compensatory mechanisms of the humanitarian sort. But is it really the idea of an artificial reconstruction of the natural order that constitutes the problem—how to rehabilitate nature through artifice or how to apply artifice to nature without denaturalizing it? The only way to do so successfully is to adjust preventively the idea of nature to the artificial model with which nature wants to restore itself, rejecting as unnatural all that doesn't conform to the model. However, the negative that was to be neutralized now reappears: to affirm a good *genos* means negating what negates it from within. This is the reason that a positive eugenics (from the work of Francis Galton on), directed to

improving the race, is always accompanied by a negative eugenics, one designed to impede the diffusion of dysgenic exemplars. And yet, where would the space for increasing the best exemplars be found if not in the space produced by the elimination of the worst?

The concept of "racial hygiene" constitutes the median point of this categorical passage. It represents not only the German translation of the eugenic orientation, but something that discloses its essential nervation. We can trace a significant confirmation of the change in course in Wilhelm Schallmayer's essay, *Vererbung und Auslese im Lebenslauf der Völker: Eine staatswissenschaftlich Studie auf Grund der neueren Biologie* [Heredity and selection in the vital development of nations A social and scientific study based on recent biology].[48] If we keep in mind that the same author had written a book some years earlier, dedicated to treating the degeneration of civilized nations, we can clearly see the move that German political science makes vis-à-vis biology.[49] It is true that Schallmayer doesn't adopt Aryan racism, as was the case with Ludwig Woltmann in a contemporary piece titled *Politische Anthropologie.*[50] But this makes the biopolitical approach that it inaugurates even more important. Contrary to every hypothesis put forward by the democratic left for social reform, the power of the state is tied directly to the biological health of its members. By this it is understood that the vital interest of the nation resides in increasing the strongest and checking, in parallel fashion, the weak of body and of mind. The defense of the national body requires the removal of its sick parts. In his influential manual *Rassenhygiene,* Alfred Ploetz had furnished the most pertinent key for understanding the meaning of the transformation under way: race and life are synonymous to the degree in which the first immunizes the second with regard to the poisons that threaten it.[51] Born from the struggle of cells against infectious bacteria, life is now defended by the state against every possible contamination. Racial hygiene is the immunitary therapy that aims at preventing or extirpating the pathological agents that jeopardize the biological quality of future generations.

What is sketched here is a radical transformation of the notion of politics itself, at least in the modern sense of the expression. As was the case with Francis Galton, but still more in Karl Pearson's biometrics, politics appears to be pressed among the fields of mathematics, economics, and biology. The political choices of national organisms are to be derived rigidly from a calculation of the productivity of human life with regard to its costs. If it is possible to quantify the biological capital of a nation on the basis of

the vital qualities of its members, the division into zones of different value will be inferred. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to take such a value in an exclusively economic sense. If this seems to prevail in the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian matrices of eugenics, it doesn't in the German case. Certainly, the reference to a differential calculus between costs and revenues isn't lacking there either, but it is always subordinated to a more profound and underlying difference relative to the typology of human life as such. It isn't man that is valued on the basis of his economic productivity, but economic productivity that is measured in proportion to the human type to which it pertains. This helps to account for the extraordinary development of anthropology in Germany in the closing decades of the nineteenth into the first half of the following century, culminating in the 1930s and 1940s, which saw 80 percent of all anthropologists in Germany join the National Socialist party. It wasn't by chance that Vacher de Lapouge wrote in his *Essais d'Anthroposociologie* on *Race et milieu social* that "the revolution that bacteriology has produced in medicine, anthropology is about to produce in the political sciences.[52] What is at stake, even before its socioeconomic implications, is the definition of the human generally and its internal thresholds.

The distinction between races, both superior and inferior, more and less pure, already constitutes the first intraspecies *clivage,* apparently confirmed by Ludwik Hirszfeld and Karl Landsteiner's contemporary discovery of different blood groups: rather than being the representative of one genus, the *anthropos* is the container of radically diverse biotypologies that move from the superman (Aryan) to the anti-man (Jew), passing through the average man (Mediterranean) and the subhuman (Slavic).[53] But what matters more is the relation between such a *clivage* within the human race and what is situated outside with regard to others. In this sense, German anthropology worked closely with zoology on the one hand and botany on the other: man is situated in a line with diverse qualitative levels that include both plants and animals. Up to this point, nevertheless, we still remain within the confines of a classic evolutionist model. The new element that brings matters to a head lies, however, in the superimposition that progressively occurs when distinguishing among the various species—in the sense that one appears contemporaneously outside and inside the other. From here a double and crisscrossed effect: on the one side, the projection of established human types in the botanical and zoological "catalog"; on the other, the incorporation of particular animal and vegetable species within the human race. In particular this second step explains not only the growing

fortune of anthropology, but also the otherwise incomprehensible circumstance that Nazism itself never renounced the category of *humanitas,* on which it awarded the maximum normative importance. More than "bestializing" man, as is commonly thought, it "anthropologized" the animal, enlarging the definition of *anthropos* to the point where it also comprised animals of inferior species.[54] He who was the object of persecution and extreme violence wasn't simply an animal (which indeed was respected and protected as such by one of the most advanced pieces of legislation of the entire world), but was an *animal-man:* man in the animal and the animal in man. This explains the tragically paradoxical circumstance that in November 1933—which is to say some years before Doctor Roscher conducted experiments on the compatibility of human life with the pressure at twelve thousand meters high or with immersion in freezing water—the regime promulgated a circular that prohibited any kind of cruelty to animals, in particular with reference to cold, to heat, and to the inoculation of pathogenic germs. Considering the zeal with which the Nazis respected their own laws, this means that if those interned in the extermination camps had been considered to be *only* animals, they would have been saved. After all, in January 1937, Himmler expressed himself in similar terms when addressed the officers of the Wehrmacht: "I recently saw a seventy-two-year-old man who had just committed his seventy-third crime. To give the name animal to such a man would be offensive to the animal. Animals don't behave in such a fashion."[55] It isn't surprising that in August 1933, when Göring announced an end to "the unbearable torture and suffering in animal experiments," he went so far as to threaten to send to concentration camps "those who still think they can treat animals as inanimate property.[56]

Garland E. Allen notes how American eugenics, which was the most advanced at the beginning of the twentieth century, had its start in agriculture.[57] Its first organization was born of the collaboration between the American Breeders Association, the Minnesota Agricultural Station, and the School of Agriculture at Cornell University. Charles B. Davenport, the same Davenport who is considered to be the father of the discipline, had earlier attempted to form an agricultural company under the direction of the department of zoology at the University of Chicago in which Mendelian theories were to be experimented on domestic animals.[58] Subsequently, he turned to the Carnegie Foundation in Washington to finance a series of experiments on the hybridization and selection of plants. Finally, in 1910, with funds awarded him by the Harriman and Rockefeller families, he created a new center of

genetic experimentation, the Eugenics Records Office at Cold Spring Harbor, which was committed to the study of heredity in humans. The huge success of these initiatives is largely indicative of the relation that eugenics instituted between human beings, animals, and plants. Moreover, the periodicals born in that context, in particular *The American Breeders' Magazine, The Journal of Heredity,* and *Eugenical News,* ordinarily published works in which one moved from the selection of chickens and pigs to the selection of humans without posing the question of continuity between them. If a farmer or a breeder wants to encourage a better reproduction of vegetables and rabbits, or conversely, wants to block a defective stock, why, the exponents of the new science asked, should it be any different with man? In 1892, Charles Richet, vice president of the French Eugenics Society and future Nobel Prize winner (in 1913), prophesized that quite soon "one will no longer simply be content to perfect rabbits and pigeons but will try to perfect humans."[59] When, some decades later, Walther Darré, Reich Minister for Nutrition will advise Himmler to "transfer his attention from the breeding of herbs and the raising of chickens to human beings,"[60] Richet's prophecy will be realized. Even in their titles, two books published a year apart, Maurice Boigey's *L'élevage humain* and Charles Binet-Sanglé's *Le haras humain,* give the sense of the general inclination of anthropological discourse toward zoology, or better, toward their complete overlapping.[61] "Let us consider coldly the fact that we constitute a species of animal," exhorts Doctor Valentino, "and from the moment that our race is accused of degenerating, let's attempt to apply some principles of breeding to its improvement: let's regulate fecundation."[62] Vacher de Lapouge had already included in his project of *Sélections sociales* the services of a "rather restricted group of absolutely perfect males."[63] But the most faithful actualization of what Just Sicard de Plauzoles called "human zootechnics" was certainly the organization Lebensborn, or "font of life," which was founded by Himmler in 1935.[64] In order to augment the production of perfect Aryan exemplars, several thousand babies of German blood were kidnapped from their respective families in the occupied territories and entrusted to the care of the regime.

If "positive" eugenics was directed to the sources of life, negative eugenics (which accompanies the positive as its necessary condition) rests on the same terrain. Certainly, it was vigilant when it came to all the possible channels for degenerative contagion: from the area of immigration to that of matrimony, which were regulated by ever more drastic norms of racial

homogeneity. But "the most significant point . . . in its bio-sociological weight," as one Italian eugenicist expressed it, remained that of sterilization.[65] In addition, segregation was understood less as the restriction of personal freedom and more as the elimination of the possibility of procreation, as a sort of form of sterilization at a distance. It was no coincidence that several "feeble-minded" were given the choice between being segregated and being sterilized. The latter is the most radical modality of immunization because it intervenes at the root, at the originary point in which life is spread *[si comunica]*. It blocks life not in any moment of its development as its killer but in its own rising up—impeding its genesis, prohibiting life from giving life, devitalizing life in advance. It might seem paradoxical wanting to stop degeneration (whose final result was sterility) through sterilization, if such an antinomy, the negative doubling of the negative, wasn't an essential part, indeed the very basis of the immunitary logic itself. Therefore, on the question of sterilization the eugenicists never gave in and the Nazis made a flagship out of their own bio-thanatology. Certainly, criminals were already being castrated in 1865, but what was then considered above all else to be a punishment becomes something quite different with the development of the eugenics obsession. It concerned the principle according to which the political body had to be vaccinated beforehand from every disease that could alter the self-preserving function. Carrie Buck, a girl from Virginia who was sentenced to be sterilized after having been judged (like her mother) "weak in the mind" *[debole di mente]*, appealed her case to the County Court, the Court of Appeals, and finally to the Supreme Court. She charged that her rights had been violated under the Fourteenth Amendment (according to which no state shall deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law). Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, a eugenicist, rejected her appeal, however, for the following reasons:

> It is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind. The principle that sustains compulsory vaccination is broad enough to cover cutting the Fallopian tubes . . . Three generations of imbeciles are enough.[66]

Defined as "poor white trash," the girl was sterilized together with another 8,300 citizens of Virginia.

If the first immunitary procedure of eugenics is sterilization, euthanasia constitutes the last (in the ultimate meaning of the expression). In a bio-

political lexicon turned into its opposite, a "good" birth or nonbirth cannot but correspond to a "good" death. Attention among scholars has recently been directed to the book, published in 1920 by the jurist Karl Binding and by the psychiatrist Alfred Hoche, with the title *Die Freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Leben* [The authorization of the destruction of life unworthy of life].[67] But such a text, which seems to inaugurate a new genre, is already the result of an itinerary that ends (at least in Germany) in another work that is no less significant. I am speaking about Adolph Jost's essay *Das Recht auf den Tod* [The right to die], which twenty-five years earlier first introduced the concept of *negativen Lebenswert,* which is to say "life without value" (which was replaced with the right to end life in the case of an incurable disease).[68] Yet the difference (also with respect to Anglo-Saxon eugenics) is the progressive shift of such a right from the sphere of the individual to that of the state. While the first preserves the right/obligation to receive death, only the second possesses the right to give it. Where the health of the political body as a whole is at stake, a life that doesn't conform to those interests must be available for termination. Furthermore, as Jost asks, doesn't this already happen in the case of war, when the state exercises its right to sacrifice the lives of its soldiers for the common good? The new element here with respect to an argument that at bottom is traditional lies in the fact that it isn't so much that medical killing falls under the category of war as that war comes to be inscribed in a biomedical vision in which euthanasia emerges as an integral part.

In relation to this framework, Binding and Hoche's essay nevertheless signals a categorical opening that is anything but irrelevant, not only on the level of quantity (from the moment that the incurably ill, as well as the mentally retarded and deformed babies are added as potential objects of euthanasia), but also on the level of argumentation. From this point of view one might say that the juridical and biological competencies that the two authors represent achieve an even greater integration, which makes the one not only the formal justification but also the content of the other. It is as if the right/obligation to die, rather than falling from on high in a sovereign decision on the body of citizens, springs from their own vital makeup. In order to be accepted, death must not appear as the negation but rather as the natural outcome of certain conditions of life. In this way, if Binding is concerned about guaranteeing the legal position of doctors engaged in euthanasia through a complex procedure of asking for the consent of those who have been judged incapable of giving it, Hoche avoids the thorny

juridical question thanks to purely biological criteria: that death is juridically irreproachable not so much because it is justified by more pressing collective demands, but because the persons whom it strikes are *already* dead. The meticulous lexical research of those expressions that correspond to their diminished situation—"half-men," "damaged beings," "mentally dead," "empty human husks" *(Leere-Menschenhülsen)*, "human ballast" *(Ballastexistenzen)*—has precisely the objective of demonstrating that in their case death does not come from outside, because from the beginning it is part of those lives—or, more precisely, of these *existences* because that is the term that follows from the subtraction of life from itself. A life inhabited by death is simply flesh, an existence without life. This is the exact title of film that will later be made in order to instruct personnel working on T4, the Nazi euthanasia program: *Dasein ohne Leben* (Existence without life). Moreover, Hitler himself had juxtaposed existence and life according to an explicit hierarchy of values: "From a dead mechanism which only lays claim to existence for its own sake, there must be formed a living organism with the exclusive aim of serving a higher ideal."[69] Existence for the sake of existence, simple existence is dead life or death that lives, a flesh without body. In order to unravel the apparently semantic tension that is present in the title of Binding and Hoche's book, that of a "life unworthy of life," one need only substitute "existence" for the first term. The books are immediately balanced: the life unworthy of life is existence deprived of life—a life reduced to bare *[nuda]* existence.

The interval of value between existence and life is verified most clearly in a correlated doubling of the idea of humanity. We know the different qualitative thresholds introduced in the notion of humanity by the German anthropology of the period: *humanitas* is extended to the point of containing within it something that doesn't belong to it and indeed essentially negates it. Now, such a variety of anthropic typologies demands an analogous differentiation in the behavior of those to whom it might refer from a normative point of view. It isn't ethically human to refer to diverse types of people *[uomo]* in the same manner. Binding and Hoche had previously cautioned against "a swollen conception of humanity" and "an overevaluation of the value of life as such."[70] But against such a concept others offered a different and loftier notion of humanity, not only in relation to the collective body weakened by the unproductive weight of those of lesser worth *(Minderwertigen)*, but also to these latter ones. It was with this in mind, with the T4 Program in full operation, that Professor Lenz declared that

"detailed discussion of so-called euthanasia . . . can easily lead to confusion about whether or not we are dealing with a matter which affects the safeguarding of our hereditary endowment. I should like to prevent any such discussion. For, in fact, this matter is a purely humanitarian problem."[71] Furthermore, Lenz did nothing other than fully express a reasoning that had been made long before. That euthanasia was defined as *Gnadentod,* "mercy killing," "a death with pity," or "misericordious"—which, according to Italian eugenicist Enrico Morselli, comes from "misericord," the short-bladed knife used at one time to put an end to the suffering of the dying—is the result of the conceptual inversion that makes the victim himself the beneficiary of his own elimination.[72] With birth constituting his illness, that is to say the fact of being born against the will of nature, the only way to save the defective person from such a subhuman condition is that of handing him over to death and thereby liberating him from an inadequate and oppressive life. For this reason, the book that immediately follows Binding and Hoche's text has as its title *Die Erlösung der Menschheit vom Elend* [The liberation of humanity from suffering].[73] "Free those who cannot be cured" was also the invocation on which the film *Existence without Life* concluded. In France, where state-sponsored euthanasia was never effectively practiced, Binet-Sanglé, in his *L'art de mourir* suggests carrying out the final delivery from pain through gas by injecting morphine that will transport the beneficiary to the first level of "beatitude," while Nobel Prize winner Richet holds that those killed mercifully do not suffer and that, if they were to consider it only briefly, they would be grateful to those who saved them from the embarrassment of living a defective life.[74] Even before then, Doctor Antoine Wylm had warned:

> [F]or such beings that are incapable of a conscious and truly human life, death has less suffering than life. I realize there isn't a good probability that I will be heard. As for euthanasia, which I consider to be moral, many will object with a thousand arguments in which reason will not play any role whatsoever, but in which the most infantile sentimentalism will be freely bandied about. Let us wait for the opportune moment.[75]

Genocide

That moment arrived in the opening months of 1939, when Karl Brandt, Hitler's trusted personal physician, was given the responsibility together with Philipp Bouhler, the head of the Reich Chancellery, for beginning the process of euthanasia on children younger than three years of age who

were suspected of having "serious hereditary illnesses," such as idiocy, mongolism, microcephalia, idrocephalia, malformations, and spastic conditions. The ground had been meticulously prepared by the diffusion of films on the condition of the subhuman lives of the disabled, such as *Das Erbe* (Heredity), *Opfer der Vegangenheit* (Victim of the past), and *Ich klage an* (I accuse). The occasion for such steps was the request made to Hitler to authorize the killing of a baby by the name of Knauer, who was blind and was missing a leg and an arm. Just as soon as "mercy" was benevolently accorded him, a Reich's Committee was founded for assessing hereditary and serious congenital diseases, headed by Hans Hefelmann (who in fact had a degree not in medicine but in agricultural economics). Together with the committee a series of centers were set up, which were identified as "Institutions of Special Pediatrics" or even "Therapeutic Institutions of Convalescence," where thousands of children were killed by vernal injection or with lethal doses of morphine and scopolamine.

In October of the same year the decree was extended to adults as well and given the name T4 Program (from the address Tiergarten 4 in Berlin). The fact that the decree was backdated to the outbreak of the Second World War is the most obvious sign of the thanatopolitical character of Nazi biopolitics as well as the biopolitical character of modern war. Only in war can one kill with a therapeutic aim in mind, namely, the vital salvation of one's own people. Moreover, the program of euthanasia extended also geographically with the Eastern advance of German troops. Between 1940 and 1941, the Polish camps of Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibór, and Treblinka joined the six principal centers of elimination in Germany: Hartheim, Sonnensteim, Grafeneck, Bernburg, Brandenburg, and Hadamar. In the meantime, with the expansion of "special treatment" to include prisoners of war, the T4 project (which was still being implemented by doctors) was taken over by Operation I4f13 (from the reference number in the documents of the Camp Inspectorate). This too maintained its medical outlook, but now answered directly to the SS. It was also the point of passage to outright extermination: on January 20, in the so-called Wannsee conference that had been called by Reinhard Heydrich, the final solution was decided for all Jews.

That is what is defined as "genocide." From the moment when Raphael Lemkin, a professor of international law at Yale University, coined it in 1944, the term has continued to elicit discussion (and doubt).[76] Formed from a hybrid between the Greek root *genos* and the Latin suffix *cida* (from *caedere*), the word quickly found itself linked to similar, though not identical,

concepts, primarily that of "ethnocide" and "crimes against humanity." The result was a knot that was difficult to untie. What distinguishes the collective killing of the *genos* from that of *ethnos*? Is it the same thing when oppressors speak of "people" or of "race"? And what is the relation between the crime of genocide and that conceived in relation to the entire human species? Another difficulty of the historical variety was added to this first terminological problem. From the moment the subject of genocide is always a state and that every state is the creator of its own laws, it is difficult for the state that commits genocide to furnish a legal definition of the crime that it itself has committed. That said, scholars do concur that in order to be able to speak about genocide, the following minimum conditions must be met: (1) that there exists a declared intention of the part of the sovereign state to kill a homogeneous group of persons; (2) that such killing is potentially complete, that is, involves all its members; and (3) that such a group is killed insofar as it is a group, not for economic or political motives, but rather because of its biological constitution. It is clear that the genocide of the Jews on the part of the Nazis meets all these criteria. Still, to define the specificity of it is another matter, one that concerns the symbolic and material role of medicine to which we have so often drawn attention here: it involves the therapeutic purpose that is assigned to extermination from the beginning. Its implementers were convinced that only extermination could lead to the renewal of the German people. As emerges from the pervasive use of the term *Genesung* (healing) with regard to the massacre in progress, a singular logical and semantic chain links degeneration, regeneration, and genocide: regeneration overcomes degeneration through genocide.

All those authors who have implicitly or explicitly insisted on the biopolitical characterization of Nazism converge around this thesis: it is the growing implication between politics and life that introduces into the latter the normative caesura between those who need to live and those who need to die. What the immunitary paradigm adds is the recognition of the homeopathic tonality that Nazi therapy assumes. The disease against which the Nazis fight to the death is none other than death itself. What they want to kill in the Jew and in all human types like them isn't life, but the presence in life of death: a life that is already dead because it is marked hereditarily by an original and irremediable deformation; the contagion of the German people by a part of life inhabited and oppressed by death. The only way to do so seemed to be to accelerate the "work of the negative," namely,

to take upon oneself the natural or divine task of leading to death the life of those who had already been promised to it. In this case, death became both the object and the instrument of the cure, the sickness and its remedy. This explains the cult of the dead that marked the entire brief life of the Reich: the force to resist the mortal infection that threatened the chosen race could only come from dead ancestors. Only they could transmit to their descendants the courage to give or to receive a purifying death in relation to that other death that grew like a poisonous fungus in the soil of Germany and the West. It was this that the SS swore in a solemn pledge that seemed to correspond to the nature and the destiny of the German people. A response was needed to the presence of death in life (this was degeneration) by tempering life on the sacred fire of death: giving death to a death that had assumed the form of life and in this way had invaded life's every space. It was this insidious and creeping death that needed to be blocked with the aid of the saving Great Death bequeathed by the German heroes. Thus, the dead become both the infectious germs and the immunitary agents, the enemies to be extinguished and the protection to be activated. Confined to this double death and its infinite doubling, Nazism's immunitary machine wound up smashed *[ingranaggi]*. It strengthened its own immunitary apparatus to the point of remaining victim to it. The only way for an individual or collective organism to save itself definitively from the risk of death is to die. It was what Hitler asked the German people to do before he committed suicide.

If this was in general terms the deadly logic of the Nazi event *[vicenda]*, what were its decisive articulations and its principal immunitary *dispositifs*? I would indicate essentially three. *Absolute normativization of life* constitutes the first. In it we can say that the two semantic vectors of immunity, the biological and the juridical, for the first time are completely superimposed according to the double register of the biologization of the *nomos* and simultaneously that of the juridicalization of *bíos*. We have already seen the growth of the influence of biology, and in particular of medicine, which took place in all of the ganglions of individual and collective experience during those years. The doctors who had enjoyed great authority and prestige in Wilhelminian and Weimar Germany became more powerful in areas that had to that point been reserved for other expertises. In particular, their presence was made felt in courtrooms, where they accompanied (and in some cases surpassed) the magistrates in the application of restrictive and repressive norms. For example, when selecting individuals to undergo sterilization,

the legal commission, as well as the court of appeals, were composed of a judge and two doctors. The more the categories subjected to review were widened to include the practically unlimited field of racial deformities and social deviance, the more the power of medicine grew together with that of psychiatrists and anthropologists. The Nuremberg laws on citizenship and on the "protection of blood and the honor of the German people" further strengthened the position and power of medical doctors. When the programs of euthanasia finally began and the concentration camps came into operation, doctors became those priests of life and of death I spoke of earlier.[77]

This first side of the immunitary logic, which is attributable to the biologization of law *[diritto]*, need not, however, obscure the other side of the coin, which is to say the ever more extensive juridical (and therefore political) control of medicine. The more, in fact, the doctor was transformed into a public functionary, the more he lost autonomy with respect to the state administration on which, in the final analysis, he wound up depending. What was under way, in short, was a clear-cut transformation of the relation between patient, doctor, and state. While the relation between the first two terms was loosened, that of the second two was tightened. In the moment in which the cure (and before that still the diagnosis) was no longer a private but a public function, the doctor's responsibility was no longer exercised in relation to those who were sick, but rather to the state, the sole (and also secret) depository for archiving the conditions of the patient that before had been reserved for medicine. It is as if the role of the subject passed from the sick (who by now had become the simple object of biological definition and not of healing) to doctors, and from them in time to the state institution.[78] On the one hand, and as proof of this progressive consignment, the 1935 racial laws were not prepared by a committee of experts, as they had been the preceding year, but rather, directly by political personnel. On the other hand, if the regulations on hereditary disease still required a semblance of scientific judgment on the part of doctors, those concerning racial discrimination were assigned by pure chance. More than reflecting different biological caesuras within the population, they created them out of nothing. Doctors did nothing else except legitimate decisions with their signatures that had been made in the political sphere and translated into laws by the new legal codes of the Reich. Thus, a political juridicalization of the biological sphere corresponded to a biologization of the space that before had been reserved for juridical science.[79] To capture the essence of Nazi biopolitics, one must never lose sight of the interweaving

of the two phenomena. It is as if medical power and political-juridical power are mutually superimposed over each other through alternating points that are ultimately destined to completely overlap: this is precisely the claim that life is supreme, which provokes its absolute subordination to politics.

The concentration and later the extermination camps constitute the most symptomatic figure of such a chiasmus. The term "extermination" (from *exterminare*) already refers to a terminological leak, just as the word *elimination* alludes to a moving beyond the threshold that the Romans referred to as *limes*. Naturally, the structurally aporetic character of the camp resided in the fact that the "outside" or "beyond" were constituted in the form of an "inside" so "concentrated" as to make impossible any hope of escape. It is precisely insofar as it was "open" with respect to the closed model of the prison that the camp was proven to be forever sealed off. Closed, one would say, from its own opening, just as it is destined to be interned from its own exteriority. Now, such an obviously self-contradicting condition is nothing other than the expression of the indistinction that emerges between the horizon of life and that of law that has been completely politicized. Grabbing hold directly of life (or better, its formal dimension), law cannot be exercised but in the name of something that simultaneously makes it absolute and suspends it. Against the common conviction that the Nazis limited themselves to the destruction of the law, it is to be said instead that they extended it to the point of including within what also obviously exceeded it. Maintaining that they were removing life from the biological sphere, they placed all aspects of life under the command of the norm. If the concentration camp was certainly not the place of law, neither was it that of mere arbitrary acts. Rather, it was the antinomical space in which what is arbitrary becomes legal and the law arbitrary. In its material constitution, the camp reinstates the most extreme form of the immunitary negation, not only because it definitively superimposes the procedures of segregation, sterilization, and euthanasia, but also because it anticipates all that could exceed the deadly outcome. Ordered to lock up the perpetrators of crimes that hadn't yet been committed (and therefore were not prosecutable on the basis of laws in force), the camp is configured as a form of *Schutzhaftlager* ("preventive detention"), as was written above the entrance to Dachau. What was detained in advance, which is to say what is completely lacking *[destituire]*, was life as such, subjected to a normative presupposition that left no way out.

Nazism's second immunitary *dispositif* is the *double enclosure of the body*, that is, the enclosing of its own closure. It is what Emmanuel Levinas defined as the absolute identity between our body and ourselves. With respect to the Christian conception (but also differently from Cartesian tradition), all dualism between the ego *[io]* and body collapses. They coincide in a form that doesn't allow for any distinction: the body is no longer only the place but the essence of the ego. In this sense, one can well say that "the biological, with the notion of inevitability it entails, becomes more than an object of spiritual life. It becomes its heart."[80] We know the role that the theory of the transmission of germinative plasma played in this conception and, incidental to that, of psychosomatic heredity: man is completely defined by the past that he carries and that is reproduced in the continuity between generations. The terms used by Levinas of "enchantment" *(enchaînement)* and of a "nailing" *(être rivé)* with reference to one's biological being give the material sense of a grip from which one cannot escape.[81] When faced with it, it behooves us to accept it as both destiny and responsibility rather than trying vainly to break free. And that is true both for the one whose destiny is to be condemned unremittingly (which is to say the inferior man) and for the other who recognizes in it the mark of a proclaimed superiority. In any case, it's a matter of adhering to that natural layer from which one cannot escape. This is what is meant by double enclosure: Nazism assumes the biological given as the ultimate truth because it is the basis on the strength of which everyone's life is exposed to the ultimate alternative between continuation and interruption.

This doesn't mean that it resolves itself in an absolute materialism to be identified entirely in a radicalized version of Darwinian evolution. Although the propensity of such a sort did in point of fact exist, it was accompanied and complicated by another tendency in which some have wanted to see a sort of spiritual racism, represented, for example, in Rosenberg's position. In reality, these two lines are anything but in contradiction because from the very start they share a tangential point. In none of the writings of its theoreticians does Nazism deny what is commonly defined as "soul" or spirit—only it made out of these the means not to open the body toward transcendence, but rather to a further and more definitive enclosing. In this sense, the soul is the body of the body, the enclosing of its closing, what from a subjective point of view binds us to our objective imprisonment. It is the point of absolute coincidence of the body with itself, the consummation of every interval of difference within, the impossibility of

any transcendence.[82] In this sense, more than a reduction of *bíos* to *zōē* or to "bare life" (which the Nazis always opposed to the fullness of "life" understood in a spiritual sense as well), we need to speak of the spiritualization of *zōē* and the biologization of the spirit.[83] The name assumed by such a superimposition is that of race, which constitutes both the spiritual character of the body and the biological character of the soul. It is what confers meaning on the identity of the body with itself, a meaning that exceeds the individual borders from birth to death. When Vacher de Lapouge wrote that "what is immortal isn't the soul, a dubious and probably imaginary character: it is the body, or rather, the germinative plasma," he did nothing other than anticipate what Nazism will decisively elaborate.[84] The text in which this bio-theogony finds its most complete definition is Verschuer's manual of eugenics and racial heredity. Unlike in the old German state and in contemporary democracies in which one takes people to mean the sum of all citizens, which is to say, those individuals who inhabit state territory:

> [I]n the ethnic, National-Socialist state, we understand "people" or "ethnic" to be a spiritual and biological unity . . . ; the greatest part of the German people constitutes a great community of ancestors, which is to say a solidarity of blood relations. This biological unity of people is the foundation of an ethnic body, an organic structure of totalitarian character whose various parts are nothing less than the components of the same unity.[85]

This represents a further doubling or extension of that enclosure of the body on itself that Nazism placed at the center of its immunitary apparatus. Following the first operation, which remains at the level of the individual and the incorporation of the self within his own body, a second occurs by means of which every corporeal member finds himself in turn incorporated into a larger body that constitutes the organic totality of the German people. It is only this second incorporation that confers on the first its spiritual value, not in contrast to, but rather on the basis of, its biological configuration. But that is not all: connecting horizontally all the single bodies with the one body of the German community is the vertical line of hereditary patrimony "that, as a river, runs from a generation to the next."[86] It is only at this point in the biopolitical composite of this triple incorporation that the body of every German will completely adhere to itself, not as simple flesh, an existence without life, but as the incarnation of the racial substance from which life itself receives its essential form—provided, naturally, that it has the force to expel from itself all of that which doesn't belong to it (and for which reason hampers its expansive power). It is the

lethal outcome that inevitably derives from the first part of the discourse. "If one begins from this notion of 'people,'" Verschuer concludes, "demographic politics is that of the *protection of the ethnic body* by maintaining and improving the healthy patrimony, the elimination of its sick elements, and the conservation of the racial character of the people."[87] In this conceptual frame, it wasn't wrong to define genocide as the spiritual demand of the German people: it is only through the removal of the infected part that that body would have experienced profoundly its enclosing on itself and through it the belonging to what is shared with every other member: "Dein Körper gehört dem Führer" (Your body belongs to the Führer) was written on posters in Berlin. When the Nazi doctor Fritz Klein was asked how he could reconcile what he had done with the Hippocratic oath, he responded: "Of course, I am a doctor and I want to preserve life. And out of respect for human life, I would remove a gangrenous appendix from a diseased body. The Jew is the gangrenous appendix in the body of mankind."[88] The German *Völkerkörper* [people's body], which was filled to the brim, couldn't live without evacuating its purulent flesh. Perhaps for this reason, another of the German doctors defined Auschwitz as *anus mundi,* anus of the world.[89]

The third Nazi immunitary *dispositif* is represented by the *anticipatory suppression of birth,* which is to say not only of life but of its genesis. It is in this extreme sense that one ought to understand the declaration according to which "sterilization was the medical fulcrum of the Nazi biocracy."[90] It isn't a simple question of quantity. Certainly, between June 1933 and the beginning of the war, more than three hundred thousand people were, for various reasons, sterilized, not to mention that in the following five years the figure would grow exorbitantly. But it isn't only a question of increased sterilization. When speaking about sterilization, Nazism had something else in mind, a kind of excess whose full sense we have yet to understand. The Nazis assumed that those numbers, which were already enormous, represented a temporary limitation with regard to what they would want to do later; for his part, Lenz declared that up to a third of the German people would have to be sterilized. Waiting for that moment to arrive, the Nazis didn't waste any time. In September of 1934, the decree on obligatory abortion was approved for degenerate parents; in June 1935, castration of homosexuals; in February 1936, it was decided that women above the age of thirty-six were to be sterilized using X-rays. We could say that deciding which method to employ keenly interested Nazi medicine. When the practice of

sterilization was extended to prisoners, a real political-medical battle broke out (which is to say a thanatopolitical one) that centered on the most rapid and economical mode of operation. On the one side, there was the famous gynecologist Clauberg, the inventor of the test on the action of progesterone, who fervently supported the obstruction of the Fallopian tube. On the other side, there were Viktor Brack and Horst Schumann, who favored Roentgen rays. The result of both procedures was the atrocious suffering and death of a large number of women.

Despite the fact that both men and women were operated on without distinction, we know that it was the latter who were the principal victims of Nazi sterilization both in number (circa 60 percent) and, above all, in the frequency of death (90 percent). They were mutilated with all the pretexts in place, ones that even contradicted each other: because their husbands were psychopathic or, on the contrary, because they were unwed mothers. For those judged to be mentally deficient, the entire uterus was ablated rather than following the normal ligation of the ovarian tubes. When a number of women who had been threatened with sterilization responded with a sort of "pregnancy protest," obligatory abortion up to the seventh month of pregnancy was ordered. Moreover, in the concentration camps, maternity was punished by immediate death. To argue that all of this is the work of chance—or to obscure it in the general mechanism of extermination—would mean losing sight of the profound meaning of such an event. If we remember that the law on sterilization was in fact the first legislative measure adopted by the Nazis when in power (just as children were the first victims of euthanasia), it becomes clear that they wanted to strike at the beginning of life, life at the moment of birth. But we still haven't hit on the crux of the question. The complexity of the question will be found in the fact that these lethal measures were adopted in the midst of a pro-natalist campaign intent on strengthening the German population quantitatively as well.[91] It wasn't by chance that voluntary abortion was prohibited as a biological crime against the race, while funds were set aside for helping numerous families. How do we want to interpret such an obvious contradiction? What meaning is to be attributed to such a mingling of the production and prevention of life? How did the Nazis understand birth, and what tied birth to death?

A first response to the question lies in the distinction the Nazis wanted to make on more than one occasion between "regeneration" and "procreation." While the former, which was activated on the basis of official eugenic protocols, had to be supported at all costs, the latter (which occurred

spontaneously and unexpectedly) was to be governed strictly by the state. This means that the Nazis were anything but indifferent to the biological phenomenon of birth. In fact, they gave it their utmost attention, but in a form that subordinated it directly to political command. This is the biopolitical exchange that we know so well. On the basis of the racial heredity that birth carries with it, birth appears to determine the level of citizenship in the Reich according to the principle (and also the etymology) that links birth to the nation. In nowhere more than the Nazi regime, however, did the nation seem to take root in the natural birth of citizens of German blood. In reality, here as well, what was presented as the source of power was rather derived from power, which is to say it wasn't birth that determined the political role of the living being *[vivente]*, but its position in the political-racial calculation that predetermined the value of its birth. If this living being reentered the biopolitical enclosure dedicated to breeding, it was accepted or even encouraged; if it fell outside, it had to be suppressed even before it was announced.[92] Later, when indiscriminate extermination was at hand, not even this was sufficient. Neither was it enough to prevent birth, nor simply to prompt death. It was believed necessary to superimpose the two operations, thereby subjecting birth to death. Suspending *[interrompere]* life was too little—one needed to annul the genesis of life, eliminating all posthumous traces of life. In this sense, Hannah Arendt could write: "for the status of the inmates in the world of the living, where nobody is supposed to know if they are alive or dead, is such that it is as though they had never been born."[93] They simply did not exist. This is the logical reason for which, on the one hand, they could be killed an infinite number of times in the same day and, on the other, that they were prohibited from committing suicide. Their body without a soul belonged to the sovereign. Yet, in the biopolitical regime, sovereign law isn't so much the capacity to put to death as it is to nullify life in advance.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Philosophy of *Bíos*

Philosophy after Nazism

That biopolitics experienced with Nazism its most terrifying form of historical realization doesn't mean, however, that it also shared its destiny of self-destruction. Despite what one might think, the end of Nazism in no way signaled the end of biopolitics. To hypothesize in such a way not only ignores the long genesis of biopolitics (which is rooted in modernity), but also underestimates the magnitude of the horizon they share. Nazism didn't produce biopolitics. If anything, Nazism was the extreme and perverse outcome of a particular version of biopolitics, which the years separating us from the end of the regime have proven time and again. Not only hasn't the direct relationship between life and death been moderated, but, on the contrary, the relation appears to be in continual expansion. None of the most important questions of interest to the general public (which is fast becoming ever more difficult to distinguish from the private) is interpretable outside of a profound and often immediate connection with the sphere of *bíos*.[1] From the growing prominence of ethnicity in relations between peoples and state, to the centrality of the question of health care as a privileged index of the functioning of the economic system, to the priority that all political parties give in their platforms to public order—what we find in every area is a tendency to flatten the political into the purely biological (if not to the body itself) of those who are at the same time subjects and objects. The introduction of work in the somatic, cognitive, and affective sphere of individuals; the incipient translation of political action into domestic and international police operations; the enormous growth in migratory flows

of men and women who have been deprived of every juridical identity, reduced to the state of bare sustenance—these are nothing other than the clearest traces of the new scenario.[2] If we look then at the continuing indistinction between norm and exception that is tied to the stabilization of emergency legislation, we will find yet another sign of contemporary society's increasingly evident biopolitical characterization. That the obsessive search for security in relation to the threat of terrorism has become the pivot around which all the current governmental strategies turn gives an idea of the transformation currently taking place. From the politicization of the biological, which began in late modernity, we now have a similarly intense biologization of the political that makes the preservation of life through reproduction the only project that enjoys universal legitimacy.

From this perspective, however, it's opportune to recall that not only has the politics of life that Nazism tried in vain to export outside Germany—certainly in unrepeatable forms—been generalized to the entire world, but its specific immunitary (or, more precisely, its autoimmunitary) tonality has been as well. That the protection of biological life has become the largely dominant question of what now has for some time been called domestic and foreign affairs, both now superimposed on the unified body of a world without exterior (and hence without an interior), is an extraordinary acknowledgment of the absolute coincidence that has taken place between biopolitics and immunization. Fifty years after the fall of Nazism, the implosion of Soviet communism was the final step in this direction. It is as if at the end of what still saw itself as the last and most complete of the philosophies of history, life, which is to say the struggle for its protection/negation, had become global politics' only horizon of sense.[3] If during the cold war the immunitary machine still functioned through the production of reciprocal fear and therefore had the effect of deterring catastrophes that always threatened (and exactly for this reason never occurred), today, or at least beginning with September 11, 2001, the immunitary machine demands an outbreak of effective violence on the part of all contenders. The idea—and the practice—of preventive war constitutes the most acute point of this autoimmunitary turn of contemporary biopolitics, in the sense that here, in the self-confuting figure of a war fought precisely to avoid war, the negative of the immunitary procedure doubles back on itself until it covers the entire frame. War is no longer the always possible inverse of global coexistence, but the only effective reality, where what matters isn't only the specular quality that is determined between adversaries (who are to be

differentiated in their responsibility and original motivations), but the counterfactual outcome that their conduct necessarily triggers—in other words, the exponential multiplication of the same risks that would like to be avoided, or at least reduced, through instruments that are instead destined to reproduce them more intensely. Just as in the most serious autoimmune illnesses, so too in the planetary conflict presently under way: it is excessive defense that ruinously turns on the same body that continues to activate and strengthen it. The result is an absolute identification of opposites: between peace and war, defense and attack, and life and death, they consume themselves without any kind of differential remainder. That the greatest threat (or at least what is viewed as such) is today constituted by a biological attack has an obvious meaning: it is no longer only death that lies in wait for life, but life itself that constitutes the most lethal instrument of death. And what else besides a fragment of life is a kamikaze, except a fragment that discharges itself on the life of others with the intent of killing them *[portarvi la morte]*?

How does contemporary philosophy position itself when confronted with such a situation? What kind of response has it furnished to the questions literally of life and death that biopolitics opened in the heart of the twentieth century and that continue to be posed differently (though no less intensely) today? Certainly, the most pervasive attitude has been to repress or even ignore the problem. The truth is that many simply believed that the collapse of Nazism would also drag the categories that had characterized it into the inferno from which it had emerged. The common expectation was that those institutional and conceptual mediations that had permitted the construction and the resistance of the modern order would be reconstituted between life and death, which had been fatally joined together in the 1930s and 1940s. One could discuss—just as one continues wearily to do so today—whether a return to state sovereignty should be applauded, a sovereignty threatened by the intrusiveness of new supranational actors, or rather whether a hoped-for extension of the logic of law to the entire arena of international relations is possible. But they are always part of the old analytic framework derived from the Hobbesian matrix, perhaps with a sprinkling of Kantian cosmopolitanism thrown in for good measure, only to discover that such a model no longer works. In other words, the model reflects almost nothing of current reality, let alone is it able to provide effective tools that might prefigure its transformation. This isn't only because of the incongruence of continuing to contrast possible options (such as those

related to individual rights and sovereign power) that have from the start been reciprocally functional in the development of each from the instant that rights are not given without a sovereign power (be it national or imperial) that demands they be respected. Similarly, there doesn't exist a sovereignty that lacks some kind of juridical foundation. It's not by accident that the stunning deployment of sovereign power *[potenza]* on the part of the American imperial state is justified precisely in the name of human rights. More generally, however, the simple fact is that we can't run history backwards, which is to say Nazism (more so than communism) represents the threshold with respect to the past that makes every updating of its lexical apparatus impractical. Beginning with that threshold (which is both historical and epistemological), the biopolitical question can no longer be put off. It can, indeed needs, to be reversed with respect to the thanatological configuration that it assumed in Hitler's Germany, but not directed toward modernity, if for no other reason than because biopolitics contradictorily originates in it in both modality and intensity. This is different from the form it subsequently took in Nazi Germany.

Hannah Arendt was the person who understood early the modern roots of biopolitics, using an interpretive key that recasts its reason and even its semantic legitimacy. Contrary to the pervasive thesis that ties modernity to the deployment of politics, she not only refers it back to depoliticization, but ascribes the process to a crisis in the category of life in place of the Greek conception of the world held in common. Christianity constitutes the decisive step within such an interpretive scheme, representing in fact the original horizon in which the concept of the sacredness of individual life is affirmed for the first time (albeit inflected in an otherworldly sense). It will be sufficient that modernity secularizes it, moving the center of gravity from the celestial realm to that of the earth, to prompt that reversal in perspective that makes biological survival the highest good. From there "the only thing that could now be potentially immortal, as immortal as the body politic in antiquity and as individual life during the Middle Ages, was life itself, that is the possibility, the possibly everlasting life process of the species mankind."[4] But it is precisely the affirmation of a modern *conservatio vitae* with respect to the Greek interest for a common world that, according to Arendt, sets in motion that process of depoliticization that culminates when work that satisfies material necessities became the prevalent form of human action. Beginning from that moment,

> none of the higher capacities of man was any longer necessary to connect individual life with the life of the species; individual life became a part of the life process, and to labor, to assure the continuity of one's own life and the life of his family, was all that was needed. What was not needed, not necessitated by life's metabolism with nature, was either superfluous or could be justified only in terms of a peculiarity of human as distinguished from other animal life.[5]

It is exactly the process that Foucault will define shortly thereafter in biopolitical terms: individual life integrated in the life of the species and made distinct through a series of internal breaks in zones of different worth. But it is also the point at which Arendt's discourse tacks in a different direction, diverging from the one initiated by Foucault.[6] From the moment that the entrance of the question of life onto the scene of the modern world coincides with the withdrawal of politics under the double pressure of work and production, the term "biopolitics" (just as for the Marxian term "political economy") emerges devoid of any sense. If political activity is considered in theory to be heterogeneous to the sphere of biological life, then there can never be an experience (precisely biopolitical) that is situated exactly at their point of intersection. That such a conclusion rests on the unverified premise according to which the only valid form of political activity is what is attributable to the experience of the Greek *polis*—from which a paradigmatic separation is assumed irreflexively between the private sphere of the *idion* and the public sphere of the *koinon*—determines the blind spot that Arendt reaches concerning the problem of biopolitics: where there is an authentic politics, a space of meaning for the production of life cannot be opened; and where the materiality of life unfolds, something like political action can no longer emerge.

The truth is that Arendt didn't think the category of life thoroughly enough and therefore was unable to interpret life's relationship with politics philosophically. This is particularly surprising for the author who more than anyone else elaborated the concept of totalitarianism (unless it was precisely the specificity of what Levinas has defined as the "philosophy" of Hitlerism that eludes her or is at least hidden from her). It would have been easy to grasp its nature, to penetrate into the machine of Nazi biopolitics, beginning with a reflection on politics that is strongly marked by a reference to the Greek *polis*. The problem (relative not only to Arendt) is that such a reflection doesn't provide direct access from political philosophy, be it modern or premodern, to biopolitics. In its biocratic essence, Nazism

remains mute for classical political thought. It is no coincidence that a radically impolitical thinker such as Heidegger conducted a real philosophical comparison with it (although in an implicit and reticent form). Yet he was able to attempt it, that is, to think the reverse of the question Nazism raised for world history, because his starting point, in a certain sense, was the same presupposition, which is to say the "end of philosophy," or better, its extroversion in something that can be called existence, world, or life, but which, however, cannot be comprehended in modern categories of subject and object, individual and universal, and empirical and transcendental. When in 1946 he wrote *Letter on Humanism* in the darkest moment of defeat (a defeat that was also personal), he wrestled precisely with this question. What he seeks, in the abyss that Nazi thanatopolitics had excavated, is a response capable of meeting it on its own terms, without, that is, having recourse to that humanistic lexicon that did not know how to avoid it (or even had contributed to laying the groundwork for it). Not only does his entire reflection on technology *[tecnica]* move in this direction, but also the ontological transposition of what tradition had defined each time as "subject," "consciousness," or "man" responds to the necessity of sustaining the comparison with the powers of nihilism *[potenze del niente]* on their same level. In this sense, the invitation to think against humanism is to be interpreted "because it does not set the *humanitas* of man high enough," as well as that in line with "the world historical moment," to a meditation "not only about man but also about the 'nature' of man, not only about his nature but even more primordially about the dimension in which the essence of man, determined by Being itself, is at home."[7]

Furthermore, Heidegger didn't wait for the end of the war and the fall of Nazism to undertake his reflection on the nature of man removed from that language (however humanistic) of liberal, Marxist, or existentialist ascendancy that was left undefended with regard to Nazism and the question of *bíos*. Indeed, the entire thematic of the "factical life" *(faktisches Leben)* that he took up from the beginning of the 1920s in his Freiburg courses, first in dialogue with Paul and Augustine and then with Aristotle, implied the refusal to subject the primary or concrete experience of life to the scrutiny of theoretical or objectivizing categories that were still rooted in the transcendence of the subject of knowledge—where the disruptive element with respect to the classic framework goes well beyond the results of the "philosophy of life" that authors such Dilthey, Rickert, and Bergson had elaborated in those years, to take form instead in an unsettling of both

the terms and even more of the relation that binds them.[8] Not only is factical life, the facticity *[fatticità]* of life, not to be derived through a traditional philosophical investigation, but it is situated precisely in its reversal. That doesn't mean that the horizons do not intersect, namely, that the vital experience is closed to philosophical interrogation (or worse abandoned to the flux of irrationality). What it does mean is that philosophy is not the site in which life is defined, but rather that life is the primogenital root of the same philosophy:

> The categories are not inventions or a group of logical schemata as such, "lattices"; on the contrary, they are *alive in life itself* in an original way: alive in order to "form" life on themselves. They have their own modes of access, which are not foreign to life itself, as if they pounced down upon life from the outside, but instead are precisely the preeminent way in which *life comes to itself.*[9]

Already here, in this withdrawal of life from any categorical presupposition, we cannot miss seeing a connection, one that is certainly indirect, partial, and differential, with that much more immediate primacy of *bíos* that a decade later will constitute with Nazism the vitalistic battering ram against every form of philosophy. Still, this doesn't exhaust the area of the possible comparison between the thought of Heidegger and the open problem of Nazi biopolitics, not only because *bíos* echoes in the factical life that is one with its effective dimension and coincides immediately with its modes of being, but also because of the possibility or the temptation to interpret life politically (or at least negatively). If the facticity of life, which in *Being and Time* is assumed under the name of *Dasein,* doesn't respond to any external instance, from the moment that it isn't attributable to any preconstituted philosophical design, then only life is vested with its own decision of existence. But how is a life or being there *[esserci]* configured so that it can decide for itself *[su se stessa],* or even that it *is* such a decision, if not in an intrinsically political modality? What opens the possibility of thinking *bíos* and politics within the same conceptual piece is that [first] at no point does authentic being *[poter-essere]* exceed the effective possibility of being there *[dell'esserci],* and second that the self-decision of this being is absolutely immanent to itself. It is from this side, precisely because it is entirely impolitical, which is to say irreducible to any form of political philosophy, that Heidegger's thought emerges in the first half of the twentieth century as the only one able to support the philosophical confrontation with biopolitics.

That Heidegger faced the question of biopolitics doesn't mean that he took on its language or shared its premise, namely, the preeminence of life in relation to being in the world. Indeed, we might say that he expressed a point of view diametrically opposed to it: the biological category of life isn't the site from which the thinkability of the world opens, but is exactly the contrary. If the phenomenon of living always emerges as a living "in" or "for" or "with" something that we can indicate with the term "world," we need to conclude that "world is the basic category of the content-sense in the phenomenon, life."[10] The world isn't the container or the environment, but the content of the sense of life. It is the ontological horizon out of which only life becomes accessible to us. Thus, Heidegger distances himself both from those who, like Arendt, radically set the sphere of life against that of the world (understood as the public sphere of acting in common), and from those who reduced the world to a place for the biological deployment of life. Without being able to follow in detail the internal passages or the diachronic moments of Heidegger's discourse, one could generally trace them back to an underlying tendency to keep "factical life" apart from biology.

> Biological concepts of life are to be set aside from the very outset: unnecessary burdens, even if certain motives might spring from these concepts, which is possible, however, only if the intended grasp of human existence as life remains open, preconceptually, to an understanding of life which is essentially older than that of modern biology.[11]

Even later, when Heidegger will dedicate an entire section of his 1929–30 course to *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics,* this diffidence or categorical deformity with respect to biology will not collapse. It isn't that he doesn't come into contact with some of the principal biologists of the time, as is demonstrated not by the frequent references to Driesch, Ungerer, Roux, and above all Uexküll, and by the protocols from the seminars of Zollikon, which were held specifically with a group of doctors and psychiatrists. It is precisely these protocols that allow us to see (despite the declarations of reciprocal interest) a marked communicative difficulty, if not indeed a true and precise categorical misunderstanding between conceptual lexicons that are profoundly heterogeneous. "Quite often," admits Dr. Medard Boss, who was also tenaciously involved in a complex operation of semantic loops, "the situations in the seminars grew reminiscent of some imaginary scene: It was as if a man from Mars were visiting a group of earth-dwellers in an attempt to communicate with them."[12]

Why? What are we to make of this substantial untranslatability between Heidegger's language and that of the doctors and biologists whose intention was still to be receptive? Above all, what does it suggest in relation to our inquiry? If we recall that Nazi biopolitics was characterized by the domination of the category of life as opposed to the category of existence—"existence without life" was what was given over *[destinata]* to death both in principle and in point of fact—it wouldn't be arbitrary to see in Heidegger's polemic concerning biologism a form of advance counterposition. Without wanting to homologize profoundly different terminologies (as can only be the case between the most significant philosopher of the twentieth century and the merchants selling death at a discount), we could say that Heidegger reverses the prevalent relation instituted by the latter: it isn't existence that emerges as deficient or lacking in relation to a life that has been exalted in its biological fullness, but life that appears defective with respect to an existence understood as the only modality of being in the openness of the world. Furthermore, life defined biologically doesn't have the attributes of *Dasein*, but is situated in a different and incomparable dimension with respect to the horizon of the latter. It can only be deduced negatively from *Dasein* as that which isn't it, precisely because it is "only life" *(Nur Lebenden);* as "something that only lives" *(etwas wie Nur-noch-leben):*

> Life has its own kind of being, but it is essentially accessible only in Da-sein. The ontology of life takes place by way of a privative interpretation. It determines what must be the case if there can be anything like just-being-alive. Life is neither pure objective presence, nor is it Da-sein. On the other hand, Da-sein should never be defined ontologically by regarding it as life—(ontologically undetermined) and then as something else on top of that.[13]

But the contrastive symmetry between Heidegger and Nazi biopolitics doesn't end there, not only because both for the former and the latter life and existence emerge as linked by a relation of excluding implication—in the sense that one is defined by its not being equal to the other—but in both cases the differential comparison is constituted by the experience of death. It is precisely here, nevertheless, that the two perspectives definitively diverge. While in Nazi thanatopolitics death represents the presupposition of life even before its destiny, a life emptied of its biological potentiality *[potenza]* (and therefore reduced to bare existence), for Heidegger death is the authentic *[proprio]* mode of being of an existence distinct from bare life. Certainly, the latter life dies too, but in a form lacking in meaning that, rather than a true dying *(sterben),* refers to a simple perishing, to a

ceasing to live *(verenden)*. In this manner, what simply lives *[vivente]* cannot be defined in a fully mortal sense of the word, as can he who experiences his own death, but rather as the end of life, as that which from the beginning confers meaning on life. At this point, the relation between Nazi biopolitics and Heidegger's thought is delineated in all its antinomy. While in the first the sovereign structure of biopolitics resides in the possibility of submitting every life to the scrutiny of death, for the second the intentionality of death constitutes the original political form in which existence is "decided" in something that always resides beyond simple life.

Yet we can single out the point of Heidegger's greatest divergence from Nazi biopolitics in his treatment of that living specificity that is the animal. In this case as well, the point of departure is in a certain sense the same: not only what is the animal, but also how it is situated in relation to the world of man. We know how Nazism responds to such a question, in what was the culmination of a tradition born at the crossroads between Darwinian evolutionism and degenerative theory: the animal, more than a separate species from the human, is the nonhuman part of man, the unexplored zone or the archaic phase of life in which *humanitas* folds in on itself, separating itself through an internal distinction between that which can live and that which has to die. Previously in *Being and Time* (and then in a more articulated fashion in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*) and then in the later *Contributions to Philosophy,* Heidegger travels in a different direction.[14] The question of *animalitas* is nothing but a particularly relevant specification of the relation that was already instituted between the sphere of *Dasein* and that of simple living beings. When this latter assumes the features of the animal species, the separation with respect to the one who exists in the mode of being there *[esserci],* that is, man, becomes clearer. That the animal is defined, according to the famous tripartition, as "poor of the world" *(weltarm),* unlike that of the stone, which is "without the world" *(weltlos),* and then precisely of man, who is "the creator of the world" *(weltbildend),* is in fact a way of marking an insurmountable distance in relation to human experience. It is opposed to the animalization of man, not only the one theorized but also the one the Nazis put into practice; here Heidegger situates man well on the outside of the horizon of the animal. Man is so incomparable to the animal that he is not even able to conceptualize the condition if not by inferring it as the negative of his own proper condition. The expression "poor of the world" doesn't indicate a lesser level of participation in a common nature with all living beings,

including man, but an insurmountable barrier that excludes any conjugated form. Contrary to a long-standing tradition that thought man as the *rational animal*—an animal to which is added the charisma of *logos* to make him noble (according to the classic formulation of the *zōon logon echon*), man is precisely the *non*animal, just as the animal is the *non*human living being *[vivente]*. Despite all the attempts directed at tracing the affinity, symmetry, and copresence (perhaps in the existential dimension of boredom), the two universes remain reciprocally incommunicable.[15] As Heidegger writes in *Letter on Humanism:*

> It might seem as though the essence of divinity is closer to us than what is foreign in other living creatures, closer, namely, in an essential distance which however distant is nonetheless more familiar to our ek-sistant essence than is our appealing and scarcely conceivable bodily kinship with the beast.[16]

Exactly these kinds of passages, however, if they work in completely sheltering Heidegger from the thanatopolitical drift of Nazism, risk drawing him 360 degrees in the opposite direction, close to that humanism from which he had carefully distanced himself. Naturally, the entire movement of this thought (which is oriented in an ontological direction) makes impossible not only the reproposition of an anthropocentric model, but also any concept of human nature as such—autonomous from the being to whose custody man seems called. Precisely this decentering of man (or recentering of being) is connected, however, in the course of Heidegger's work, to a progressive loss of contact with the theme of "factical life" in which the semantics of *bíos* seemed inevitably implicated. It is as if the originary impulse to think life in the "end of philosophy" (or the end of philosophy in the facticity of life) slowly flows back with the effect of dissolving its same object. Wishing to trace the terms of an extremely complicated question back to an abbreviated formulation, we could say that the absolute distance that Heidegger places between man and animal is the same as that which comes to separate always in ever more obvious fashion his philosophy from the horizon of *bíos*.[17] And that is precisely because it risks entrusting *bíos* to nonphilosophy, or better, to that antiphilosophy that was terrifyingly realized in the 1930s in its most direct politicization. That it occurred exactly in that phase of Heidegger's thought, even briefly, becoming the prey of that antiphilosophy, is to be interpreted differently and in a more complex manner than it has been to now. It probably wasn't an excess of nearness but an excess of distance from both the vital and moral

questions raised by Nazism that made Heidegger lose his bearings. Precisely because he didn't enter deeply enough (and not because he entered too much) into the dimension of *bíos* that is in itself political, in the rapport between qualified existence and biological life, he wound up abandoning it to those whose intention was to politicize it until it shattered. Once again the black box of biopolitics remained closed with Heidegger.

Flesh

Apparently, if we are to open the black box of biopolitics we shouldn't limit ourselves to skirting Nazi semantics, or for that matter confronting it from the outside. Something more is required and it has to do with penetrating within it and overturning one by one its bio-thanatological principles. I am referring in particular to the three *dispositifs* that I examined at the conclusion of the preceding chapter: *the normativization of life, the double enclosure of the body,* and the *preemptive suppression of birth.* Yet what does it mean exactly to overturn them and then to turn them *inside out*? The attempt we want to make is that of assuming the same categories of "life," "body," and "birth," and then of converting their immunitary (which is to say their self-negating) declension in a direction that is open to a more originary and intense sense of *communitas.* Only in this way—at the point of intersection and tension among contemporary reflections that have moved in such a direction—will it be possible to trace the initial features of a biopolitics that is finally affirmative. No longer over life but of life, one that doesn't superimpose already constituted (and by now destitute) categories of modern politics on life, but rather inscribes the innovative power of a life rethought in all its complexity and articulation in the same politics. From this point of view, the expression "form-of-life," or precisely what Nazi biopolitics excluded through the absolute subtraction of life from every qualification, is to be understood more in the sense of a vitalization of politics, even if in the end, the two movements tend to superimpose themselves over one another in a single semantic grouping.

Our point of departure, therefore, will be the *dispositif* of enclosure, or better, the *double enclosure,* of the body, which Nazism understood both as the chaining of the subject onto his own body and as the incorporation of such a body in that extensive body of the German ethnic community. It is only this last incorporation, which is radically destructive of everything that is held not to be a part of it, that also confers on the subject's body that spiritual substance that has the value of the absolute coincidence of

the body with respect to itself. Naturally, this powerful ideologemme is an integral part of a biopolitical design that is already predisposed for such a paroxysmal outcome. This, however, doesn't change the fact that in it merges, or exerts an influence on, a vector of broader meaning (but also more ancient) that is part of the already classical metaphor of "political body" and, more generally, on the relation between politics and body. What I want to say is that each time the body is thought in political terms, or politics in terms of the body, an immunitary short-circuit is always produced, one destined to close "the political body" on itself and within itself in opposition to its own outside. And that is irrespective of the political orientation—either right or left, reactionary or revolutionary, monarchical or republican—to which such an operation pertains. In each of these cases, in fact, what constitutes the features either of the absolutist-Hobbesian or the democratic-Rousseauian line (without introducing genealogies even more remote in time) is the organistic model that joins every member of the body to its assumed unification. Even in contractual theories in which the political body is presented as the result of an agreement between multiple individual wills, or as the outcome of a single general will, the political body in reality is precedent to and propaedeutic to their definitions of it. It is because the political body is already inscribed in a single body that its parts can or must be consolidated in an identical figure whose object precisely is the self-preservation of the political organism as a whole. Despite all of the autonomistic, individualistic, and fragmenting impetuses that have periodically ensnared (or contradicted) this general process of incorporation, its logic has largely prevailed in the constitution and the development of nation-states, at least until modern political categories will be able to elaborate productively their own immunitary function of the negative protection of life.[18]

Then, when such a mechanism breaks down, or when the immunitary demands grow until it overflows the banks of modern mediation, totalitarianism, and in particular Nazism, produced an additional enclosure of the body on itself through a double movement. On the one side, it made absolutely coterminus political identity with the racial-biological; on the other, it incorporated into the same national body the line of distinction between inside and outside, which is to say between the portion of life that is to be preserved and what is to be destroyed. The individual and collective body—the one in the other and the one for the other—was immunized in this way, before and beyond the outside and its own surplus or

lines of flight. These emerged as interrupted by a refolding of the body on itself that had the function of providing a spiritual nucleus or a surplus of meaning, to what was also considered to be absolutely biological. The concept of the political body was made functional to this direct tradition of life in politics as its antithesis, more so than to what is outside it, namely, to that part of itself judged to be not up to *[inidonea]* a similar bio-spiritual conversion. We previously saw how the first name that the Nazis gave to such an abject material was that of "existence" (because it was resistant to the double corporeal subsumption); "existence without life" is considered to be all that does not have the racial qualifications necessary to integrate ethnically the individual body with that of the collective.[19] But perhaps a more meaningful term is that of *flesh,* because it is intrinsic to the same body from which it seems to escape (and which therefore expels it). Existence without life is flesh that does not coincide with the body; it is that part or zone of the body, the body's membrane, that isn't one with the body, that exceeds its boundaries or is subtracted from the body's enclosing.

Merleau-Ponty is the twentieth-century philosopher who more than any other elaborated the notion of flesh. To recognize in his work a specific feature of the biopolitical reflection or even only an enervation of *bíos* would certainly be misleading, given the substantially phenomenological scope in which his philosophical considerations are situated.[20] This doesn't mean, however, that the theme of flesh tends precisely to exceed it in a direction not so far removed from what we brought together under the Heideggerian thematic of the "factical life." As in that case, so too the horizon of flesh *[chair]* is disclosed in the point of rupture with the traditional modality of philosophy that poses the latter in a tense and problematic relation with its own "non." When in a text titled *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy Beginning with Hegel,* Merleau-Ponty refers to the necessity that "philosophy also becomes worldly," philosophy has already shifted in a conceptual orbit in which the entire philosophical lexicon is subjected to a complete rotation on its own axis.[21] It is in this radical sense that the proposition according to which "what we are calling flesh, this interiorly worked-over mass, has no name in any philosophy" is to be understood.[22] It has no name because no philosophy has known how to reach that undifferentiated layer (and thus for this reason exposed to difference), in which the same notion of body, anything but enclosed, is now turned outside *[estroflessa]* in an irreducible heterogeneity. What this means is that the question of flesh is inscribed in a threshold in which thought is freed from every self-referential modality in

favor of directly gazing on contemporaneity, understood as the sole subject and object of philosophical interrogation. From this point of view, the theme of flesh lends itself to a symptomatic reading that can also push beyond the intentions expressed by Merleau-Ponty because it is rooted therefore within the series of questions that his philosophy opened with a lexical originality at times unequaled by Heidegger himself. Without wanting in any way to propose an inadmissible comparison between the two, one could say instead that the blind point of Heidegger's analysis of *bíos* is born precisely from a missing or inadequate encounter with the concept of flesh.

Didier Franck's thesis is that Heidegger's wasn't able to think fully the notion of flesh because it is a category that is constituted spatially, and that therefore appears to be irreducible to the temporal modality that Heidegger traced in being.[23] Now, it is precisely at this point that Merleau-Ponty introduces a different perspective, beginning with an approach (but also a semantics) that is more traceable to Husserl than to Heidegger. It is from Husserl in fact that Merleau-Ponty infers not only the theme of the reversibility between sentient and felt *[senziente e sentito]*, but also that of a relation of otherness that is destined to force open the identity presupposed by the body proper. When, in a fragment from *The Visible and the Invisible,* he writes that "my body is made of the same flesh as the world (it is perceived), and moreover that this flesh of my body is shared by the world," he takes another step that brings him into a semantic range that is situated beyond both phenomenology and an existential analytic.[24] That the world is the horizon of meaning in which the body recognizes itself and which is traversed by the diversity that keeps it from being coterminous with itself, means that it has surpassed not only a Husserlian transcendentalism but also the Heideggerian dichotomy between existence and life.[25] If, for Heidegger, *bíos* does not recognize any of the modes of being that distinguish a fundamental ontology, in Merleau-Ponty it is precisely living flesh that constitutes the tissue of relations between existence and the world. Here, then, not only does the spatiality of flesh allow us to recuperate a temporal dimension, but it constitutes precisely their tangential point.

> Oppose to a philosophy of history such as that of Sartre . . . not doubtlessly a philosophy of geography . . . but a philosophy of structure which, as a matter of fact, will take form better on contact with geography than on contact with history . . . In fact it is a question of grasping the *nexus*—neither "historical" nor "geographic" of history and transcendental geology, this very time that is space, this very space that is time, which I will have

> rediscovered by analysis of the visible and the flesh, the simultaneous *Urstiftung* of time and space which makes there be a historical landscape and a quasi-geographical inscription of history.[26]

Can we read such a composite of flesh, world, and history in terms of "mondialization"? It would be imprudent to respond absolutely yes (at least considering Merleau-Ponty's personal journey). But it would be equally reductive to deny that he is the author who pushed further than others the theoretical declination of the relation between body and world. Not only, but he, before any one else, also understood that the enlargement of the body to the dimension of the world (or the configuration of the world as a singular body) would fragment the same idea of "political body," in its modern as well as in its totalitarian declensions. This is for no other reason than because, not having anything outside itself (and for that reason making it one with its own outside), such a body wouldn't be able to be represented as such—doubling upon itself in that self-identical figure, which, as we saw, constitutes one of the most terrible immunitary *dispositifs* of Nazi biocracy. For us as well as for Merleau-Ponty, the flesh of the world represents the end and the reversal of that doubling. It is the doubling up *[sdoppiamento]* of the body of all and of each one according to leaves that are irreducible to the identity of a unitary figure: "It is because there are these 2 doublings-up that are possible: the insertion of the world between the two leaves of my body [and] the insertion of my body between the two leaves of each thing and of the world."[27] That the fragment—already marked by the reference to the "thing" as the possible bridge between body and world—continues with reference to a perspective that "isn't anthropologism," further attests to the lateral move that Merleau-Ponty makes with regard to Heidegger. In the same moment in which Merleau-Ponty distances himself from anthropology (in a direction that, even if indirectly, refers to a Heideggerian ontology), he frees himself from Heidegger's ontology by assuming in the place of an object/subject not only every form of life from the human to the animal, but especially (or even) what was that "poor of the world" situated in unsurpassable remoteness from the universe of *Dasein*.[28] Again, by alluding to a "participation of the animal in our perceptive life and to the participation of our perceptive life in animality," Merleau-Ponty penetrates more deeply than Heidegger does into the most devastating imaginary of our epoch, expressing himself more forcefully against it.[29] Inscribing the threshold that unites the human species with that of the animal in the flesh of the world, but also the margin that joins the living and the nonliving,

Merleau-Ponty contributes to the deconstruction of that biopolitics that had made man an animal and driven life into the arms of nonlife.

We might be surprised that the theme of flesh, which Merleau-Ponty took up in the 1950s, remained on the margins of contemporary philosophical debates, and even more that it was treated coolly and with a certain diffidence on the part of many from whom more attention and interest might have been expected.[30] If for Lyotard the evocation of the chiasmus that flesh operates between body and world runs the risk of slipping into a "philosophy of erudite flesh," closed to the onset of the event, Deleuze sees in the "curious Fleshism" of more recent phenomenology not only a feature that deviates from what he himself defines as the "logic of sensation," but both "a pious and a sensual notion, a mixture of sensuality and religion."[31] As for Derrida, aside from the philological perplexities that he advances on the translation of the French *chair* [flesh] into the German *Leib*, he doesn't hide his fear that an immoderate use of the term can give rise to a sort of generic "globalization *[mondalisation]* of flesh": "By making flesh ubiquitous, one runs the risk of vitalizing, psychologizing, spiritualizing, interiorizing, or even reappropriating everything, in the very places where one might still speak of the nonproperness or alterity of flesh."[32] But it is perhaps Jean-Luc Nancy, to whom Derrida's texts were, however, dedicated, who expresses the most important reservation in relation to the discourse that I've traced here. This is because in the same moment in which Nancy clearly distances himself from the philosophy of flesh, he juxtaposes the urgency of a new thought of the body to it: "In this sense, the 'passion' of the 'flesh,' in the flesh, is finished—and this is why the word *body* ought to succeed on the word *flesh*, which was always overabundant, nourished by sense, and egological [égologique]."[33]

Why such a broad rejection? And to what do we owe an opposition so marked as to assume the features of a true incomprehension of what flesh signifies in the theoretical scheme I sketched above? Agitating in it certainly is an irritability on the part of contemporary French philosophy with regard to the phenomenological tradition.[34] But this particular element is not to be separated from a more general demand of differentiation in relation to the Christian conception of flesh. Indeed, one could say that it is precisely the Christian origin *[ascendenza]* (which is in no way secondary to phenomenology) that constitutes the true objective of the antiflesh polemic. If Michel Henry's most recent essay on incarnation is taken as a site of possible comparison, the terms of the question can be identified with

sufficient clarity.[35] What is seen as problematic in the phenomenological (but also, eventually, in the ontological) concept of flesh is its spiritualistic connotation, which becomes evident in Henry's interpretation itself: without entering too much into the details of the question, what differentiates the flesh of the opaque and inert material of the body is its self-affectivity, which the divine Word directly transmits *[trasmessale]*. When Derrida polemicizes about an excessive fleshiness *[carnista]* that risks canceling the concreteness of the body, or when Nancy sees in incarnation a process of disembodiment and interiorization that subjects the corporeal sign to the transcendence of meaning, they do nothing other than reaffirm this spiritualistic characterization of flesh. So doing, they end up offering the same reading that Henry does, even if with the opposite intention, which is not more positive but now negative. Rather than deconstructing and overturning it in its hermeneutic effects (as one might have expected them to do), they assume the conclusions and for that reason only spurn the object. If flesh refers to the body translated into spirit, or to spirit that is introjected into the body, the path for an effective rethinking of bodies (of each body and of all bodies) moves through the definitive abandonment of the philosophy of the flesh.

Such a reasoning has its power, which rests, however, on a premise that is anything but certain—certainly, with reference to Merleau-Ponty, for whom, as we saw, *flesh* doesn't refer at all to an interiorization of the body, but if anything to its exteriorization in another body (or even in that which is not a body), but also with reference to the same Christianity, which only in exceptional circumstances links the term flesh (*sarx* or *caro)* to a spiritual dimension, which usually relates instead to the idea of body *(sōma, corpus)*. Even if the two words at a certain moment come to be partially superimposed, certainly what refers most precisely and intensely to the soul as its privileged content is the body and not flesh.[36] Flesh, for its part, finds its own specificity in the material substrate of which man is initially "made" (even before his body is filled with spirit). It is no coincidence that in Judaism (and not so differently in Greece), it is precisely the *flesh* (*basar)* that tangibly represents earthly elements and therefore suffers and is perishable. Early Christianity takes up and develops this terminology.[37] In Paul (2 Corinthians 4:11), *thnētē sarx* is the mortal existence that is exposed to pain and to sin, just as the expression "in the flesh" *(en sarki)* alludes precisely to earthly life as such, to the point where sometimes (Romans 3:20 and Galatians 2:16, in a citation from Psalms 143:2), Paul adopts the formulation

pasa sarx, which means "every living thing *[vivente]*." It is true that the word *sōma* and then *corpus* can have analogous meanings, but more often than not it refers to the general unity of the single organism or of the collective (the church, Christianity) in which the first is positioned. As for Tertullian, the author of *De carne Christi*, he wages a difficult apologetical battle against those (Valentino, Marcione, Apelle) who argued for the spiritual or pneumatic character of Christ's flesh. His thesis instead was that while the *corpus* can be immaterial, celestial, and angelic, *caro* instead is clearly distinguished from the soul or the psyche. There does not exist a *caro animalis* [soul-flesh] or an *anima carnalis* [flesh-soul] *(nusquam animam carnem ut carnem animam)* [never soul-flesh or flesh-soul] (*De carne Christi*, XIII, 5), but only the unity, *in the body*, of two unmistakable substances that are different in and of themselves.

This notion of a material-like, inorganic, and "savage" flesh, as Merleau-Ponty would have called it, has never had a political configuration. It indicates a vital reality that is extraneous to any kind of unitary organization because it is naturally plural.[38] Thus, in Greek the term *sarx* is usually declined with the plural *sarkes*, and the expression *pasa sarx* that I noted earlier preserves a connotation of irreducible multiplicity that can be rendered with "all men" *[uomini]*. So that this might set in motion the general process of constituting the Christian church, it was necessary that the diffused and dispersed flesh be reunited in a single body.[39] It so happened that we previously find in Paulian Christianity, and later in the Patristic, that the words *sōma* and *corpus* begin to displace those of *sarx* and *caro* with ever greater frequency (without ever completely replacing them). More than an expulsion of the flesh, this concerns its incorporation into an organism that is capable of domesticating flesh's centrifugal and anarchic impulses. Only the spiritualization of the body (or better, the incorporation of a spirit that is capable of redeeming man from the misery of his corruptible flesh) will allow him entrance into the mystical body of the church: "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which* is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:19–20).[40] The role that the sacrament of the Eucharist had in this salvific passage from flesh to body has been noted as the double extravasation *[travaso]* of the body in Christ in that of the believer and of that of the believer in the ecclesial body. With all the variants as well as the conflicts that are derived from an initial competition, we can say

that first the empire and then the nascent nation-states activated and secularized the same theological-political mechanism; but also here they did so in order to save *[riscattare]* themselves from the risk associated with "bare life," which is implicit in that extralegal condition defined as the "state of nature"—namely, the "flesh" of a plural and potentially rebellious multitude that needed to be integrated in a unified body at the command of the sovereign.[41]

The biopolitical transition that characterizes modernity advanced by this perspective didn't modify such a "corporative," as is also demonstrated on the lexical level by the long duration of the metaphor of "body politic." That the strategies of sovereign power are addressed directly to the life of subjects *[sudditi]* in all their biological requirements for protection, reproduction, and development not only doesn't weaken, but indeed further strengthens, the semantics of a body inherited by medieval political theology. There is nothing more than that body (in the individual and collective sense) that restitutes and favors the dynamic of reciprocal implication between politics and life, and this for a number of reasons. First, because of the somatic representation of legitimate citizenship prior to the growing role that demographic, hygienic, and sanitary questions began to assume for public administration. And second, because it is precisely the idea of an organic body that implicates, as necessary complement, the presence of a transcendent principle that is capable of unifying the members according to a determined functional design: a body always has a soul, or at least a head, without which it would be reduced to a simple agglomerate of flesh. Far from rejecting en masse this figural apparatus, totalitarian biopolitics (but above all Nazi biopolitics) leads it to its extreme outcome, translating what had always been considered nothing more than an influential metaphor into an absolutely real reality: if people have the form and the substance of a body, then they must be looked after *[curato]*, defended, and reinforced with instruments and a finality that are purely biological. They didn't exclude what was traditionally referred to as soul, but they understood it biologically as the carrier of a racial heredity that was destined to distinguish the healthy part from the sick part within the body—the "true" body from a flesh that lacked vital resonance and which therefore was to be driven back to death *[respingere alla morte]*. As we saw previously, this double, bio-spiritual incorporation was the final result of an immunitary syndrome so out of control that it not only destroys everything that it comes into contact with, but turns disastrously on its own body.

We noted already that such an outcome doesn't in fact mark the exhaustion or only the retreat of the biopolitical paradigm. With the end of both twentieth-century totalitarianisms, the question of life remains solidly at the center of all politically significant trajectories of our time. What recedes, however (either because of explosion or implosion), is instead the body as the *dispositif* of political identification. This process of disembodiment is paradoxically the result of an excess. It is as if the extension of the somatic surface to the entire globe makes the world the place (by way of antinomical excellence) in which inside coincides with outside, the convex with the concave, and everything with nothing. If everything is the body, nothing will rigidly define it, which is to say no precise immunitary borders will mark and circumscribe it. The seemingly uncontainable proliferation of self-identical agglomerations that are ever more circumscribed by the function of immunitary rejection of the dynamics of globalization signals in reality the eclipse of the political body in its classical and twentieth-century sense in favor of something else that appears to be its shell and proliferating substance. It is in such a substance that, perhaps for the first time with some political pregnancy, it is possible to discern something like a "flesh" that precedes the body and all its successive incorporations. Precisely for this reason it appears again when the body is in decline. That the Spinozian name of "multitude" or that of Benjamin's "bare life" can be attributed to it is also secondary with respect to the fact that in it *bíos* is reintroduced not on the margins or the thresholds, but at the center of the global *polis*.[42] What the meaning, as well as the epochal outcome, of a relation between politics and life might be (given the same material formation that escapes from the logic of immunitary) is difficult to say, also because such a biopolitical dynamic is inserted in a framework that is still weighed down by the persistence (if not by the militarization) of sovereign power. Certainly, the fact that for the first time the politicization of life doesn't pass necessarily through a semantics of the body (because it refers to a world material that is antecedent to or that follows the constitution of the subject of law *[diritto]*) opens up a series of possibilities unknown till now. What political form can flesh take on, the same flesh that has always belonged to the modality of the impolitical? And what can be assigned to something that is born out of the remains of anomie? Is it possible to extract from the cracks of *immunitas* the outlines of a different *communitas*? Perhaps the moment has arrived to rethink in nontheological terms the event that is always

evoked (but never defined in better fashion) that two thousand years ago appeared under the enigmatic title "the resurrection of the flesh." To "rise again," today, cannot be the body inhabited by the spirit, but the flesh as such: a being that is both singular and communal, generic and specific, and undifferentiated and different, not only devoid of spirit, but a flesh that doesn't even have a body.

Before moving on, a final point relative to the modality of incarnation. We know that some have wanted to see in the term "incarnation" the theological bond that keeps phenomenology within a Christianity-derived semantics, and which is therefore fatally oriented toward the spiritual: penetrated by the Holy Spirit, the body of man ends up being disembodied in a dialectic that subordinates the materiality of the corporeal sign to the transcendence of meaning. The body, reduced not to signifying anything other than its own incarnated being, loses that exteriority, that multiplicity, and that opening that situate it in the real world, what in turn will refer to its anthropological, technological, and political dimension.

But is this how things really stand? Or does a similar reconstruction risk making it junior to that post-Christian or meta-Christian nucleus that it would like to deconstruct (without being able to free itself from that post-Christian or meta-Christian nucleus, which has shown through more than once in the present work)? My impression is that such a nucleus coincides in large part with the idea and the practice of incarnation. With regard to the distinction (and also the opposition) vis-à-vis the logic of incorporation: while incorporation tends to unify a plurality, or at least a duality, incarnation, on the contrary, separates and multiples in two what was originally one. In the first case, we are dealing with a doubling that doesn't keep aggregated elements distinct; in the second, a splitting that modifies and subdivides an initial identity. As the great apologetics of the first centuries after Christ argued, the Word that becomes flesh establishes the copresence of two diverse and even opposite natures in the person of Christ: the perfect and complete nature of God and the suffering and mortal nature of man. How can a God alter, disfigure, and expropriate himself to the point of really taking on the flesh of a mortal? The accent here ought to be placed on the adverb *really* because it is precisely there, on the material substantiality of a flesh that is identical to ours in all and for all, that for five centuries the Christian fathers, from Ireneus to Tertullian to Augustine, fought a difficult battle against a series of heresies (Docetism, Aranism, Monophysism,

Nestorianism), each aimed at negating the insurmountable contradiction implicit in the idea of Incarnation: to cancel either the nature of God or that of man and therefore the line they share. What appears logically unthinkable for classical culture is the two-in-one or the one-that-is-made-two through a slippage of the body out of itself, which coincides with the insertion of something within that doesn't naturally belong to it.

Given this transition, this contagion, and this denaturation, the notion of flesh needs to be rethought outside of Christian language, namely, as the biopolitical possibility of the ontological and technological transmutation of the human body. One could say that biotechnology is a non-Christian form of incarnation. What in the experience of prosthesis (of the transplant or the implant) penetrates into the human organism is no longer the divine, but the organ of another person *[uomo]*; or something that doesn't live, that "divinely" allows the person to live and improve the quality of his or her life. But that this new biopolitical feature (which inevitably is technopolitical) doesn't lose every point of contact with its own Christian archetype is witnessed in the artist who, perhaps more than any other, has placed the theme of flesh outside of the body (or of the nonorganic body) at the center of his own work. We know that classical images of the Incarnation, above all at the moment of the Crucifixion, mark a break or a rupture in the figural regime of the *mimesis* in which Christian art is framed—as if not only the Christ (for example, Dürer's), but rather also the entire order of figuration must slip into the open folds of its martyred body, damaged and disfigured, without any possibility of restoration.[43] But the flight of flesh from the body, both barely sustained and strained to the point of spasms by the structure of the bones, constitutes the center itself of the paintings of Francis Bacon, to whom I alluded above. In Bacon too this journey to the limits of the body, this slippage of flesh through its foramen explicitly refers to the ultimate experience of the Christian incarnation: "The images of the slaughterhouse and butchered meat have always struck me," Bacon remembers. "They seemed directly linked to the Crucifixion."[44] I don't know if flesh is to be related to the Nazi violence, as Deleuze would have it in his admirable comment (though the horror of that violence always remained with Bacon).[45] The fact is that in no one more than Bacon is the biopolitical practice of the animalization of man carried out to its lethal conclusion, finding a reversed correspondence perfectly in the disfigured figure of butchered flesh:

> In place of formal correspondences, what Bacon's painting constitutes is a *zone of indiscernibility or undecidability* between man and animal . . . It is never a combination of forms, but rather the common fact: the common fact of man and animal.[46]

According to all the evidence, that "common fact," that butchered, deformed, and chapped flesh, is the flesh of the world. That the painter always saw in animal carcasses hanging in butcher shops the shape of man (but also of himself) signifies that that bloody mound is the condition today of a large section of humanity. But that this recognition didn't ever lead to despair means that in it he glimpsed another possibility, tied to a different mode of understanding the relation between the phantasms of death and the power of life:

> When the visual sensation confronts the invisible force that conditions it, it releases a force that is capable of vanquishing the invisible force, or even befriending it. Life screams *at* death, but death is no longer this all-too-visible thing that makes us faint; it is this invisible force that life detects, flushes out, and makes visible through the scream. Death is judged from the point of view of life, and not the reverse, as we like to believe.[47]

Birth

The second Nazi immunitary *dispositif* to deconstruct with respect to its deadly results is that of suppressing birth. We saw how it presents itself as split in its actualization and how it is dissociated in two vectors of sense that are seemingly contradictory: on the one side, the exhibition and the strengthening of the generative capacity of the German people; on the other, the homicidal fury that is destined inevitably to inhibit it. Scholars have always seemed to have difficulty deciphering the contradiction between a politics of increasing the birthrate and the antinatalism produced first by a negative eugenics and then by the elimination en masse of pregnant mothers. Why did the Nazis commit themselves so eagerly to draining that vital fount of life that they also wanted to stimulate? The biopolitical paradigm furnishes a first response to such a question, identifying precisely the root of the genocidal discrimination in the excess of political investment on life. But perhaps a more essential motivation is to be traced in the nexus (one that isn't only etymological) linking the concepts of "birth" *[nascita]* and of "nation" in an ideological short-circuit that finds its most exasperated expression in Nazism. What kind of relationship did the Nazis institute

between birth and nation? How were these superimposed in the name of Nazism—indeed, how were they constituted precisely at their point of intersection?

We know how the term "nation" is almost identical in almost all of the principal modern languages and how it derives from the Latin *natio,* which in turn is the substantive form of the verb *nascor.* Naturally, in order for the modern meaning of nation to become stable, a long process is required that doesn't leave untouched the originary relation with the concept of birth. Without entering into the details, we can say that while for the entire ancient and medieval periods the biological referent in nativity prevails over the political one that is diffused in the concept of nation, in the modern phase the equilibrium between the two terms shifts until it is reversed in favor of the latter. Therefore, if it were possible for a long period to designate as *nationes* groups of people that were joined by a common ethnic provenance (or only by some kind of social, religious, or professional contiguity), afterwards an institutional connotation prevails.[48] It is the genesis and the development of territorial states that mark this passage: in order to take on a political signification, the biological phenomenon of birth (which is impolitical in itself) needs to be inscribed in an orbit of the state that is unified by sovereign power. It was precisely in this way that a notion, which was used generically prior to that moment and often in contrasting ways—it referred to others rather to themselves, as the Roman dichotomy between uncivil and barbarian *nationes* and the *populus* or the *civitas* of Rome attests—came increasingly to assume that powerful charge of self-identification that still today connotes the national ideology. The same Declaration of Human Rights and of the Citizen (as before it habeas corpus) is to be understood in this way: as the unbreakable bond that links the bodies of subjects *[sudditi]* to that of the sovereign. In this perspective we find again the decisive reference to the category of "body." Leaving aside its monarchical, popular, as well as voluntaristic and naturalistic declinations, the nation is that territorial, ethnic, linguistic complex whose spiritual identity resides in the relation of every part to the whole, which is included in it. A common birth constitutes the thread that maintains this body's identity with itself over the course of generations. It is what joins fathers to sons and the living to the dead in an unbreakable chain. It constitutes in its continuity both the biological content and the spiritual form of self-belonging to the nation in its indivisible whole. We are dealing with a relation that isn't unlike what we saw pass between the semantics of flesh

and that of the body. Just as the body constitutes the site of the presupposed unification of the anomalous multiplicity of flesh, so the nation defines the domain in which all births are connected to each other in a sort of parental identity that extends to the boundaries of the state.

With respect to this biopolitical dialectic, Nazism marks both a development and a variation; a development because it assigns a value to birth even more important in the formation of the German nation. It isn't only the unbroken line that assures the biological continuity of the people across generations, but also the material form or the spiritual material that destines the German people to dominate all other peoples (given its absolute purity of blood). But here the difference is fixed with respect to national as well as other nationalistic models that precede it. In this case, we can no longer speak of the politicization of a notion (birth, precisely) that was originally impolitical, but rather of a copresence between the biological sphere and the political horizon. If the state is *really* the body of its inhabitants, who are in turn reunified in that of the head, politics is nothing other than the modality through which birth is affirmed as the only living force of history. Nevertheless, precisely because it is invested with this immediate political valence, it also becomes the fold along which life is separated from itself, breaking into two orders that are not only hierarchically subordinated, but also rigidly juxtaposed (as are those of master and slave, of men and animals, of the living and the dead). It is from this perspective that birth itself becomes the object of a sovereign decision that, precisely because it appears to originate directly from it, transcends it, traversing it along excluding lines. This is how the ambivalence of the Nazis with regard to what was born is to be interpreted. On one side, the preventive exaltation of a life that is racially perfect; on the other side, removing the one who is assigned to death by the same statute of what is considered to be living. They could die and needed to die because they had never truly been born. Once identified with the nation, birth undergoes the same fate, as what is also held in a biopolitical clench that cannot be loosened except by collective death.

The same antinomy that characterizes the biopolitical relation between nation and birth is found at the center of the category of fraternity. For at least two centuries now (that is, from when the republican motto of the French Revolution was coined), we know that the notion of fraternity, which is originally biological or naturalistic, acquired an inevitable political resonance. Nevertheless, it is precisely the comparison with the other

two truly significant words with which it is associated that reveals a *deficit* of theoretical elaboration. If liberty and equality have been analyzed, discussed, and defined at length, fraternity emerges as one of the terms least thought about by the political-philosophical tradition. Why? Why is the one that would appear to be the most comprehensible of the three concepts still unanalyzed? A first response to this question is to be sought in its originally impolitical characteristic (when not explicitly theological) that has blocked any kind of historical translation. Leaving aside their ancient roots, liberty and equality are constituted in the modern period and originate with the two great political traditions that are liberalism and socialism. This isn't the case with fraternity, whose fortune seems limited and completely consumed in the brief arc between 1789 and 1848. Indeed, with respect to the other two principles of the Revolution, fraternity is what is established later. Although previously enunciated in 1789, it only begins to appear in official documents between 1792 and 1793 when France, attacked on every side and threatened internally, needed to find words and symbols capable of calling all to the indivisible unity of the nation against its enemies. It is then that the term becomes the fundamental and founding principle with respect to the other two, which now emerge as subordinated to it both historically and logically. Only if all Frenchmen will force themselves into a single will can the nation obtain liberty and equality for itself and for those who will follow its example.[49]

Here is sketched a second and more essential motivation for the political-philosophical unthinkability of the category of fraternity.[50] Political philosophy doesn't fully grasp it not only because it is impolitical, but also because it is intensely biopolitical. This means that fraternity isn't subtracted from the concept because it is too universal, abstract, and millenarist as one might think, but, on the contrary, because it is too concrete, rooted directly in the natural *bíos*. The fact that it takes on strong national connotations in the same moment of its emergence on the political scene (as well as a nationalistic one as it appeals to the sacrality of the French nation) contrasts in some way with its supposed universalism. Unless one wants to argue (as not only Robespierre and Saint-Just did, but also Hugo and Michelet) that France represents the universal because it is the country around which the entire history of the world turns—only to discover quickly that all the people that were to be buggered with such a conviction wound up inevitably assuming the same for themselves. At stake (much more than universal abstractions of common justice) was, in reality, the reference to a

self-identification founded on the consanguinity of belonging to the same nation. More than "phratry," fraternity essentially refers to the fatherland *[patria]*; it confirms the biological bond that joins in a direct and masculine lineage the brother to the father (the "motherland" *[madrepatria]* has always had symbolic connotations of virility). Now, if it is true that democracy is often referred to the idea of brotherhood, that is because democracy, like all modern political concepts, rests on a naturalistic, ethnocentric, and androcentric framework that has never been fully interrogated. What precisely is a "fraternal democracy"? Certainly, sublime accents can be heard in similar expressions: a reference to substantial values that move beyond the formalism of equal rights. Yet something different also resonates here and with a more troubling timbre. It isn't the same thing to hold that all men ought to be equal because they are brothers or that they are brothers because they are equal. Despite appearances, the category of brotherhood is more restricted and more particularistic; it is more exclusive than that of equality in the specific sense that it excludes all those who do not belong to the same blood as that of the common father.[51]

This perspective makes visible another decisive feature of the idea of brotherhood. The fact that at the moment of its maximum diffusion it was invoked *against* someone, or even all of the non-French, reveals a conflictual, when not bellicose, attitude that has been always hidden by its usual pacifist coloration. Moreover, the figure of the brother (which a long tradition from Plato to Hegel and beyond associated with that of the friend) had and has to do with the enemy, as both Nietzsche and Schmitt argued.[52] They explained that the true brother (and for that reason the true friend) is precisely the enemy because only the enemy truly puts someone to the test. The enemy confers identity through opposition; he reveals the borders of the other and therefore also one's own borders. From Cain and Abel to Eteocle and Polinice to Romulus and Remus, absolute enmity, which is to say fratricide, has always been figured through the couple of the brother, or even of twins, as René Girard demonstrates when he sees the bloodiest conflict always erupting between close relatives and neighbors.[53] One could say that blood calls forth blood. And whether metaphorically or literally, blood becomes the principle of politics, politics always risks slipping into blood.

This was Freud's conclusion, the author who perhaps more than any other decrypted the paradox of fraternity. As he tells it in *Totem and Taboo,* one day the brothers unite, oppressed by a tyrannical father.[54] They kill him and they devour his flesh, taking his place. This signifies, in the first

instance (and according to a more "enlightened" interpretation), that the process of civilization is connected to the substitution of a despotic authority, indeed, to the same principle of authority, with a democratic universe in which the power that is shared by the many replaces the power of the One. In this sense, democracy emerges as both the cause and the effect of the passage from vertical domination to a horizontal one, precisely from Father to sons. But in a closer and less ingenuous analysis, Freud's allegory exhibits a more troubling truth, namely, the perpetuation of the paternal domination even inside the democratic horizon of the brothers. What else would brothers literally incorporating the dead father into themselves mean, if not that they are inexorably destined to reproduce the distinctive features (even if in a plural and domesticated form)? The fact that from such an act morality *[l'attegiamento morale],* which is to say the sense of guilt for the homicide they have committed and the respect with regard to the Law, signifies that the act remains marked by that traumatic event, by the killing of someone who doesn't actually disappear from the scene, but is perpetually regenerated in the line of descent from brothers to sons. Once again the difference is prisoner of the repetition and the dead once again reach out and grab hold of the living.

Yet *Moses and Monotheism* is the Freudian text that most forcefully invests the biopolitical superimposition of birth and nation.[55] That it refers on several occasions to *Totem and Taboo* (following to some degree the structural schema) need not hide the *political* as well as the philosophical novelty of an essay written in three phases between 1934 and 1938: these dates are enough to indicate the adversary to whom it is addressed. It concerns Nazi anti-Semitism as it is constituted precisely along a genealogical line that joins national identity to the founding moment of its origin. In different fashion from those who refused to confront the Nazi *dispositif,* who limited themselves simply to invalidating the naturalistic presupposition, Freud met the challenge on the same terrain. In other words, he doesn't contest the connection made by Nazism between the form assumed by a people and the origin of its founder. It is true that the national community finds its own identifying foundation in the act of its birth and therefore in the birth of its most ancient Father—yet precisely because to call into question its purity and property also means to fundamentally undercut the self-identifying mechanism of the people of which it is a part. This is exactly the strategy Freud uses in *Moses and Monotheism.* He understands perfectly well the risk that he is running as is evinced by the substantial series of warnings,

precautions, and reservations disseminated throughout the text as if to defend it from something close by that threatens it. When he warns in the preamble that "to deny a people the man whom it praises as the greatest of its sons is not a deed to be undertaken lightheartedly," he intends to warn the reader that he is pushing up against the adversary's position to such a degree that he risks entering in a zone of indistinction with it.[56] Why? Why precisely was it that Nazism expropriated their identity from the Jewish people, denying that they might have a form, a type, or be a race? How can one carry out this kind of expropriation, denying them even a founder by attributing a different nationality to the founder, without converging on the same anti-Semitic thesis? Why not just categorically oppose it? The opening that Freud has created is in effect rather narrow. It doesn't concern lessening the relation of the origin with regard to the Jewish people (and by extension to every people), which would mean adhering to the historicist thesis against which Nazism will have no difficulty in establishing its radical position. Rather, it concerns placing the same notion of origin under an operation of deconstruction that decenters and overturns it into its opposite: in an originary in/origin that, far from belonging solely to itself, splits from itself, divides into its own other, and thus in the other from its own *[nell'altro da ogni proprio]*.

This is the political significance of the Egyptian Moses. Freud doesn't contest that Moses founded his people; indeed, Freud supports this view with greater force than is traditionally held. But he argues that Moses was able to do it—that is, *create* a people—precisely because he did *not* belong to them, because he was impressed with the mark of the foreigner and even of the Enemy, of whom he is the natural son. It is exactly for this reason—that he was the son of the Jewish people—that he can be their Father and that he can form them according to law proper, which is to say the law of another *[di un altro]*, when not also the law of the other *[dell'altro]*.[57] However, with the relation between ethnic identity of the nation and the birth of its fathers secured (which Nazism insisted upon *in primis*), this means that that people (and therefore every people) can no longer claim the purity of their own race, which is already contaminated by a spurious origin. Not only, but no people can define themselves as the elect, as the Jewish people had first done, and then later the German people (albeit certainly in very different fashion). No people will be able to name themselves as such, that is, furnished with a national identity that is transmitted from father to son, from the moment in the archetype of Moses, in which the father is not the

true father, which is to say the natural father, and whose sons are not his true sons—arriving at a point in which these Jewish sons with tremendous effort tried to free themselves from their unnatural father, killing him exactly as the brothers of the primitive hordes in *Totem and Taboo* did. Afterward, inevitably, they bowed to another law, or the law of the other, brought to them by what will be subsequently altered by Christianity. What remains in this uninterrupted sequence of metamorphosis and betrayal is the originary doubling of the Origin, or its definitive splitting in a binary chain that simultaneously unites and juxtaposes two founders, two peoples, and two religions, beginning with a birth that is itself double (just as is biologically, after all, every birth). Anything but ordered toward unifying the two (or the many in the one), birth is destined to subdivide the one (the body of the mother) into two, before the subsequent births in turn multiply those in the plurality of infinite numbers. Rather than enclosing the extraneousness within the same biological or political body (and so canceling it), birth now puts *[rovescia]* what is within the maternal womb outside. It doesn't incorporate, but excorporates, exteriorizes, and bends outside *[estroflette]*. It doesn't assume or impose but exposes someone (male or female) to the event of existence. Therefore, it cannot be used, in either a real sense or a metaphoric sense, as protective apparatus for the self-protection of life. At the moment in which the umbilical cord is cut and the newborn cleaned of amniotic fluid, he or she is situated in an irreducible difference with respect to all those who have come before.[58] With regard to them, he or she emerges as necessarily extraneous and also foreign *[straniero]*, similar to one who comes for the first time and always in different form to walk the earth. This is precisely the reason why the Nazis wanted to suppress birth, because they felt and feared that, rather than ensuring the continuity of the ethnic filiation, birth dispersed and weakened it. Birth reveals the vacuum and the fracture from which the identity of every individual or collective subject originates. Birth is the first *munus* that opens it to that in which it does *not* recognize itself. Annihilating birth, the Nazis believed that they were filling up the originary void, that they were destroying the *munus* and so definitively immunizing themselves from their traumas. It is the same reason (albeit with perfectly reversed intensity) that pushes Freud to place it at the center of his essay: not to force the multiplicity of birth into the unitary calculation of the nation, but rather to place the alleged identity of the nation under the plural law of birth.

Hannah Arendt takes the same route at war's end. We already know that her work cannot be situated within a proper biopolitical horizon (if such an expression were to connote a direct implication between political action and biological determination). The body, insofar as it is body—which is to say, like an organism it is subjected to the natural demands of protection and development of life—is radically extraneous to a politics that assumes meaning precisely by freeing itself from the order of necessity. Yet it is precisely on the basis of such an extraneousness with respect to the biopolitical paradigm that the *political* relevance that Arendt attributes to the phenomenon of birth gains more prominence. If there is a theme that recurs with equal intensity in all her texts, it is really this political characterization of birth or the "natal" features of politics. Writing against a long tradition that situates politics under the sign of death, Arendt refers precisely to the immunitary line inaugurated by Hobbes (not without an oblique glance at Heidegger's being-for-death). What she insists upon is the originary politicity of birth: "Since action is the political activity par excellence, natality, and not mortality, may be the central category of the political, as distinguished from metaphysical thought."[59] If the fear of death cannot produce anything but a conservative politics, and therefore be the negation itself of politics, it is in the event of birth that politics finds the originary impulse of its own innovative power. Inasmuch as man had a beginning (and therefore is himself a beginning), he is the condition of beginning something new, of giving life to a common world.[60]

Here Arendt seems to open a perspective in political ontology that does not coincide either with Greek political philosophy or with modern biopolitics, but refers rather to Roman usage along a line that joins the creationism of Saint Augustine to the Virgilian tradition. Birth, in a way that is different from the creation of the world (which occurred one time on the part of a single creator), is a beginning that repeats itself an infinite number of times, unraveling lines of life that are always different. It is this differential plurality that is the point in which the Arendtian political ontology is separated (or at least is placed on a different plane with respect to biopolitics). In both cases, politics assumes meaning from a strong relationship with life; but while biopolitics refers to the life of the human species in its totality or to that of a particular species of man, the object of political ontology is the individual life as such, which is to say that politics is constituted in the doubled point of divergence or noncoincidence of the individual life with

respect to that of the species, as well as the single action vis-à-vis the repeated course of daily life (which is marked by natural needs).

> Yet just as, from the standpoint of nature, the rectilinear movement of man's life-span between birth and death looks like a peculiar deviation from the common natural rule of cyclical movement, thus action, seen from the viewpoint of the automatic processes which seem to determine the course of world, looks like a miracle . . . The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, "natural" ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born.[61]

At this point we cannot help but see the antinomy on which rests the entire discourse in relation to the question of *bíos*. It is clear that Arendt endeavors to keep politics sheltered from the serial repetition that tends to subject politics to natural processes and then to historical processes as well, which are ever more assimilated to the former. What is surprising, therefore, is the choice, which she often stresses, of assuming a differential element with respect to the homogeneous circularity of biological cycle, precisely a biological phenomenon that is in the final, and indeed in the first, instance, birth. It is as if, notwithstanding her refusal of the biopolitical paradigm, Arendt was then brought to use against biopolitics a conceptual instrument that was extracted from the same material—almost confirming the fact that today biopolitics can be confronted only from within, across a threshold that separates it from itself and which pushes it beyond itself. Birth is precisely this threshold. It is the unlocalizable place in space or the unassimilable moment in the linear flowing of time in which *bíos* is placed the maximum distance from *zōē* or in which life is given form in a modality that is drastically distant from its own biological bareness *[nudità]*. That the reflection on the relationship between life and birth emerged in a monumental book on totalitarianism, which is to say in a direct confrontation with Nazism, is perhaps not unrelated to this paradox. Wanting to institute a political thought that is radically counterposed to Nazi biopolitics, Arendt, like Freud before her (but in more explicit fashion), attacks precisely the point at which Nazism had concentrated its own deadly power. As Nazism employed the production and with it the suppression of birth so as to dry up the source of political action, so does Arendt recall it in order to reactivate it. But there's more. Just as Nazism made birth the biopolitical mechanism for leading every form of life back to bare life, in the same way Arendt

sought in it the ontopolitical key for giving life a form that coincides with the same condition of existence.

It has been said the perspective opened by Arendt rests on a profound antinomy relative to the theme of *bíos politikos*. It appears cut by a caesura that links the two terms in the form of a reciprocal diversity. It is true that politics, just like every human activity, is rooted in the naturalness of life, but according to a modality that assigns meaning to it precisely because of the distance from it. Birth constitutes the point at which one sees more powerfully the tension between terms united by their separation: it is the glimmering moment in which *bíos* takes up distance from itself in a way that frontally opposes it to *zōē*, that is, to simple biological life. Although birth is innervated in a process—that of conception, gestation, and parturition—that has to do directly with the animality of man, Arendt thinks birth is what distinguishes man most clearly from the animal, what exists from what lives, politics from nature. Despite all the distance she takes up from her former teacher, one can't help but sense in this political ontology a Heideggerian tonality that ends up keeping her on this side of the biopolitical paradigm. The same reference to birth doesn't appear able (except in metaphoric and literary terms) to penetrate into the somatic network between politics and life. Out of what vital layer of life is the politicity of action generated? How are the individual and genus linked in the public sphere? Is it enough in this regard to evoke the dimension of plurality without making clear beforehand its genesis and direction?

A diagonal response to this series of questions is contained in the work of an author who is less prone to directly interrogating the meaning of politics, and so precisely for this reason more likely to root it in its ontogenetic terrain. I am speaking of Gilbert Simondon, whose thematic assonance with Bergson and Whitehead (without returning to Schelling's philosophy of nature) shouldn't hide a more essential relation with Merleau-Ponty, who dedicates his essay *L'individu et sa genèse physico-biologique* to Simondon, or with George Canguilhem along a vector of sense that we will analyze shortly.[62] Without wanting to give an account of Simondon's entire system of thought, the points that have to do directly with our analysis (precisely the interrogatives that Arendt left open) are essentially two and are tightly connected between them. The first is a dynamic conception of being that identifies it with becoming and the second an interpretation of this becoming as a process of successive individuations in diverse and concatenated domains. Writing against monist and dualist philosophies that presuppose

an individual that is already fully defined, Simondon turns his attention to the always incomplete movement of the individual's ontogenesis. In every sphere, be it physical, biological, psychic, or social, individuals emerge from a preindividualistic foundation that actualizes the potentialities without ever arriving at a definitive form that isn't in turn the occasion and the material for further individuation. Every individual structure, at the moment of its greatest expansion, always preserves a remainder that cannot be integrated within its own dimension without reaching a successive phase of development. And so, as the biological individuation of the living organism constitutes the continuation on another level of incomplete physical individuation, in turn psychic individuation is inscribed in a different position, which is to say in the point of indeterminacy of the biological individuation that precedes it.

What can we conclude from this with regard to our problem? First of all, we can say that the subject, be it a subject of knowledge, will, or action as modern philosophy commonly understands it, is never separated from the living roots from which it originates in the form of a splitting between the somatic and psychic levels in which the first is never decided *[risolve]* in favor of the second. Contrary to the Arendtian caesura between life and condition of existence (which is already Heideggerian), Simondon argues that man never loses his relation with his living being. He is not other from living (or more than living), but a *living human [vivente umano]*. Between the psychic and biological, just as between the biological and the physical, a difference passes through not of substance or nature but of level and function. This means that between man and animal—but also, in a sense, between the animal and the vegetal and between the vegetal and the natural object—the transition is rather more fluid than was imagined, not only by all the anthropologisms, but also by the ontological philosophies that presumed to contest them, by reproducing instead, at a different level, all their humanistic presuppositions. According to Simondon, with respect to the animal, man "possessing extensive psychic possibilities, particularly thanks to the resources of symbolism, appeals more frequently to psychism . . . but there is no nature or essence that permits the foundation of anthropology; simply a threshold is crossed."[63] Simondon defines crossing this threshold—which shouldn't be interpreted either as a continuous passage or as a sudden transition of nature—in terms of "birth." And so when he writes that "precisely speaking there is no psychic individuation, but an individuation of the living that gives *birth* to the somatic and the psychic,"

we need to take the meaning of that expression rather literally.[64] Every step in each phase, and therefore every individuation, is a birth on a different level, from the moment that a new "form of life" is disclosed, so that one could say that birth isn't a phenomenon of life, but life is a phenomenon of birth; or also that life and birth are superimposed in an inextricable knot that makes one the margin of opening of the other:

> The individual concentrates in himself the dynamic that gives birth to him and which perpetuates the first operation in a continuous individuation; *to live is to perpetuate a birth that is permanent and relative.* It isn't sufficient to define the living as an organism. The living is an organism on the basis of the first individuation; but it can live only if it is an organism that organizes and is organized through and across time. The organization of the organism is the result of a first individuation that can be called absolute. But the latter more than life is the condition of life; it is the condition of that perpetual birth that is life.[65]

Here Simondon completely reverses the suppression of birth that the Nazis employed as the *dispositif* for biopolitically reconverting life into death—not only by guiding all of life back to the innovative potential of birth, but by making out of it the point of absolute distinction with regard to death. If one thinks about it, life and birth are both the contrary of death: the first synchronically and the second diachronically. The only way for life to defer death isn't to preserve it as such (perhaps in the immunitary form of negative protection), but rather to be reborn continually in different guises. But the intensity of the relation that Simondon fixes between politics and *bíos,* which is to say between biological life and form of life, doesn't end here. The selfsame fact that birth is reproduced every time the subject moves beyond a new threshold, experiencing a different form of individuation, means that birth deconstructs the individual into something that was prior to, but also contemporaneously after, him. Psychic life cannot actualize the potential preindividual except by pushing him to the level of the transindividual, which is to say by translating him and multiplying him in the sociality of the collective life. The transindividual—what for Simondon constitutes the specific terrain of ethics and politics—maintains a dynamic relation with that of the preindividual, who, unable to be individualized, is precisely "placed in common" in a form of life that is richer and more complex. This means that the individual (or better, the subject) that is produced by individuating itself is not definable outside of the political relationship with those that share the same vital experience, but also with that collective, which

far from being its simple contrary or the neutralization of individuality, is itself a form of more elaborate individuation. Nowhere more than here do plurality and singularity intersect in the same biopolitical node that grabs hold of politics and life. If the subject is always thought through the form of *bíos*, this in turn is inscribed in the horizon of a *cum* that makes it one with the being of man.

The Norm of Life

Nazism's third immunitary *dispositif*, in whose overturning are to be found the features of an affirmative biopolitics, is constituted by the *absolute normativization of life*. That the Nazis completely normativized life is not something current interpretation allows for. Yet couldn't one object that the uninterrupted violation of the normative order characterized Hitlerian totalitarianism and that such a distortion of natural right *[diritto]* was effectuated precisely in the name of the primacy of life over every abstract juridical principle? Actually, although both these objections contain a kernel of truth, they do not contradict (except apparently) the proposition with which I began these reflections. As to the first question—the constitutively illegal character of Nazism—and without wanting to give minimum credit to the self-interested opinions of Reich jurists, things are nevertheless more complex than they might seem at first. Certainly, from a strictly formal perspective, the never-revoked decree of February 1933 with which Hitler suspended the articles of the Weimar Constitution on personal liberty situates the twelve years that follow clearly in an extralegal context. And yet—as also emerges from the double-edged statute of the concept of the "state of exception" (which one can technically use to refer to that particular condition), a situation of extralegality isn't necessarily extrajuridical. The suspension of the effective *[vigente]* law is a juridical act, even if of the negative sort. As others have argued, the state of exception is more than a simple normative lacuna; it is the opening of a void in law intended to safeguard the operation of the norm by temporally deactivating it.[66] Moreover, not only did the Nazis formally let the complexities of the Weimar Constitution remain in force—albeit exceeding it in every possible way—but they even demanded that the Constitution be "normalized" by reducing the use of the emergency decree that had been abused by the preceding regime. This explains the cold welcome that Schmittian decisionism received on the part of the regime once it was in power. What Nazism wanted was not an order subtracted from the norm on the basis of a continuous series

of subjective decisions, but, on the contrary, to ascribe them to a normative framework that was objective precisely because it originated from the vital necessities of the German people.

This last formulation takes us back to the more general question of the relationship between norm and life in the Nazi regime. Which of the two prevailed over the other to such an extent as to make it function on the basis of its own demands? Was it life that was rigidly normativized, or rather, does the norm emerge as biologized? Actually, as we saw in the preceding chapter, the two perspectives are not juxtaposed but rather integrated in a gaze that includes them both. In the moment in which one appeals to the concept of concrete, substantial, and material law against what is subjective and what belongs to the liberal matrix (but also against every kind of juridical formalism), the reference to the life of the nation appears largely to dominate. No law can be superior (or simply comparable) to that of the German community to preserve and augment its own *bíos*. From this point of view, Nazi "jurisprudence" is not attributable to a subjective or decisionistic radicalization of positive law, but, if anything, to a perverse form of natural right. Obviously, by this we understand that for "nature" is not to be understood either law expressed by the divine will or what originated with human reason, but just that biological layer in which the national order *[ordinamento nazionale]* is rooted. After all, isn't it a biological given, blood precisely, that constitutes the ultimate criterion for defining the juridical *status* of a person? In this sense, the norm is nothing but the a posteriori application of a present determination in nature: it is the racial connotation that attributes or removes the right to exist to or from individuals and peoples.

However, this biologization of law in turn is the result of a preceding juridicalization of life. If it were otherwise, where would the subdivision of human *bíos* into zones of different value be derived from, if not from such a juridical decision? It is precisely in this continual exchange between cause and effect, intention and outcome, that the biopolitical machine of Nazism is at its most lethal. In order that life can constitute the objective, concrete, and factitious reference of law, it must have already been previously normativized according to precise juridical-political caesuras. What results is a system that is doubly determined. Something else also emerges from the combined competition between the power of doctors and that of judges in the application of the biopolitical (and therefore thanatopolitical) laws of Nazism. Biology and law, and life and norm, hold each other in a doubly linked presupposition. If the norm presupposes the facticity of life

as its privileged content, life for its part presupposes the caesura of the norm as its preventive definition. Only a life that is already "decided" according to a determinate juridical order can constitute the natural criteria in the application of the law. From this perspective, we can say that Nazism, in its own way, created a "norm of life": certainly not in the sense that adapted its own norms to the demands of life, but in what closed the entire extension of life within the borders of a norm that was destined to reverse it into its opposite. Directly applying itself to life, Nazi law subjected it to a norm of death, which at the same time made it absolute while displacing it.

How can this terrible thanatopolitical *dispositif* be finally broken? Or, better perhaps, how can we overturn its logic into a politics of life? If its lethal result appeared to originate from a forced superimposition between norm and nature, one could imagine that the way out might pass through a more precise separation between the two domains. Normativism and juris-naturalism—both introduced again with the fall of the Nazi regime as protective barriers against its recurring threat—followed the same path from opposite directions: in the first case, autonomizing and almost purifying the norm in an obligation always more separate from the facticity of life; in the other, deriving the norm from the eternal principles of a nature that coincides with divine will or, otherwise, with human reason. Yet the impression remains that neither of these two responses has stood the test of time, and not only because it is difficult to hypothesize the restoration of conceptual apparatuses antecedent to totalitarianism.[67] The principal reason is that neither the absoluteness of the norm nor the primacy of nature is to be considered external to a phenomenon like Nazism, which seems to be situated exactly at the point of intersection and tension of their opposing radicalizations. What else is the Nazi bio-law if not an explosive mixture between an excess of normativism and an excess of naturalism, if not a norm superimposed on nature and a nature that is presupposed to the norm? We can say that in these circumstances the "norm of life" was the tragically paradoxical formula in which life and norm are held together in a knot that can be cut only by annihilating both.

Yet this knot cannot simply be undone either, or worse still, ignored. It is here, beginning with that "norm of life," that we need today to start, not only to restore to the two terms the richness of their originary meaning, but also to invert the reciprocally destructive relation that Nazism instituted between them. We need to oppose the Nazi normativization of life with an attempt to vitalize that of the norm. But how? How should we move here

and with what assumptions should we begin? I believe that the theoretical key of this passage cannot be traced to any of the grand modern juridical philosophies; nor will it be found in positivism, in juris-naturalism, in normativism, or decisionism (or at least in none of those philosophies that modernity together brought to completion and then did away with). From this point of view, not only Kelsen and Schmitt, but also Hobbes and Kant, emerge as unhelpful for thinking biopolitics affirmatively. Either they are constitutively outside its lexicon, as Kant and Kelsen are, or they are within its negative fold, as Hobbes and Schmitt are. A possible (and necessary) thread that we ought to weave is found instead in the philosophy of Spinoza—to the extent that he remains external to or lateral with respect to the dominant lines of modern juridical tradition. There is much to say (and much has been said) about the stunning force with which Spinozian philosophy destabilizes the conceptual apparatus of contemporary thought. But if we had to condense in one expression the most significant categorical step that it produces with regard to the relationship between norm and nature, between life and law, I would speak of the substitution of a logic of presupposition with one of reciprocal immanence. Spinoza doesn't negate (nor does he repress, as other philosophers do) the connection between the two domains, but deploys them in a form that situates them worlds apart from what it will assume in Nazi semantics: norm and life cannot mutually presuppose one another because they are part of a single dimension in continuous becoming.[68]

Thanks to the path he takes, Spinoza can remove himself from the formalism of the modern contract *[obbligazione]*, in particular to that of the Hobbesian variant, without, however, falling into what will be the Nazi biological substantialism. What keeps him apart from both is his refusal of that sovereign paradigm that, notwithstanding all the differences, is joined to substantialism by their same coercive tendency. When he writes in one of the most famous propositions in *Political Treatise* that "every natural thing has as much right from Nature as it has power to exist and to act," he too is thinking a "norm of life," but in a sense that rather then presupposing one to the other, joins them together in the same movement that understands life as always already normalized and the norm as naturally furnished with vital content.[69] The norm is no longer what assigns rights and obligations from the outside to the subject, as in modern transcendentalism—permitting it to do that which is allowed and prohibiting that which is not—but rather the intrinsic modality that life assumes in the expression of its own

unrestrainable power to exist. Spinoza's thought differs from all the other immunitary philosophies that deduce the transcendence of the norm from the demand for protecting life and conditioning the preservation of life to the subjection to the norm. He makes the latter the immanent rule that life gives itself in order to reach the maximum point of its expansion. It is true that "each [particular thing] is determined by another particular thing to exist in a certain way, yet the force by which each one perseveres in existing follows from the eternal necessity of the nature of God," but such an individual force doesn't acquire meaning as well as possibility of success except within the internal extension of nature.[70] It is for this reason that, when seen in a general perspective, every form of existence, be it deviant or defective from a more limited point of view, has equal legitimacy for living according to its own possibilities as a whole in the relations in which it is inserted. Having neither a transcendent role of command nor a prescriptive function with respect to which conformity and deformity are stabilized, the norm is constituted as the singular and plural mode that nature every so often assumes in all the range of its expressions:

> So if something in Nature appears to us as ridiculous, absurd, or evil, this is due to the fact that our knowledge is only partial, that we are for the most part ignorant of the order and coherence of Nature as a whole, and that we want all things to be directed as our reason prescribes. Yet that which our reason declares to be evil is not evil in respect of the order and laws of universal Nature, but only in respect of our own particular nature.[71]

In nowhere more than this passage do we find the anticipated overturning that Spinoza undertakes with respect to Nazi normalization. While the latter measures the right to life or the obligation to die in relation to the position occupied with respect to the biological caesura constituted by the norm, Spinoza makes the norm the principle of unlimited equivalence for every single form of life.

It cannot be said that Spinoza's intuitions found expression and development in later juridical philosophy. The reasons for such a theoretical block are multiple. But in relation to our problem, it's worth paying attention to the resistance of the philosophy of natural right *[diritto]* as a whole to think the norm together with life: not *over* life nor *beginning from life,* but *in life,* which is to say in the biological constitution of the living organism. This is why the few heirs of the Spinozian juridical naturalism (consciously or unconsciously) are to be found less among philosophers of natural right than among those who have made the object of their research the development

of individual and collective life. Or better: the moving line that runs from the first to the second, constantly translating the one into the other. As we know, it's what Simondon defines with the term and the concept of "trans-individual." It is no coincidence that, beginning with Simondon, Spinoza has been interrogated, but not (as Étienne Balibar believes) because Spinoza negates individuality as such.[72] Rather, we can say that for Spinoza nothing other than individuals exists. These individuals are infinite modes of a substance that does not subtend or transcend them, but is that expressed precisely in their irreducible multiplicity; only that such individuals for Spinoza are not stable and homogenous entities, but elements that originate from and continually reproduce a process of successive individuations. This occurs not only because, as Nietzsche will later theorize, every individual body is a composite of parts belonging to other individuals and in transit toward them, but because its expansive power is proportional to the intensity and the frequency of such an exchange. Thus, at the apex of its development it finds itself part of a relation that is always more vast and complex with the environment that lets it continue to the extent that its own originary identity has been enormously reduced.

All of this is reflected in the Spinozian concept of natural right. I said earlier that the norm doesn't invest the subject from the outside because it emerges from the same capacity of existence. Not only every subject is *sui juris*, but every behavior carries with it the norm that places it in existence within a more general natural order. Considering that there are as many multiple individuals as there are infinite modes of the substance means that the norms will be multiplied by a corresponding number. The juridical order as a whole is the product of this plurality of norms and the provisional result of their mutable equilibrium. It is for this reason that neither a fundamental norm from which all the other norms would derive as consequence can exist nor a normative criterion upon which exclusionary measures vis-à-vis those deemed abnormal be stabilized. In short, the process of normativization is the never-defined result of the comparison and conflict between individual norms that are measured according to the different power that keeps them alive, without ever losing the measure of their reciprocal relation. To this dynamic, determined by the relation between individuals, is connected that relative to their internal transformation. If the individual is nothing but the momentary derivation of a process of individuation, which at the same time produces it and is its product, this indicates as well that the norms that the individual expresses vary according

to his or her different composition. As the human body lives in an infinite series of relations with the bodies of others, so the internal regulation will be subject to continuous variations. More than an immunitary apparatus of self-preservation, Spinoza configures the juridical order as a meta-stable system of reciprocal contaminations in which the juridical norm, rooted in the biological norm, reproduces the latter's mutations.

It is this type of argumentation that can be ascribed to Simondon's analysis along the thread of transindividual semantics. When in *L'individu et sa genèse physico-biologique* he writes that "the values are the preindividual of the norm; they express the connection between orders of different size; born from the preindividual, they tend toward the postindividual," Simondon is negating all attempts to make absolute the normative system.[73] That such a system is likened to an individual in perpetual motion from the preindividual to the postindividual indicates that there is never a moment in which the individual can be enclosed in himself or be blocked in a closed system, and so removed from the movement that binds him to his own biological matrix. From this point of view, the only value that remains stable in the transition from the norm of one system to another is the awareness of their translatability in always more diverse and necessarily perishing forms. The most complete normative model is indeed what already prefigures the movement of its own deconstruction in favor of another that follows it: "In order for the normativity of a system of norms to be complete, it's important that there be within it both its prefigured destruction as system and its possible translation in another system according to transductive order."[74] It is true that there exists a natural tendency to imagine absolute and unchangeable norms, but that too is part of an ontogenetic process that is structurally open to the necessity of its own becoming: "The tendency to eternity becomes therefore the consciousness of the relative: this latter is no longer the will to stop becoming or to render absolute an origin and to privilege normatively a structure, but the knowledge of the meta-stability of the norms."[75] Just like Spinoza before him, Simondon also places the constitution of norms within the movement of life and makes life the primary source for the institution of norms.

If Simondon tightens norm and life in an affirmative nexus that strengthens both, the most explicit philosophical attempt to vitalize the norm is owed, however, to his teacher, Georges Canguilhem. It's certainly not the case here to consider the important passages that make up Canguilhem's resolute opposition to Nazism, many of which are biographical. Canguilhem

was called in 1940 to Strasbourg to take up the chair left free by the mathematician Jean Cavaillès, a partisan who died fighting Nazism. Canguilhem also actively participated in the resistance under the pseudonym Lafont. I would say that nothing about his philosophy is comprehensible outside of this military commitment.[76] The entire conception of *bíos* to which he dedicated his work is deeply marked by it, beginning with the idea of "philosophy of biology," which in itself is counterposed to the Nazi's programmatic antiphilosophical biology. To think life philosophically, to make life the pertinent horizon of philosophy, signifies for him distancing it from an objectivist paradigm that, thanks to its alleged scientificity, ends up canceling its dramatically subjective character. But even before doing so, it's worth challenging that reduction of life to a simple material, to brute life, that Nazism precisely had pushed toward its most ruinous consequences. When he writes that "health is in no way a demand of the economic order that is to be weighed when legislating, but rather is the spontaneous unity of the conditions for the exercise of life," he can't help but refer critically and above all to Nazi state medicine, which had made that bio-economic procedure the hinge of its own politics of life and death.[77] Against it he offers the apparently tautological thesis that "the thought of what lives needs to assume its idea from the living"; here he doesn't only want to replace subjectivity at the center of the biological dimension, but also to institute a dynamic interval between life and its concept: the living is the one who always exceeds the objective parameters of life, which in a certain sense always lie beyond itself, in the median statistic on the basis of which its suitability to live and die is measured.[78] If Nazism stripped away every form of life, nailing it to its nude material existence, Canguilhem reconsigns every life to its form, making of it something unique and unrepeatable.

The conceptual instrument he adopts for such an end is precisely the category of the norm, which is assumed by juridical, as well as sociological, anthropological, and pedagogical traditions as a descriptive and prescriptive measure for valuing human behavior.[79] Canguilhem ascribes to the norm the meaning of the pure mode or state of being. In such a case, not only health but also disease constitutes a norm that is not superimposed on life, but expresses a specific situation of life. Before him, Émile Durkheim, in "Rules for the Distinction of the Normal from the Pathological," had recognized "that a fact can be termed pathological only in relation to a given species," but also that "a social fact can only be termed normal in a given

species in relation to a particular phase, likewise determinate, of its development."[80] Canguilhem pushes further this "dialectical logic": what is defined as abnormal not only is included (albeit with its own fixed characterization) within the norm, but becomes the condition of recognizability and before that of existence. It is for this reason "that it is not paradoxical to say that abnormal, while logically second, is existentially first."[81] What would such a rule be that is outside the possibility of its infraction and how would it be defined? In the biological field, in fact, the normal state (as it were, of full health) is not even perceptible as such. To affirm, as the doctor Leriche does, that "health is life in the silence of organs," means that it is precisely illness that reveals to us negatively all of the physiological potentiality of the organism.[82] In order to be raised to a level of consciousness, health needs first to be lost. It is because of this second arrangement with respect to what negates it that the norm cannot be prefixed or imposed on life, but only inferred from it. Here the deconstruction is already evident that, beginning from the biological paradigm (liberated in turn from every presupposed objectivization), Canguilhem undertakes with regard to the juridical norm.[83] While this norm, which establishes a code of behavior that is anterior to its actuation, necessarily needs to foresee the possibility of the deviation of life (and therefore of sanctions with respect to it), the biological norm coincides with the vital condition in which it is manifested: "[A]n organism's norm of life is furnished by the organism itself, contained in its existence . . . a human organism's norm is its coincidence with the organism itself."[84] Once again it is the "norm of life" that is in play, but according to an order that, rather than circumscribing life within the limits of the norm, opens the norm to the infinite unpredictability of life. To the necessary negativity of the juridical norm—as Kelsen reminds us, every command can be expressed in the form of a prohibition—responds the constitutively affirmative nature of the biological.[85] Contrary to the Nazi idea that there exists a type of life which from its inception belongs to death, Canguilhem reminds us that death itself is a phenomenon of life.

Of course, it is also a negative phenomenon, like a disease that precedes and in turn determines it. But the negativity of disease (and more so death) doesn't lie in the modification of a properly original norm, as theories of degeneration would have it. It lies, on the contrary, in the organism's incapacity to modify the norm in a hold that crushes the norm on itself, forcing it into an infinite repetition. Here Canguilhem grafts the most innovative

part of his proposal, situating it precisely in the point of connection and difference between normality and normativity. Derived from the Latin *norma,* both terms tend to come together in a definition that at once superimposes them while stretching them apart. Completely normal isn't the person who corresponds to a prefixed prototype, but the individual who preserves intact his or her own normative power, which is to say the capacity to create continually new norms: "Normal man is normative man, the being capable of establishing new, even organic forms."[86] It is the point of maximum deconstruction of the immunitary paradigm and the opening to a different biopolitical lexicon: the medico-biological model, employed in an intensely self-preserving key by all of modernity *[tradizione moderna]* (not to mention that of totalitarianism), is here oriented to a radically innovative meaning. As only Nietzsche of the "great health" had glimpsed, biological normality doesn't reside in the capacity to impede variations, or even diseases of the organism, but will be found rather in integrating them within a different normative material. If one interprets life according to a perspective that isn't dominated by the instinct of preservation; if, as Kurt Goldstein had argued (in a direction, by the way, that Canguilhem himself takes up and elaborates), this instinct isn't to be considered "the general law of life but the law of a withdrawn life," then disease will no longer be configured as extreme risk, but rather as the risk of not being able to face new risks, such as the atrophying of what is naturally imperiling about human nature: "The healthy organism tries less to maintain itself in its present state and environment than to realize its nature. This requires that the organism, in facing risks, accepts the eventuality of catastrophic reactions."[87] The logic of the living is capable of introducing a powerful semantic in the juridical norm against the immunitary normalization of life that is able to push beyond its usual definition.

The last work Gilles Deleuze left us is titled *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life.*[88] A short text, in some ways elliptical and incomplete, it does, however, contain all the threads that we have woven to this point under the sign of an affirmative biopolitics. Deleuze commences with the definition of a "transcendental camp," understood as something that does not refer to an object or a subject, but rather a potentializing or depotentializing flow that moves between one sensation and another. Such a characterization is also to be contrasted with the notion of consciousness to the degree that, always focused on the constitution of a subject separated from the object

proper, it ends up inevitably establishing a relationship of reciprocal transcendence. Against the latter, the transcendental field is presented as a plane of absolute immanence: it doesn't refer to anything else but itself. It is here that the category of *bíos* comes into play: "We will say of pure immanence that it is A LIFE and nothing else . . . A life is the immanence of immanence, absolute immanence: it is complete power, complete bliss."[89] Deleuze traces the conceptual genealogy in the later works of Fichte, for whom intuition of pure activity is nothing fixed.[90] It isn't a being, but precisely a life, for Maine de Biran as well (without speaking of Spinoza, Nietzsche, and Bergson, who remain the leading lights for Deleuze). Surprisingly, though, Deleuze's text introduces another unusual reference, to Dickens, and in particular to the novel titled *Our Mutual Friend* (in French *L'ami commun*), which seems to inscribe the question of *bíos* in that of *communitas* and vice versa. I would say that his "theoretical" nucleus (though we could say biophilosophical) resides in the connecting and diverging point between *the* life and precisely *a* life.[91] Here the move from the determinate article to that of the indeterminate has the function of marking the break with the metaphysical feature that connects the dimension of life to that of individual consciousness. There is a modality of *bíos* that cannot be inscribed within the borders of the conscious subject, and therefore is not attributable to the form of the individual or of the person. Deleuze seeks it out in the extreme line in which life *[la vita]* encounters *[s'incontra]* or clashes with *[si scontra]* death. It is that which happens in Dickens's text, when Riderhood, still in a coma, is in a suspended state between life and death. In those moments, in which time seems to be interrupted and opened to the absolute force of the event, the flicker of life that remains to him separates Riderhood from his individual subjectivity so as to present itself in all its simple biological texture, that is, in its vital, bare facticity:

> No one has the least regard for the man: with them all, he has been an object of avoidance, suspicion, and aversion; but the spark of life within him is curiously separable from himself now, and they have a deep interest in it, probably because it *is* life, and they are living and must die.[92]

The interest on the part of those present for this uncertain spark of life that "may smolder and go out, or it may glow and expand" is born, therefore, from the fact that in its absolute singularity, it moves beyond the sphere of the individual to be rooted in an impersonal datum—in the circumstance that, sooner or later, one dies *[si muore]*.[93]

> Between his life and his death, there is a moment that is only that of *a* life playing with death. The life of the individual gives way to an impersonal and yet singular life that releases a pure event freed from the accidents of internal and external life, that is from the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens: a "Homo tantum" with whom everyone empathizes and who attains a sort of beatitude. It is a haecceity no longer of individuation but of singularization: a life of pure immanence, neutral, beyond good and evil, for it was only the subject that incarnated it in the midst of things that made it good or bad. The life of such individuality fades away in favor of the singular life immanent to a man who no longer has a name, though he can be mistaken for no other. A singular essence, a life.[94]

A singular *[così]* life, the singularity of *a* life, Deleuze continues, is not distinguishable *[individuabile]*, that is, is not ascribable to an individual, because it is in itself generic, relating to a genre, but also unmistakable because it is unique in its genre—as that of a newborn, who is similar to all the others, but different from each of them for the tonality of the voice, the intensity of a smile, the sparkle of a tear.[95] It is constitutively improper, and for that reason common, as pure difference can be, the difference that isn't defined from anything other than from its own same differing *[differire]*. This is how the warning that appears in the section on singularity in *The Logic of Sense* ought to be understood, according to which "we can not accept the alternative . . . ; either singularities already comprised in individuals and persons, or the undifferentiated abyss."[96] The difference, which is to say the singularity, doesn't reside on the side of the individual, but rather of the impersonal—or a person that doesn't coincide with any of those [forms] in which we are accustomed to decline the subject (I, you, he), but, if anywhere, in that of the "fourth person," as Lawrence Ferlinghetti paradoxically expresses it.[97] Which is to say, in the grammar of knowledge and of power that has always excluded it:

> Far from being individual or personal, singularities preside over the genesis of individuals and persons; they are distributed in a "potential" which admits neither Self nor I, but which produces them by actualizing or realizing them, although the figures of this actualization do not at all resemble the realized potential.[98]

It is the classic and controversial Deleuzian theme of the "virtual," but at the same time of the preindividual and of the transindividual that Simondon posits.[99] Deleuze himself refers to it, citing Simondon's assertion that "the living lives at the limit of itself, on its limit," which is to say a crease in which subject and object, internal and external, and organic and inorganic

are folded.[100] An impersonal singularity (or a singular impersonality), which, rather than being imprisoned in the confines of the individual, opens those confines to an eccentric movement that "traverses men as well as plants and animals independently of the matter of their individuation and the forms of their personality."[101]

In such a move we can glimpse something that, while still not tracing the figure of an affirmative biopolitics, anticipates more than one feature. If we superimpose the pages of Dickens to which reference was already made, we perceive that these kinds of features emerge once again from the reversal of Nazi thanatopolitics: the life that qualifies the experience of Riderhood, depersonalizing it, is, as in the Nazi laboratory, in direct contact with death. What Dickens calls "outer husk" or a "flabby lump of mortality" has not a little to do with the "empty shells" and "life unworthy of life "of Binding and Hoche—with Treblinka's flesh of the ovens—yet with a fundamental difference that has to do with a change in orientation; no longer from life seemingly to death, but from death seemingly to a life in which Riderhood awakes.[102] When Deleuze speaks of a "sort of beatitude" as a condition that lies beyond the distinction between good and evil (because it precedes, or perhaps because it follows, the normative subject that places it in being), he is also alluding to "a norm of life" that doesn't subject life to the transcendence of a norm, but makes the norm the immanent impulse of life. The appeal to the impersonal as the only vital and singular mode isn't unrelated to the going beyond a semantics of the person that has been represented from the origin of our culture in its juridical status (at least insofar as the law was and continues to function in relation to the intangible individuality of the person). It is this biojuridical node between life and norm that Deleuze invites us to untie in a form that, rather than separating them, recognizes the one in the other, and discovers in life its immanent norm, giving to the norm the potentiality *[potenza]* of life's becoming. That such a unique process crosses the entire extension of life without providing a continuous solution—that any thing that lives needs to be thought in the unity of life—means that no part of it can be destroyed in favor of another: every life is a form of life and every form refers to life. This is neither the content nor the final sense of biopolitics, but is a minimum its presupposition. Whether its meaning will again be disowned in a politics of death or affirmed in a politics of life will depend on the mode in which contemporary thought will follow its traces.

Notes

Translator's Introduction

1. Roberto Esposito, *Communitas: Origine e destino della comunità* (Turin: Einaudi, 1998).

2. Or, when not "exposing" presumed terrorists, force-feeding them so as to protect their lives. See Luke Mitchell, "God Mode," *Harper's* 313 (August 2006): 9–11. The American business in question (though by no means the only one) is Wal-Mart, where, in order to discourage "unhealthy job applicants, it was suggested that Wal-Mart arrange for 'all jobs to include some physical activity (e.g., all cashiers do some cart-gathering)'" ("Wal-Mart Memo Suggests Ways to Cut Employee Benefit Costs," *New York Times*, October 26, 2005).

3. Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems*, trans. John Bednarz Jr. with Dirk Baecker (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995); Donna Haraway, "Biopolitics and Postmodern Bodies," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 203–30; and Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena* (New York: Verso, 1991), 85. Compare as well Robert Unger's discussion and problematization of "immunity rights" and radical democracy in *False Necessity: Anti-Necessitarian Social Theory in the Service of Radical Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 513–17, 530. My thanks to Adam Sitze for drawing my attention to Unger's important contribution to immunity theory.

4. Agnes Heller and Ferenc Fehér, *Biopolitics* (Brookfield: Aldershot, 1994); Agnes Heller and Sonja Puntscher Riekmann, eds., *The Politics of the Body, Race, and Nature* (Averbury: Aldershot, 1996); and idem, *Theory of Modernity* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1999). For Mark C. Taylor, see *Nots* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), as well as *Hiding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

5. Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of Religion," in *On Religion*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998); *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (New York: Verso, 1997); "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides," in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, ed. Giovanna Borradori (Chicago:

University of Chicago Press, 2003); and *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005).

6. Michel Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976*, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003). See also his lectures from 1978 to 1979, collected in *Naissance de la biopolitique: Cours au Collège de France (1978–1979)*, under the guidance of Alessandro Fontana (Paris: Seuil, 2004).

7. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998); *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999); and *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004).

8. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000) and *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004).

9. See in this regard Esposito's earlier works on political philosophy: *Vico e Rousseau e il moderno Stato borghese* (Bari: De Donato, 1976); *La politica e la storia: Machiavelli e Vico* (Naples: Liguori, 1980); *Ordine e conflitto: Machiavelli e la letteratura politica del Rinascimento italiano* (Naples: Liguori, 1984); *Categorie dell'impolitico* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1988); *Nove pensieri sulla politica* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1993); and *L'origine della politica: Hannah Arendt o Simone Weil?* (Rome: Donzelli, 1996).

10. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004) and *Giving an Account of Oneself: A Critique of Ethical Violence* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005); Keith Ansell-Pearson, *The Viroid Life: Perspectives on Nietzsche and the Transhuman Condition* (New York: Routledge, 1997) and *Germinal Life: The Difference and Repetition of Deleuze* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature* (London: Polity Press, 2004); and Ronald Dworkin, *Life's Dominion: An Argument about Abortion, Euthanasia, and Individual Freedom* (London: Vintage Books, 1994) as well as *Sovereign Virtue: The Theory and Practice of Equality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

11. Karl Binding and Alfred Hoche, *Die Freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Leben: Ihr Mass und ihre Form* (Leipzig, 1920). Selections from the work were translated into English in 1992. See "Permitting the Destruction of Unworthy Life," in *Law and Medicine* 8 (1994): 231–65.

12. Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas: Protezione e negazione della vita* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002).

13. Esposito, *Communitas*, xii.

14. Émile Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society*, trans. Elizabeth Palmer (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1973), and Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W. D. Halls (London: Routledge, 2002).

15. Esposito, *Communitas*, xiii.

16. Ibid., xiv.

17. Cf. the chapter in *Communitas* dedicated to guilt: "Community is definable only on the basis of the lack from which it derives and that inevitably connotes it precisely as an absence or defect of community" (33).

18. See "Immunity" in chapter 2.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. What Esposito has done, it seems to me, is to have drawn on Nancy's arguments in *The Inoperative Community* regarding precisely the excessive nature of community vis-à-vis the metaphysical subject. Nancy writes that "community does not weave a superior, immortal, or transmortal life between subjects . . . but it is constitutively, to the extent that it is a matter of 'constitution' here, calibrated on the death of those whom we call, perhaps, wrongly, its 'members' (inasmuch as it is not a question of organism)." Esposito demonstrates instead that the calibration of which Nancy speaks doesn't just involve the future deaths of the community's "members," but also revolves around the mortal threat that the other members represent for each other. It is precisely this threat and the calls for immunization from it that explain why so many have in fact made the question of community "a question of organism." Or better, it is precisely the unreflected nature of community as organism that requires deconstruction. Only in this way will the biopolitical origins of community be made clear via community's aporia in immunity (Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community,* ed. Peter Connor, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simone Sawhney [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991], 14).

23. See "Immunity" in chapter 2.

24. Rossella Bonito Oliva's analysis of the immunization paradigm is apropos: "The route of a mature modernity unbinds the originarity of the relation [between *zoon* and the political] and makes immanent the reasons of living with *[cum-vivere],* which is always assumed as a subsequent and therapeutic step for the condition of solitude and the insecurity of the individual" ("From the Immune Community to the Communitarian Immunity: On the Recent Reflections of Roberto Esposito," *Diacritics* 36:2 (summer 2006).

25. Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality,* ed. Graham Burcell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 103.

26. Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended,"* 253.

27. Butler, *Precarious Life,* 24. See as well Butler's discussion of the opacity of the subject: "The opacity of the subject may be a consequence of its being conceived as a relational being, one whose early and primary relations are not always available to conscious knowledge. Moments of unknowingness about oneself tend to emerge in the context of relations to others, suggesting that these relations call upon primary forms of relationality that are not always available to explicit and reflective thematization" (Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself,* 20).

28. Butler, *Precarious Life,* 20.

29. Butler does come close to Esposito's position when describing the violent, self-centered subject: "Its actions constitute the building of a subject that seeks to restore and maintain its mastery through the systematic destruction of its multilateral relations . . . It shores itself up, seeks to reconstitute its imagined wholeness, but only at the price of denying its own vulnerability, its dependency, its exposure, where it exploits those very features in others, thereby making those features 'other to' itself" (ibid., 41).

30. Roberto Esposito, "Introduzione: Termini della politica," in *Oltra la politica: Aantologia dell'impolitico* (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 1996), 1. Lest I appear to reduce their respective positions to a Hobbesian declension of biopolitics in Esposito and a Hegelian search for recognition in subject positions in Butler, each does recognize the need to

muster some sort of new understanding of the changing conditions of what qualifies as life. For Butler, that search is premised on the need to enlarge "the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved"; hence the importance she places on narratives of multilateralism and changing the normative schemes of what is or isn't human proffered by the media (Butler, *Precarious Life,* xiv). For his part, Esposito chooses to focus on the process of individualization that occurs at both the individual and collective level, arguing that "if the subject is always thought within the form of *bíos,* this in turn is inscribed in the horizon of a *cum* [with] that makes it one with the being of man" (See "Philosophy after Nazism" in chapter 5.). The title *Bíos* comes into its own here as a term that marks the vital experiences that the individualized subject shares and has "in common" politically with others. Esposito's excursus on life as a form of birth that he elaborates in chapter 5 may in fact be read as a necessary preface for the kind of changed recognition protocols related to grieving that Butler herself is seeking.

31. Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 44.

32. Ibid. Cf. in this regard the pages Foucault devotes to the theme in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981–82,* trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 120–21, 182–85. My thanks to Adam Sitze for pointing out the important connections between biopolitics and these later seminars.

33. Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 51.

34. Ibid.; emphasis in original.

35. Ibid. In this regard, see A. J. P. Thomson's "What's to Become of 'Democracy to Come?'" *Postmodern Culture* 15:3 (May 2005).

36. Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship,* 35; emphasis in original.

37. "Thus Deleuze's ultimate response to Hegel's argument against the 'richness' of immediacy is that the significance of the singular — 'this,' 'here,' 'now' — is only grasped within the context of a problem, a 'drama' of thought that gives it sense, in the absence of which it is effectively impoverished" (*Gilles Deleuze: Key Concepts,* ed. Charles J. Stivale [Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005], 47).

38. Derrida, *Rogues,* 33.

39. Ibid., 36.

40. Ibid., 36–37.

41. Derrida, "Autoimmunity," 95; emphasis in original.

42. With that said, it is also true that with a different set of texts in hand a different reading of Derrida emerges, namely, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International,* trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), as well as Derrida's later texts on hospitality, in particular *On Hospitality,* trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000). Hent de Vries analyzes Derridean thought and hospitality as well in the last chapter of his *Religion and Violence: Philosophical Perspectives from Kant to Derrida* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002). My thanks to Miguel Vatter for pointing out these other more "communist" texts.

43. Esposito, *Immunitas,* 170.

44. See "The Norm of Life" in chapter 5.

45. See Andrea Cavalletti's recent *La città biopolitica,* where he implicitly invokes the life of the city as one requiring protection (Andrea Cavalletti, *La città biopolitica: Mitologie della sicurezza* [Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2005], esp. 20–27). See as well my interview with Esposito in *Diacritics* 36:2 (summer 2006).

46. See too the recent, brilliant contributions of Simona Forti to discussions of biopolitics originating in Italy. In addition to her groundbreaking work from 2001 titled *Totalitarianismo* (Rome: Laterza, 2001), her stunning "The Biopolitics of Souls: Racism, Nazism, and Plato" recently appeared in English (*Political Theory* 34:1 [February 2006]: 9–32). There she examines "the ambivalences that connect some of the assumptions of our philosophical tradition to Nazi totalitarianism" (10).

47. Foucault, "*Society Must Be Defended*," 246–47.

48. Ibid., 246.

49. Ibid., 247.

50. Ibid., 246.

51. Ibid., 259.

52. See especially Paolo Virno, *The Grammar of the Multitude*, trans. Isabella Bertoletti (New York: Semiotext[e], 2004); *Governing China's Population: From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*, ed. Susan Greenhalgh and Edwin A. Winckler (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005); *Lessico di biopolitica*, ed. Renata Brandimarte, Patricia Chiantera-Stutte, et al. (Rome: Manifestolibri, 2006); and Antonella Cutro, *Biopolitica: storia e attualità di un concetto* (Verona: Ombre Corte 2005).

53. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1.

54. On this note see Laurent Dubreuil's "Leaving Politics: Bios, Zoé, Life," *Diacritics* 36:2 (summer 2006).

55. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985). Agamben discusses at length the relation among Schmitt, Benjamin, and the state of exception in *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

56. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 7.

57. Ibid., 8.

58. Ibid., 174. In this sense I agree with Eric Vogt's view that Agamben "corrects" Foucault's analysis. See his "S/Citing the Camp," in *Politics, Metaphysics and Death: Essays on Giorgio Agamben's Homo Sacer* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005), 74–101.

59. Agamben does take up his analysis of modern biopolitics in *The Open*, where what he calls the anthropological machine begins producing "the state of exception" so as to determine the threshold between the human and the inhuman. Yet to the degree the optic moves along the horizon of the state of exception, modernity and with it a nineteenth-century anthropological discourse remain wedded to a political (and metaphysical) aporia. "Indeed, precisely because the human is already presupposed every time, the machine actually produces a kind of state of exception, a zone of indeterminacy in which the outside is nothing but the exclusion of an inside and the inside is in turn only the inclusion of an outside" (Agamben, *The Open*, 37).

60. Marco Revelli, *La politica perduta* (Turin: Einaudi, 2003).

61. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 421.

62. See Paolo Virno's previously cited *Grammar of the Multitude* as well as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's edited collection of essays on Italian radical thought *Labor of Dionysus: A Critique of the State-Form* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

63. Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 348.

64. Certainly, the Deleuzian optic is crucial in accounting for Hardt and Negri's positive vision of biopolitics, as they themselves readily admit. A new sense of the communal

based on the multitude and cooperation makes clear the illusory nature of modern sovereignty. See in this regard Negri's *Kairòs, alma venus, multitudo: Nove lezioni impartite a me stesso* (Rome: Manifestolibri, 2000): "The teleology of the common, inasmuch as it is the motor of the ontological transformation of the world, cannot be subjected to the theory of sovereign mediation. Sovereign mediation is always in fact the foundation of a unit of measure, while ontological transformation has no measure" (127).

65. Hardt and Negri, *Multitude,* 206.

66. In a recent essay, Esposito pushes his reading of Foucault to a global reevaluation of the term "totalitarianism": "Recognizing the attempt in Nazism, the only kind of its genre, to liberate the natural features of existence from their *historical* peculiarity, means reversing the Arendtian thesis of the totalitarian superimposition between philosophy of nature and philosophy of history. Indeed, it means distinguishing the blind spot in their unassimilability and therefore in the philosophical impracticability of the notion of totalitarianism" (Roberto Esposito, "Totalitarismo o biopolitica: Per un'interpretazione filosofica del Novecento," *Micromega* 5 [2006]: 62–63).

67. See "Regeneration" in chapter 4.

68. We ought to note that much of Esposito's critique of Foucault also holds true for Agamben. But where Foucault links socialism to Nazism via racism, Agamben joins a Nazi biopolitics to modern democracies through the state of exception. The result is, however, the same: to highlight Nazism's shared biopolitical features with contemporary democracies and so to lessen its singularity.

69. In this regard, see the entry for sovereignty in Esposito's *Nove pensieri sulla politica* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1993), 87–111.

70. "One can speak of the Nazi state as a 'biocracy.' The model here is a theocracy, a system of rule by priests of a sacred order under the claim of divine prerogative. In the case of the Nazi biocracy, the divine prerogative was that of cure through purification and revitalization of the Aryan race." Lifton goes on to speak of biological activism in the murderous ecology of Auschwitz, which leads him to the conclusion that the "Nazi vision of therapy" cannot be understood apart from mass murder (Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* [New York: Basic Books, 1986], 17, 18).

71. See "Regeneration" in chapter 4. In *Immunitas* Esposito makes explicit his attempt to fold the notion of exception into that of immunization. Alluding to Agamben, Esposito notes that "the irreducibly antinomical structure of the *nomos basileûs*—founded on the interiorization or better the 'internment' of an exteriority—is especially evident in the case of exception that Carl Schmitt situates in the 'most external sphere' of law" (Esposito, *Immunitas,* 37). Here Esposito attempts to think immunity through a Benjaminian reading of law and violence, but elsewhere he notes that such a method is in fact Bataillian. See his *Categorie dell'impolitico* for the debt such a methodology owes Georges Bataille and the term *partage,* or the liminal copresence of separation and concatenation (Esposito, *Categorie dell'impolitico,* xxii).

72. See "Poliitics over Life" in chapter 1.

73. See in particular the 2001 roundtable discussion among Esposito, Negri, and Veca ("Dialogo sull'impero e democrazia," *Micromega* 5 [2001]: 115–34), as well as Esposito's recent elaboration of biopolitical democracy ("Totalitarismo o biopolitica: Per un'interpretazione filosofica del Novecento," *Micromega* 5 [2006]: 57–66).

74. Hardt and Negri, *Multitude,* 206.

75. "Interview with Roberto Esposito," *Diacritics* 36:2 (summer 2006). With more time, it would be of great interest to trace how Esposito's early work on the Italian avant-garde informs his later reflections on immunity and biopolitics. See in this regard his analysis of the poetry of Nanni Balestrini in *Ideologia della neo avanguardia* (Naples: Liguori, 1976) and the resemblance between *communitas* as a vital sphere with that of Balestrini's poetics.

76. Hardt and Negri, *Multitude,* 356. But we shouldn't assume that the contact implicit in a network doesn't risk precisely the kind of autoimmunitary deficiencies that Baudrillard, for instance, sees as the principal feature of current politics. He writes: "All integrated and hyperintegrated systems—the technological system, the social system, even thought itself in artificial intelligence, and its derivatives—tend towards the extreme constituted by immunodeficiency. Seeking to eliminate all external aggression, they secrete their own internal virulence, their own malignant reversibility" (Jean Baudrillard, "Prophylaxis and Virulence," in *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena,* trans. James Benedict [London: Verso, 1993], 62).

77. See "Property" in chapter 2.

78. See "Flesh" in chapter 5; emphasis in original.

79. What he will later say about Deleuze's final text, "Pure Immanence: A Life . . . ," is a shorthand for his own analysis: *bíos* is inscribed in the question of *communitas* and vice versa (See "The Norm of Life" in chapter 5).

80. See "Philosophy of Nazism" in chapter 5.

81. In this sense, Esposito's conception of biopolitics differs from Donna Haraway's. Haraway, we recall, leans directly on the immunitary paradigm as a model for interaction. If she doesn't sing its praises, she does recognize in it the postmodern mode by which "the semi-permeable self [is] able to engage with others (human and non-human, inner and outer), but always with finite consequences" (Haraway, "Biopolitics and Postmodern Bodies," 225). Significantly, these include "situated possibilities and impossibilities of individuation and identification; and of partial fusions and dangers." In short, only when immunized is every member capable of interacting with every other. *Bíos* moves the accent off of the individual and the body, the individual body, to a notion of life, one that cannot be traced back to a specific individual, but rather to the dynamic motor of the virtual and the singularities that precede the genesis of individual selves. In other words, to *communitas* as the preindividualizing mode of having and being in common.

82. More similarities between Butler and Esposito's reading of the subject emerge here. "Do we want to say that it is our status as 'subjects' that binds us all together even though, for many of us, the 'subject' is multiple or fractured? And does the insistence on the subject as a precondition of political agency not erase the more fundamental modes of dependency that do bind us and out of which emerge our thinking and affiliation, the basis of our vulnerability, affiliation, and collective resistance?" (Butler, *Precarious Life,* 49).

83. Of particular importance for Esposito is the category of flesh appropriated from Merleau-Ponty, and its usefulness for scrambling and eliding previously inscribed immunitary borders. Flesh, for Esposito, offers the possibility of thinking a politicization of life that doesn't move through a semantics of the body, as flesh refers to a "worldly material that is antecedent to or that follows the constitution of the subject of law" (See "Flesh" in chapter 5.). The distinctively anti-immunitary features of flesh make

it possible to countenance the "eclipse of the political body," and with it the emergence of a different form of community in which contagious exposure to others gives way to constituitive openness. Flesh will then name what is common to all, a being that is "singular and common" (ibid.).

84. Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 64.

85. Esposito, *Communitas*, 139. In this regard, see Adriana Cavarero's compelling reading of speech and politics in the thought of Hannah Arendt, to which Esposito's understanding of the relation between community and communication is indebted: "According to her [Arendt], speech—even it is understood as *phone semantike*—does not become political by way of the things of the community that speech is able to designate. Rather, speech becomes political on account of the self-revelation of speakers who express and communicate their uniqueness through speaking—no matter the specific content of what is said. The political valence of signifying is thus shifted from speech—and from language as a system of signification—to the speaker" (Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman [Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005], 190). For the relation Bataille draws between the individual and communication, see his *On Nietzsche*, trans. Bruce Boone (New York: Paragon, 1992), esp. 18–19.

86. Cf. Judith Butler's gloss of Laplance's "Responsibility and Response" in *Giving an Account of Oneself:* "The other, we might say, comes first, and this means that there is no reference to one's own death that is not at once a reference to the death of the other" (75).

87. Georges Bataille, "The College of Sociology," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, trans. Alan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 251.

88. Esposito, *Communitas*, 142.

89. See "The Norm of Life" in chapter 5.

90. Ansell-Pearson, *Viroid Life*, 182, 189.

91. Esposito, *Immunitas*, 205.

92. See "Birth" in chapter 5.

93. Ibid.

94. See Andrew Fischer's helpful summary of the debate, "Flirting with Fascism: "The Sloterdijk Debate," *Radical Philosophy* 9 (January/February 2000): 20–33.

95. Habermas, 14.

96. Ibid., 10.

97. Esposito, "Totalitarismo o biopolitica," 63–64; emphasis in original.

98. Dworkin, *Life's Dominion*, 76–77.

99. Dworkin, "Playing God," in *Sovereign Virtue*, 452.

100. Ibid., 449.

101. Dworkin, "Liberal Community," in *Sovereign Virtue*, 227.

102. Dworkin, "Playing God," 452.

103. See "The Norm of Life" in chapter 5.

104. Ibid.

105. Cf. Esposito's reading of Gehlen in *Immunitas:* "For Gehlen, the other, more than an alter ego or a different subject is essentially and above all else a non-ego; the 'non' that allows the ego to identify with the one who is precisely other from its own other" (123).

106. Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, trans. Anne Boyman (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 28–29.

107. See "The Norm of Life" in chapter 5.

108. Ibid.

109. I wish to thank Miguel Vatter for the terminology. For a discussion of the difference between biopower and biopolitics, which seems to me implicit in this distinction, see Maurizio Lazzarato, "From Biopower to Biopolitics," available at http://www.generation-online.org/c/fcbiopolitics.htm (accessed October 10, 2007): "Foucault's work ought to be continued upon this fractured line between resistance and creation. Foucault's itinerary allows us to conceive the reversal of biopower into biopolitics, the 'art of governance' into the production and government of new forms of life. To establish a conceptual and political distinction between biopower and biopolitics is to move in step with Foucault's thinking."

110. "Transcript, "President Bush Discusses the War on Terror," National Endowment for Democracy, October 5, 2005 (available at www.whitehouse.gov).

111. "As Americans, we believe that people everywhere—everywhere—prefer freedom to slavery, and that liberty once chosen, improves the lives of all" (ibid.).

112. Cf. Achille Mbembe's discussion of the individual as opposed to the person in discussions of African societies: "Finally, in these societies the 'person' is seen as predominant over the 'individual,' considered (it is added) 'a strictly Western creation.' Instead of the individual, there are entities, captives of magical signs, amid an enchanted and mysterious universe in which the power of invocation and evocation replaces the power of production, and in which fantasy and caprice coexist not only with the possibility of disaster but with its reality" (Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001], 4). My thanks to Adam Sitze for pointing out the deep connections between Esposito and Mbembe.

113. See "Flesh" in chapter 5.

Introduction

1. Roberto Esposito, *Communitas: Origine e destino della comunità* (Turin: Einaudi, 1998) and *Immunitas: Protezione e negazione della vita* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002).

1. The Enigma of Biopolitics

1. See in this regard the collection *Biopolitik*, ed. Christian Geyer (Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 2001).

2. Karl Binding, *Zum Werden und Leben der Staaten: Zehn Staatsrechtliche Abhandlungen* (Munich and Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1920); Eberhard Dennert, *Der Staat als lebendiger Organismus: Biologische Betrachtungen zum Aufbau der neuen Zeit* (Halle [Saale]: C. E. Müller, 1920); and Edward Hahn, *Der Staat, ein Lebenwesen* (Munich: Dt. Volksverlag, 1926).

3. Rudolph Kjellén, *Stormakterna: Konturer kring samtidens storpolitik* (Stockholm: Gebers, 1905).

4. Rudolph Kjellén, *Staten som Lifsform* (Stockholm: Hugo Geber, 1916).

5. Rudolph Kjellén, *Grundriss zu einem System der Politik* (Leipzig: Rudolf Leipzig Hirzel, 1920), 3–4.

6. Jakob von Uexküll, *Staatsbiologie: Anatomie, Phisiologie, Pathologie des Staates* (Berlin: Verlag von Gebrüder Paetel, 1920).

7. Ibid., 46.

8. Ibid., 55.

9. Morley Roberts, *Bio-politics: An Essay in the Physiology, Pathology and Politics of the Social and Somatic Organism* (London: Dent, 1938).

10. Ibid., 153.

11. Ibid., 160.

12. Aroon Starobinski, *La biopolitique: Essai d'interprétation de l'histoire de l'humanité et des civilisations* (Geneva: Imprimerie des Arts, 1960).

13. Ibid., 7.

14. Ibid., 9.

15. Edgar Morin, *Introduction à une politique de l'homme* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969).

16. Ibid., 11.

17. Ibid., 12.

18. Edgar Morin, *Le paradigme perdu: La nature humaine* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973).

19. André Birré, "Introduction: Si l'Occident s'est trompé de conte?" *Cahiers de la biopolitique* 1:1 (1968): 3.

20. Antonella Cutro also discusses this first French production in biopolitics in her *Michel Foucault. Tecnica e vita. Biopolitica e filosofia del "Bios"* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 2004), which constitutes the first, useful attempt to systematize Foucauldian biopolitics. More generally on biopolitics, see *Politica della vita*, ed. Laura Bazzicalupo and Roberto Esposito (Milan: Laterza, 2003), as well as *Biopolitica minore*, ed. Paolo Petricari (Rome: Manifestolibri, 2003).

21. *Research in Biopolitics*, ed. Stephen A. Peterson and Albert Somit (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press). The volumes, in order, are *Sexual Politics and Political Feminism* (1991); *Biopolitics in the Mainstream* (1994); *Human Nature and Politics* (1995); *Research in Biopolitics* (1996); *Recent Explorations in Biology and Politics* (1997); *Sociology and Politics* (1998); *Ethnic Conflicts Explained by Ethnic Nepotism* (1999); and *Evolutionary Approaches in the Behavioral Sciences: Toward a Better Understanding of Human Nature* (2001).

22. Lynton K. Caldwell, "Biopolitics: Science, Ethics, and Public Policy," *Yale Review*, no. 54 (1964): 1–16; and James C. Davies, *Human Nature in Politics: The Dynamics of Political Behavior* (New York: Wiley, 1963).

23. Roger D. Masters, *The Nature of Politics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989).

24. Walter Bagehot, *Physics and Politics, or, Thoughts on the Application of the Principles of "Natural Selection" and "Inheritance" to Political Society* (Kitchener, Ont.: Batoche, 2001).

25. Thomas Thorson, *Biopolitics* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1970).

26. See, on this point, D. Easton, "The Relevance of Biopolitics to Political Theory," in *Biology and Politics*, ed. Albert Somit (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), 237–47, as well as before that William James Miller Mackenzie, *Politics and Social Science* (Baltimore:

Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967), and H. Lasswell, *The Future of the Comparative Method,* in *Comparative Politics* 1 (1968): 3–18.

27. Warder C. Allee's volumes on the animal are classic: *Animal Life and Social Growth* (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins Company and Associates in Cooperation with the Century of Progress Exposition, 1932) and *The Social Life of Animals* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958). Also of interest are Lionel Tiger, *Men in Groups* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970) and Desmond Morris, *The Human Zoo* (New York: Dell, 1969). For this "natural" conception of war, see especially Quincy Wright, *A Study of War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), and Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948). More recently there is V. S. E. Falger, *Biopolitics and the Study of International Relations: Implication, Results, and Perspectives,*in *Research in Biopolitics* 2: 115–34.

28. Albert Somit and Stephen A. Peterson, *Biopolitics in the Year 2000, Research in Biopolitics* 8: 181.

29. In this direction, compare Carlo Galli, "Sul valore politico del concetto di 'natura,'" in *Autorità e natura: Per una storia dei concetti filosofico-politici* (Bologna: Centro stampa Baiesi, 1988), 57–94, and Michela Cammelli, "Il darwinismo e la teoria politica," *Filosofia politica,* no. 3 (2000): 489–518.

30. An acute historical-conceptual analysis of sovereignty, if from another perspective, is that proposed by Biagio De Giovanni, "Discutere la sovranità," in Bazzicalupo and Esposito, *Politica della vita,* 5–15. See as well Luigi Alfieri's "Sovranità, morte, e politica," in the same volume (16–28).

31. For an analytic reconstruction of the problem, see Alessandro Pandolfi, "Foucault pensatore politico postmoderno," in *Tre studi su Foucault* (Naples: Terzo Millennio Edizioni, 2000), 131–246. On the relation between power and law, I refer the reader to Lucio D'Alessandro, "Potere e pena nella problematica di Michel Foucault," in *La verità e le forme giuridiche* (Naples: La città del sole, 1994), 141–60.

32. Michel Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976,* ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 239–40.

33. Michel Foucault, "Crisis de un modelo en la medicina?" in *Dits et Écrits,* vol. 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 222.

34. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).

35. Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974–1975,* trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2003).

36. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* vol. 1: *An Introduction,* trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 89.

37. Ibid., 145.

38. Michel Foucault, "Return to History," in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology,* ed. J. Faubion (New York: New Press, 1998), 430–31.

39. Michel Foucault, "The Crises of Medicine or the Crises of Anti-Medicine," *Foucault Studies,* no. 1 (December 2004): 11.

40. Michel Foucault, "Human Nature: Justice versus Power" (Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault), in *Michel Foucault and His Interlocutors,* ed. A. I. Davidson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 110. Cf. Stefano Catucci's *La 'natura' della natura umana: Note su Michel Foucault,* in Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault, *Della natura umana: Invariante biologico e potere politico* (Rome: Derive Approdi, 2004), 75–85.

41. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 143.

42. Michel Foucault, "Bio-histoire et bio-politique," in *Dits et Écrits, 1954–1988*, vol. 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 97.

43. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 143.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.

46. Foucault, "*Society Must Be Defended*," 35; my emphasis.

47. Ibid., 36.

48. Ibid.; my emphasis.

49. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 138.

50. On the processes of subjectivization, cf. Mariapaola Fimiani, "Le véritable amour et le souci commun du monde," in *Foucault: Le courage de la vérité*, ed. Frédéric Gros (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2002), 87–127, and Yves Michaud, "Des modes de subjectivationaux techniques de soi: Foucault et les identités de notre temps," *Cités*, no. 2 (2000): 11–39. Fundamental for the theme remains Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Seán Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

51. Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8:4 (summer 1982): 781.

52. Michel Foucault, " 'Omnes et Singulatim': Towards a Critique of Political Reason," in *Power*, ed. James Faubion (New York: New Press, 1997), 321.

53. Ibid., 322.

54. Ibid.

55. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 95.

56. Ibid., 144–45.

57. I am alluding to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), esp. 22–41, but also to the group headed by the French journal *Multitudes*. See in particular the first issue of 2000, dedicated precisely to *Biopolitique et biopouvoir*, with contributions by Maurizio Lazzarato, Éric Alliez, Bruno Karsenti, Paolo Napoli, and others. It should be said that the theoretical-political perspective is in itself interesting, but only weakly linked to that of Foucault, who inspires it.

58. See, on this point, Valerio Marchetti, "La naissance de la biopolitique," in *Au risque de Foucault* (Paris: Éditions du Centre Georges Pompidou: Centre Michel Foucault, 1997), 237–47.

59. Michel Foucault, "The Political Technology of Individuals," in Faubion, *Power*, 405.

60. Marco Revelli has recently discussed the relation between politics and death in a vigorously ethical and theoretical essay, *La politica perduta* (Turin: Einaudi, 2003). See as well his earlier *Oltre il Novecento* (Turin: Einaudi, 2001).

61. Foucault, "*Society Must Be Defended*," 241; my emphasis.

62. Ibid., 36.

63. Ibid., 253–54.

64. Ibid., 254.

65. Cf. Michael Donnelly, "On Foucault's Uses of the Notion 'Biopower,' " in *Michel Foucault Philosopher*, ed. Timothy Armstrong (New York: Routledge, 1992), 199–203, as well as Jacques Rancière, "Biopolitique ou politique?" *Multitudes* 1 (March 2000): 88–93.

66. Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 779.

67. This is the outcome that Giorgio Agamben coherently arrives at in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998).

2. The Paradigm of Immunization

1. On the communitarian motif in Hegel, see in particular Rossella Bonito-Oliva's *L'individuo moderno e la nuova comunità* (Naples: Guida, 1990), esp. 63–64.

2. Émile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method,* trans. W. D. Halls (New York: Free Press, 1982), 73.

3. Max Scheler, *Problems of a Sociology of Knowledge,* trans. Manfred Frings (London: Routledge, 1980) and *Person and Self-Value: Three Essays,* trans. M. S. Frings (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1987); Helmuth Plessner, *Conditio humana* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983) and *Limits of Community: A Critique of Social Radicalism,* trans. Andrew Wallace (New York: Humanity Books, 1999); and Arnold Gehlen, *Urmensch und Spätkultur: Philosophische Ergebnisse und Aussagen* (Bonn: Athenäum-Verlag, 1956) and *Man, His Nature and Place in the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

4. Plessner, *Conditio humana,* 72.

5. Gehlen, *Urmensch und Spätkultur,* 44–45.

6. Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process,* trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 453.

7. For this reading of Parsons, see as well Stefano Bartolini, "I limiti della pluralità: Categorie della politica in Talcott Parsons," *Quaderni di teoria sociale* 2 (2002): 33–60.

8. Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems,* trans. John Bednarz Jr. with Dirk Baecker (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995), 371–72.

9. [Esposito deals more at length with Luhmann and immunity, particularly in the juridical sense, in *Immunitas: Protezione e negazione della vita* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002), 52–61.— *Trans.*]

10. Luhmann, *Social Systems,* 374.

11. See in this regard A. D. Napier's *The Age of Immunology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

12. Dan Sperber, *Explaining Culture: A Naturalistic Approach* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), and Donna Haraway, "The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Determinations of Self in Immune System Discourse," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1991), 204.

13. See Odo Marquard, *Aesthetica und Anaesthetica: Philosophische Überlegungen* (Paderborn: F. Schöning, 1989).

14. On this last point, see Alain Brossat, *La démocratie immunitaire* (Paris: Dispute, 2003), and Romano Gasparotti, *I miti della globalizzazione: "Guerra preventiva" e logica delle immunità* (Bari: Dedalo, 2003). On globalization more generally, see the works of Giacomo Marramao, which have been collected in *Passaggio a Occidente: Filosofia e globalizzazione* (Turin: Bollati Bolinghieri, 2003).

15. In this regard, see my *Immunitas,* as well as *Communitas: Origine e destino della comunità* (Turin: Einaudi, 1998). Giuseppe Cantarano has recently written as well on some of these same themes. See his *La comunità impolitica* (Troina: Città Aperta, 2003).

16. Bruno Accarino has drawn attention to the opposing bipolarity of *Belastung/Entlastung* (debt/exoneration) in *La ragione insufficiente: Al confine tra autorità e razionalità* (Rome: Manifestolibri, 1995), 17–48.

17. With regard to the aporia and the potentialities of this dialectic (or nondialectic) between immunity and community, see the intelligent essay that Massimo Donà

has dedicated to the category of immunization using a key that productively pushes it toward a different logic of negation: Massimo Donà, "Immunity and Negation: On Possible Developments of the Theses Outlined in Roberto Esposito's *Immunitas*," *Diacritics* 36:3 (2006).

18. See the section "Politics of Life" in chapter 1.

19. [Esposito is clearly referring to Giorgio Agamben's discussion of paterfamilias. See Agamben's *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Life*, trans. Danile Heller-Roazen (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), esp. 81–90. — *Trans.*].

20. Plato, *Republic*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 173.

21. See in this regard the invaluable essay by Simona Forti, "The Biopolitics of Souls," *Political Theory* 34:1 (2006): 9–32.

22. Joachim Günther, *Hitler und Platon* (Berlin and Leipzig: W. de Gruyter, 1933) and *Hitlers Kampf und Platons Staat: Eine Studie über den ideologischen Aufbau der nationalsozialistischen Freiheitsbewegung* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1933); A. Gabler, (Berlin and Leipzig: W. de Gruyter, 1934); and Hans F. K. Günther, *Platon als Hüter des Lebens: Platons Zucht- und Erziehungsgedanken und deren Bedeutung für die Gegenwart* (Munich: J. F. Lehmann, 1928). In the same direction as Günther see *Humanitas* (Munich: J. F. Lehmann, 1937). For Wilhelm Windelband, see his *Platon* (Stuttgart: F. Frommann, 1928). The following are the texts that Günther cites in the third edition of his book on Plato (1966, 9–10): Alfred E. Taylor, *Plato: The Man and His Work* (New York: Dial Press, 1927); Julius Stenzel, *Platon der Erzieher* (Leipzig: F. Meiner, 1928); Paul Friedländer, *Platon* (Berlin and Leipzig: W. de Gruyter, 1928–30); Constantine Ritter, *Die Kerngedanken der platonischen Philosophie* (Munich: E. Reinhardt, 1931); Werner Wilhelm Jaeger, *Paideia: Die Formung des Griechischen Menschen* (Berlin and Leipzig: W. de Gruyter, 1936); Léon Robin, *Platon* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1935); Gerhardt Krüger, *Einsicht und Leidenschaft: Das Wesen des platonischen Denkens* (Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1939); and Ernst Hoffmann, *Platon* (Zurich: Artemis-Verlag, 1950).

23. Plato, *Republic*, 174.

24. Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. Trevor J. Saunders (New York: Penguin Classics, 1981), 88.

25. In addition to Mario Vegetti's recent *Quindici lezioni su Platone* (Turin: Einaudi, 2003), see in particular "Medicina e potere nel mondo antico" in the forthcoming *Biopolitiche*. With regard to these problems and with an implicit attention to the immunitary paradigm, there is the recent publication of the important essay by Gennaro Carillo, *Katechein: Uno studio sulla democrazia antica* (Naples: Editoriale Scientifica, 2003).

26. With regard to Peter Sloterdijk, one ought to keep in mind the three important volumes that appeared under the title *Sphären* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2004) in which the author traces the lineaments of a true and actual "social immunology."

27. This reading of modernity has for some time been the object of discussion for Paolo Flores d'Arcais. See his important essay *Il sovrano e il dissidente: La democrazia presa sul serio* (Milan: Garzanti, 2004) and the debate that ensued in *Micromega* 2–3 (2004).

28. Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," in *The Question concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 149–50.

29. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Francis B. Randall (New York: Washington Square Press, 1976), 87.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid., 87–88.

32. Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive* (London: R. Royston, 1651; 1843), 158; Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law* (London: Tönnies, 1889), 178; Hobbes, *Leviathan,* 240.

33. See in this regard Carlo Galli's "Ordine e contingenza: Linee di lettura del *Leviatano,*" in *Percorsi della libertà: Scritti in onore di Nicola Matteucci* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996), 81–106; Alessandro Biral, *Hobbes: La società senza governo,* in *Il contratto sociale nella filosofia politica moderna,* ed. Giuseppe Duso (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1993), 51–108; and Giuseppe Duso, *La logica del potere* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1999), 55–85.

34. I am referring in particular to Roman Schnur, *Individualismus und Absolutismus: Zur politischen Theorie vor Thomas Hobbes, 1600–1640* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1963).

35. Michel Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976,* ed. Maruo Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 90.

36. Hobbes, *Leviathan,* 149.

37. Ibid., 150.

38. John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 224.

39. Ibid., 223.

40. John Locke, *Epistola de Tolerantia: A Letter on Toleration,* trans. J. W. Gough (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 67. Cf. the following: "And 'tis not without reason, that he seeks out, and is willing to joyn in Society with others who are already united, or have a mind to unite for the mutual *Preservation* of their Lives, Liberties, and Estates, which I call by their general name, *Property*" (Locke, *Two Treatises,* 368).

41. Locke, *Two Treatises,* 324.

42. With regard to the dialectic of property in modern political philosophy, I have drawn important insights from Pietro Costa, *Il progetto giuridico: Ricerche sulla giurisprudenza del liberalismo classico* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1974), and Francesco De Sanctis, *Problemi e figure della filosofia giuridica e politica* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1996). Paolo Grossi's *Il dominio e le cose: Percezioni medievali e moderne dei diritti reali* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1992) remains crucial for understanding the premodern tradition.

43. Locke, *Two Treatises,* 305–6.

44. Ibid., 316–17.

45. Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,* ed. Dirk J. Struik, trans. Martin Milligan (New York: International Publishers, 1964), 128–29.

46. See, on this point, Pietro Barcellona, *L'individualismo proprietario* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1987).

47. On this transformation, see Adriana Cavarero's "La teoria contrattualistica nei *Trattati sul governo* di Locke," in *Il contratto sociale nella filosofia politica moderna,* ed. Giuseppe Duso (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1987), 149–90.

48. Immanuel Kant, *The Philosophy of Law: An Exposition of the Fundamental Principles of Jurisprudence as the Science of Right,* trans. W. Hastie (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1887), 64–65.

49. [I have chosen to translate the Italian *libertà* with "liberty" (and not "freedom"), not only because the passages Esposito cites from Locke include the term, but also to mark the assonances that Esposito will hear between liberty, deliberation, *libertates,* and, of course, liberalism.— *Trans.*].

50. Cf. Dieter Nestle, *Eleutheria: Studien zum Wesen der Freiheit bei den Griechen und im Neuen Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1967); Émile Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society,* trans. Elizabeth Palmer (London: Faber, 1973); and Richard. B. Onians, *The Origins of European Thought about the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time, and Fate: New Interpretations of Greek, Roman and Kindred Evidence Also of Some Basic Jewish and Christian Beliefs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

51. In this regard, see Pier Paolo Portinaro's dense postface to the translation of Benjamin Constant's *La libertà degli antichi, paragonata a quella dei moderni* (Turin: Einaudi, 2001).

52. Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in *Four Concepts of Liberty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 130; my emphasis.

53. Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Human Freedom: An Introduction to Philosophy,* trans. Ted Sadler (New York: Continuum, 2002), 13.

54. [Esposito is punning here on the assonance between *alterità* (otherhood) and *alterazione* (alteration).— *Trans.*]

55. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy,* Oxford World's Classics, trans. Julia Conaway and Peter E. Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 64.

56. Thomas Hobbes, "Of Liberty and Necessity," in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes,* vol. 4 (London: John Bohn, 1890), 273.

57. Hobbes, *Leviathan,* 37.

58. Locke, *Two Treatises,* 302.

59. Ibid., 289.

60. Charles de Scondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *Spirit of Laws,* trans. Thomas Nugent (Kitchener, Ont.: Batoche Books, 2001), 206; Jeremy Bentham, *Rationale of Judicial Evidence,* in *The Works of Jeremy Bentham,* vol. 7 (Edinburgh: John Bowring, 1843), 522.

61. Jeremy Bentham, *Manuscripts* (University College of London), Ixix, 56. See the doctoral thesis of Marco Stangherlin, "Jeremy Bentham e il governo degli interessi" (University of Pisa, 2001–2).

62. Michel Foucault, "La questione del liberalismo," in *Biopolitica e liberalismo: Detti e scritti su potere ed etica 1975–1984,* trans. Ottavio Marzocca (Milan: Medusa, 2001), 160.

63. Hannah Arendt, "What Is Freedom?" in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Viking Press, 1961), 155.

64. Ibid., 150.

65. Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault,* ed. Luther H. Martin (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 152.

66. Luis Dumont, *Essays on Individualism: Modern Ideology in an Anthropological Perspective* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

67. For the figure of the *homo democraticus* I refer to the reader to Massimo Cacciari's important observations in *L'arcipelago* (Milan: Adelphi, 1997), 117–18. See too Elena Pulcini, *L'individuo senza passioni: Individualismo moderno e perdita del legame sociale* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2001), 127–28. On Tocqueville more generally, cf. Francesca Maria De Sanctis, *Tempo di democrazia: Sulla condizione moderna* (Naples: Editoriale Scientifica, 1986).

68. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* ed. Francis Bowen, trans. Henry Reeve, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Sever and Francis, 1862), 121, 124.

69. Ibid., 169.

70. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols, or, How to Philosophize with a Hammer,* trans. Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 68; 64.

3. Biopower and Biopotentiality

1. [The term Esposito uses in the chapter title is *biopotenza*, which connotes both power and a potentiality for producing and undergoing change. Since Esposito intends it as a necessary step on the way to thinking an affirmative biopolitics, I have translated it as potentiality unless otherwise indicated. — *Trans.*]

2. [See the introduction to Esposito's 1998 preface to *Categorie dell'impolitico* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1988) for further thoughts on the "impolitical." — *Trans.*]

3. Karl Löwith, "European Nihilism: Reflections on the European War," in *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, trans. Gary Steiner (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 206; Georges Bataille, "Nietzsche and the Fascists," in *Visions of Excess*, trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 24.

4. Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, ed. J. Faubion (New York: New Press, 1998), 369–91.

5. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic: By Way of Clarification and Supplement to My Last Book, Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 66.

6. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Frammenti postumi (1885–1887)*, in *Opere complete di Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol. 8 (Milan: Adelphi, 1992), 139. [As no complete edition of Nietzsche's posthumous works exists in English, I have cited the Italian and where possible the German. — *Trans.*].

7. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 311.

8. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols, or, How to Philosophize with a Hammer*, trans. Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 65.

9. Nietzsche, *Frammenti postumi (1888–1889)*, 408.

10. On the complex relationship between Nietzsche and Darwinism and more generally with the biological sciences, see especially Éric Blondel, *Nietzsche, le corps et la culture: La philosophie comme généalogie philologique* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1986); H. Brobjer, *Darwinismus*, in *Nietzsche-Handbuch* (Stuttgart-Weimar: Metzler, 2000); Barbara Stiegler, *Nietzsche et la biologie* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2001); Gregory Moore, *Nietzsche, Biology and Metaphor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), as well as Andrea Orsucci, *Dalla biologia cellulare alle scienza dello spirito* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992).

11. Nietzsche, *Frammenti Postumi (1881–1882)*, 432–33.

12. I am referring, of course, to Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

13. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 34–35.

14. For this relation see especially Remo Bodei's chapter dedicated to Nietzsche in his important work *Destini personali: L'età della colonizzazione delle coscienze* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2002), 83–116, as well as Ignace Haaz, *Les conceptions du corps chez Ribot et Nietzsche* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002).

15. In this sense the work contemporary with Nietzsche of the greatest importance is Wilhelm Roux's *Der Kampf der Theile im Organismus* (Leipzig, 1881). For more on Roux, see Wolfgang Müller-Lauter, "Der Organismus als innere Kampf: Der Einfluss von Wilhelm Roux auf Friedrich Nietzsche," *Nietzschen Studien* 7 (1978): 89–223.

16. Nietzsche, *Frammenti postumi (1884–1885)*, 238.

17. Nietzsche, *Ecco Homo,* 231–32.

18. Nietzsche, *Frammenti postumi (1885–1887),* 77–78.

19. "It should be considered symptomatic when some philosophers — for example Spinoza who was consumptive — considered the instinct of self-preservation decisive and *had* to see it that way; for they were individuals in conditions of distress" (Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* 292).

20. Ibid., 291–92.

21. Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book for All and None,* trans. Thomas Wayne (New York: Algora Publishing, 2003), 87.

22. Friedrich Nietzsche, "History in the Service and Disservice of Life," in *Unmodern Observations,* trans. Gary Brown (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 89.

23. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future,* trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 153, 154.

24. The reference here is to W. H. Rolph's *Biologische Probleme zugleich als Versuch zur Entwicklung einer nationalen Ethik* (Leipzig: Wilhelm Engelmann, 1882).

25. "Uncommon is the highest virtue and useless, luminous it is and gentle in its brilliance: a bestowing virtue is the highest virtue" (Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* 57).

26. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits,* trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 376.

27. See in this regard Umberto Galimberti's *Gli equivoci dell'anima* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1987).

28. Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," in *The Nietzsche Reader,* ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson and Duncan Large (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 122.

29. Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human,* 89.

30. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols,* trans. Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 78.

31. Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human,* 113.

32. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality,* trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 52.

33. Nietzsche, *Frammenti postumi (1888–1889),* 214.

34. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals,* 105.

35. I am referring to Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy,* trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

36. Nietzsche, *Frammenti postumi (1885–1887),* 283, 289.

37. Ibid., 93.

38. For the theme of decadence, see Giuliano Campioni, "Nietzsche, Taine et la décadence," in *Nietzsche: Cent ans de réception française,* ed. Jacques Le Rider (San-Denis: Éditions Suge, 1999), 31–61.

39. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo,* 233–34. [The Italian translation of the German differs widely from the English. For "unclean" (*Lauterkeit* in German), one reads "contaminated" *(contaminate)* and for "cleanliness" (*Reinheit* in German), purity *(purezza).* Given Esposito's emphasis on the themes of integrity and purity, I have chosen to add the German in brackets. — *Trans.*]

40. Nietzsche, *Frammenti postumi (1888–1889),* 217.

41. Ibid., 377.

42. [See in particular Michel Foucault's *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the*

Collège de France, 1975–1976, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), esp. the seminars of February 18 and 25, 1976.— *Trans.*]

43. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 152.

44. I am referring to Domenico Losurdo's important and debatable book *Nietzsche, il rebello aristocratico, biografia intellettuale e bilancio critico* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2002).

45. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 100.

46. Rather important in this direction is Alexander Tille, *Vom Darwin bis Nietzsche: Ein Buch Entwicklungsethik* (Leipzig: C. G. Naumann, 1895).

47. Cf. Alfred Espinas, *Des sociétés animales: Étude de psychologie comparée* (Paris: G. Baillière, 1877), and two texts from Georg Heinrich Schneider: *Der Tierische Wille* (Leipzig: Abel, [188?]) and *Der menschliche Wille vom Standpunkte der neueren Entwicklungstheorien (des "Darwinismus")* (Berlin: F. Dummlers, 1882). The texts of Espinas and Schneider were part of Nietzsche's library.

48. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 61.

49. Ibid., 68.

50. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 177.

51. Ibid.

52. In this direction, see Marco Vozza, *Esistenza e interpretazione: Nietzsche oltre Heidegger* (Rome: Donzelli, 2001). On the metaphor of illness, see Patrick Wotling, *Nietzsche et le problème de la civilisation* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1995), 111ff.

53. Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 99.

54. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 346.

55. Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 107.

56. Ibid., 108.

57. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 96.

58. Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, trans. Bruce Boone (New York: Paragon, 1992), 8, 25.

59. Cf. Furio Semerari, *Il predone, il barbaro, il giardiniere* (Bari: Dedalo, 2000), 145ff.

60. Massimo Cacciari dedicates intense pages to this theme in *L'arcipelago* (Milan: Adelphi, 1997), 135–54.

61. Nietzsche, *Frammenti postumi (1884–1885)*, 317.

62. Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 149.

63. Nietzsche, *Frammenti postumi (1881–1882)*, 348.

4. Thanatopolitics

1. Michel Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976*, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 258–63.

2. See the section titled "Politics over Life" in chapter 1.

3. Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended,"* 258.

4. Ibid., 260.

5. Alain Brossat, *L'épreuve du désastre: Le XX^e siècle et les camps* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1996), 141ff.

6. Simona Forti offers an exemplary profile of the relation between totalitarianism and philosophy in her *Il totalitarianismo* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2001).

7. Robert Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 31.

8. Erwin Baur, Eugen Fischer, and Fritz Lenz, *Grundriss der menschlichen Erblichkeitslehre und Rassenhygiene* (Munich: J. F. Lehmann, 1923), 417–18.

9. Rudolf Ramm, *Ärztliche Rechts und Standeskunde: Der Arzt als Gesundheitserzieher* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1943), 156.

10. Hans Reiter, "La biologie dans la gestion de l'État," in *État et santé* (Paris: F. Sorlot, 1942). Other contributions include L. Conti, "L'organisation de la santé publique du Reich pendant la guerre"; F. von Verschuer, "L'image héréditaire de l'homme"; E. Fischer, "Le problème de la race e la législation raciale allemande"; A. Scheunert, "La recherche et l'étude des vitamines au service de l'alimentation nationale.

11. Hans Weinert, *Biologische Grundlagen für Rassenkunde und Rassen Hygiene* (Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke Verlag, 1934).

12. Cf. Benno Müller-Hill, *Murderous Science: Elimination by Scientific Selection of Jews, Gypsies, and Others, Germany 1933–1945,* trans. George R. Fraser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 94.

13. Joachim Mrugowsky, "Einleitung," in *Das ärztliche Ethos,* ed. Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland (Munich and Berlin: J. F. Lehmann, 1939), 14–15. See in this regard Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors,* 32.

14. Robert N. Proctor, *The Nazi War on Cancer* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 55.

15. In addition to the work of Lifton cited above, see too in this connection the relevant work of Rafaella de Franco, *In nome di Ippocrate: Dall'olocausto medico nazista all'etica della sperimentazione contemporanea* (Milan: F. Angeli, 2001).

16. K. Blome, *Arzt im Kampf: Erlebnisse und Gedanken* (Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth Verlag, 1942).

17. Andrzej Kaminski, *Konzentrationslager 1896 bis heute: Eine Analyse* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1982), 145.

18. Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz: The Nazi Assault on Humanity,* trans. Stuart Woolf (New York: Touchstone Books, 1996), 40.

19. Kaminski, *Konzentrationslager 1896 bis heute,* 200.

20. Adolf Hitler, *Libres propos sur la guerre et la paix recueillis sur l'ordre de Martin Bormann,* vol. 1 (Paris: Flammarion, 1952), 321.

21. Cf. Christopher R. Browning, *The Path to Genocide: Essays on Launching the Final Solution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 153–54.

22. Otto Helmut, *Volk in Gefahr: Der Geburtenrückgang und seine Folgen für Deutschlands Zukunft* (Munich: J. F. Lehmann, 1933), and Friedrich Burgdörfer, *Völker am Abgrund* (Munich: J. F. Lehmann, 1936).

23. On transformations in the concept of "degeneration," compare Georges Paul Genil-Perrin, *Histoire des origines et de l'évolution de l'idée de dégénérescence en médecine mentale* (Paris, 1913), as well as R. D. Walter, "What Became a Degenerate? A Brief History of a Concept," *Journal of the History of Medicine and the Allied Sciences* 11 (1956): 422–29.

24. Benedict-Augustin Morel, *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l'espèce humaine et des causes qui produisent ces variétés maladives* (Paris: J. B. Baillière; New York: H. Baillière, 1857).

25. Valentin Magnan and Paul Maurice Legrain, *Les dégénérés, état mental et syndromes épisodiques* (Paris: Rueff, 1895), 79.

26. Morel, *Traité des dégénérescences physiques,* 5; Giuseppe Sergi, *Le degenerazioni umane* (Milan: Fratello Dumolard, 1889), 42.

27. Edwin Ray Lankester, *Degeneration: A Chapter in Darwinism* (London: Macmillan, 1880), 58.

28. On Italian degenerative theory, see A. Berlini, "L'ossessione della degenerazione: Ideologie e pratiche dell'eugenetica," diss., Ist. Orientale di Napoli, 2000, and more generally Maria Donzelli, ed., *La biologia: Parametro epistemologico del XIX secolo* (Naples: Liguori Editore, 2003).

29. Prosper Lucas, *Traité philosophique et physiologique de l'hérédité naturelle* (Paris: J. B. Baillière, 1847–50), and Théodule Ribot, *L'hérédité: Étude psychologique sur ses phénomènes, ses lois, ses causes, ses conséquences* (Paris: Ladrange, 1876). On Ribot, see Remo Bodei, *Destini personali: L'età della colonizzazione delle coscienze* (Milan: Feltrinelli), 65ff.

30. Eugène Apert, *L'hérédité morbide* (Paris: E. Flammarion, 1919), 1.

31. Lucas, *Traité philosophique et physiologuqe de l'hérédité naturelle,* 5.

32. André Pichot, *La société pure, de Darwin à Hitler* (Paris: Flammarion, 2000), 80–85.

33. Max Nordau, *Degeneration,* introduction by George L. Mosse (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 22.

34. Gina Ferrero Lombroso, *I vantaggi della degenerazione* (Turin: Bocca, 1904), 56, 114.

35. Ibid., 185.

36. For the literary references that I take up and elaborate in the following pages I am indebted to the directions that Daniel Pick provides in *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, 1848–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 155–75. On the concept of degeneration, see as well J. Edward Chamberlin and Sander L. Gilman, eds., *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

37. Émile Zola, *His Excellency* (London: Elek Books, 1958); Federico De Roberto, *I viceré* (Milan: Garzanti, 1970); Francesco Mastriani, *I vermi* (Naples: M. Milano, 1972).

38. Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2002), 60–61.

39. Ibid., 67, 68, 66.

40. Ibid., 69.

41. Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 115.

42. Ibid., 183.

43. Ibid., 184.

44. Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Toronto, Ont.: Broadview Press, 1998), 383.

45. Ibid., 279, 252, 252.

46. Ibid., 253.

47. For a detailed (and positive) review of eugenic institutions and practices in the first decades of the last century, see Marie-Thérèse Nisot, *La question eugénique dans les divers pays* (Brussels: G. Van Campenhout, 1927–29).

48. Wilhelm Schallmayer, *Vererbung und Auslese im Lebenslauf der Völker: Eine staatswissenschaftlich Studie auf Grund der neueren Biologie* (Jena: G. Fischer, 1903).

49. Wilhelm Schallmayer, *Über die drohende körperliche Entartung der Kulturmenschheit und die Verstaatlichung des ärztlichen Standes* (Berlin: L. Heuser, 1891).

50. Ludwig Woltmann, *Politische Anthropologie* (Eisenach and Leipzig: Thüringische Verlags-Anstalt, 1903).

51. Alfred Ploetz, *Die Tüchtigkeit unserer Rasse und der Schutz der Schwachen: Ein Versuch über Rassenhygiene und ihr Verhältnis zu den humanen Idealen, besonders zum Socialismus* (Berlin: Fischer Verlag, 1895).

52. Georges Vacher de Lapouge, *Race et milieu social: Essais d'anthroposociologie* (Paris: M. Rivière, 1909).

53. See in this regard the essays collected in M. B. Adams, *The Wellborn Science: Eugenics in Germany, France, Brazil and Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

54. Reference has already been made to the success of Alfred Espinas's *Des sociétés animales: Étude de psychologie comparée* (Paris: G. Baillière, 1877), 13–60. The most relevant sections for our discussion are perhaps the initial ones on parasites (distinguished in "parasites, commensals, and mutualists").

55. Joël Kotek et Pierre Rigoulot, *Le siècle des camps: Détention, concentration, extermination, cent ans de mal radical* (Paris: Lattès, 2000).

56. Proctor, *The Nazi War on Cancer,* 129.

57. Garland E. Allen, "Chevaux de course et chevaux de trait: Métaphores et analogies agricoles dans l'eugénisme américain 1910–1940," in *Histoire de la génétique: Pratiques, techniques et théories,* ed. Jean-Louis Fischer and William Howard Schneider (Paris: Créteil, 1990), 83–98.

58. On the figure of Davenport, see in particular his *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1911).

59. Charles Richet, "Dans cent ans," *La Revue scientifique* (March 12, 1892): 329.

60. Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors,* 279.

61. Maurice Boigey, *L'élevage humain* (Paris: Payot, 1917), and Charles Binet-Sanglé, *Le haras humain* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1918).

62. Charles Valentino, *Le secret professional en médecine, sa valeur sociale* (Paris: C. Naud, 1903).

63. Vacher de Lapouge, *Sélections sociales* (Paris: A. Fontemoing, 1896), 472–73.

64. Just Sicard de Plauzoles, *Principes d'hygiène* (Paris: Éditions Médicales, 1927).

65. A. Zuccarelli, "Il problema capitale dell'Eugenica," *Nocera Inferiore* (1924): 2.

66. In *Buck v. Bell,* 274 U.S. 200 (1927). Cf. Amedio Santuosuosso, *Corpo e libertà: Una storia tra diritto e scienza* (Milan: R. Cortina, 2001). On American biopolitics and its close relations with Nazi Germany, see Stefan Kühl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism and German National-Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

67. Karl Binding and Alfred Hoche, *Die Freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Leben: Ihr Mass und ihre Form* (Leipzig: Meiner, 1920).

68. Adolph Jost, *Das Recht auf den Tod* (Göttingen: Grunow & Co., 1895).

69. Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors,* 17.

70. Binding and Hoche, "Ärztliche Bemerkungen," in *Die Freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Leben,* 61–62.

71. Müller-Hill, *Murderous Science,* 40.

72. Enrico Morselli, *L'uccisione pietosa* (Turin: Bocca, 1928), 17.

73. Ernst Mann (pseudonym of Gerhard Hoffmann), *Die Erlösung der Menschheit vom Elend* (Weimar: F. Fink, 1922).

74. Charles Binet-Sanglé, *L'art de mourir: Défense et technique du suicide secondé* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1919); Richet, "Dans cent ans," 168.

75. Antoine Wylm, *La morale sexuelle* (Paris: Alcan, 1907), 280.

76. Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Division of International Law, 1944). On the vast literature related to genocide, I direct the reader only to *Genocide: A Critical Bibliographic Review* (New York: Facts on File Publications, 1988), as well as to Y. Ternon, *L'état criminel* (Paris: Seuil, 1995).

77. See the section titled "Regeneration" in this chapter.

78. See, on this point, Anne Carol, *Histoire de l'eugénisme en France* (Paris: Seuil, 1995).

79. In addition to Paul Weindling's *Health, Race and German Politics between National Unification and Nazism 1870–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), which is a rich source on the relation between medicine and politics from Wilhelminian to Nazi Germany, see too Michel Pollak, "Une politique scientifique: Le concours de l'anthropologie, de la biologie et du droit," in *La politique nazie d'extermination,* ed. François Bédarda (Paris: Albin Michel, 1989), 75–99.

80. Emmanuel Levinas, "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism," *Critical Inquiry* 17:1 (fall 1990): 69.

81. The impossibility of escape *[evasione]* is at the center of Levinas's *On Escape,* trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003). It seems to me that no one has noted that Brieux, in his play titled precisely *L'évasion,* takes up the identical theme, at first affirming and then contesting the idea that a hereditary disease cannot be cured (Eugène Brieux, *L'évasion, comédie en 3 actes* [Paris: Stock, 1914]).

82. On the dialectic of incorporation, cf. Claude Lefort, "L'image du corps et le totalitarisme," in *L'invention démocratique* (Paris: Fayard, 1981).

83. This dual procedure of the biologization of the spirit and the spiritualization of the body constitutes the nucleus of Nazi biopolitics. See, in this regard, the chapter titled "Politique biologique" of the *Anthologie de la nouvelle Europe,* which was published in occupied France by Alfred Fabre-Luce (Paris, 1942). It includes contributions from Gobineau, Chamberlain, Barrès, Rostand, Renan, and Maurras, alongside those of Hitler.

84. Vacher de Lapouge, *Sélections sociales,* 306. Cf. Pichot's *La société pure,* 124.

85. Otmar von Verschuer, *Manuel d'eugénique et hérédité humaine* (Paris: Masson, 1943), 114. I am citing the French version and not the original, *Leitfaden der Rassenhygiene,* in the following paragraphs.

86. Ibid.

87. Ibid., 115.

88. Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors,* 16.

89. Ibid., 147.

90. Ibid., 27.

91. Cf. Gisela Bock, "Il nazionalsocialismo: Politiche di genere e vita delle donne," in *Storie delle donne in Occidente: Il Novecento* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1992), 176–212. See as well her *Zwangssterilisation im Nazionalsozialismus: Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1986); more generally, on women under Nazism, see Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987).

92. In his text on female fertility, *Fruchtbarkeit und Gesundheit der Frau,* which opens with the Nazi slogan that "the genus and the race are above the individual," Dr. Hermann Stieve holds that the value of women is measured by the state of their ovaries.

To prove such a thesis, he himself conducted experiments on the degree to which ovaries could suffer lesions under bouts of terror until they atrophied. On this, compare the third chapter of Ernst Klee's *Auschwitz, die NS-Medizin und ihre Opfer* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1997).

93. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harvest Book, 1968), 444.

5. The Philosophy of *Bíos*

1. On new biopolitical emergencies, compare the exhaustive survey by Laura Bazzicalupo, "Ambivalenze della biopolitica," in *Politica della vita: Sovranità, biopotere, diritti,* ed. Laura Bazzicalupo and Roberto Esposito (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2003), 134–44. See as well Bazzicalupo's *Governo della vita: Biopolitica ed economia* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2006).

2. For further discussion of these aspects, see Alessandro Dal Lago, *Non-persone: L'esclusione dei migranti in una società globale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2002); Salvatore Palidda, *Polizia postmoderna: Etnografia del nuovo controllo sociale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2000); and, more generally, Sandro Mezzadra and Petrillo Agostino, *I confini della globalizzazione: Lavoro, cultura, cittadinanza* (Rome: Manifestolibri, 2000).

3. In this sense, see Agnes Heller, "Has Biopolitics Changed the Concept of the Political? Some Further Thoughts about Biopolitics," in *Biopolitics: The Politics of the Body, Race, and Nature,* ed. Ferenc Fehér and Agnes Heller (Aldershot: Avebury, 1996), as well as Heller and Fehér's *Biopolitics* (Aldershot and Brookfield, Vt.: Avebury, 1994).

4. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 55.

5. Ibid., 22.

6. In this direction, cf. Leonardo Daddabbo, *Inizi: Foucault e Arendt* (Milan: B. A. Graphis, 2003), esp. 43–46.

7. Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in *Basic Writings from Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1977), 210, 225. Interesting elaborations of these reflections are contained in the reading of "Letter on Humanism" as well as Heidegger's entire thought by Peter Sloterdijk in *La domestication de l'être: Pour un éclaircissement de la clairière,* a paper given at the Centre Pompidou in March 2000 (Paris: Mille et une Nuits, 2000).

8. For such a tonality of Heidegger's thought, and more generally on the early Heidegger, see Eugenio Mazzarella, *Ermeneutica dell'effettività: Prospettive ontiche dell'ontologia heideggeriana* (Naples: Guida, 2002).

9. Martin Heidegger, *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle: Initiation into Phenomenological Research,* trans. Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 66.

10. Ibid., 65.

11. Ibid., 62.

12. Medard Boss, "Preface to the First German Edition of Martin Heidegger's *Zollikon Seminars,*" in *Zollikon Seminars: Protocols-Conversations-Letters,* ed. Medard Boss, trans. Franza Mayr and Richard Askay (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2001), xviii.

13. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 46.

14. Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude,* trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); *Contributions to Philosophy: From Enowning,* trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999). Luca Illetterati accurately analyzes this itinerary in *Tra tecnica e natura: Problemi di ontologia del vivente in Heidegger* (Padova: Paligrafo, 2002).

15. [Esposito's obvious target is Giorgio Agamben's discussion of boredom and the animal in *The Open.— Trans.*]

16. Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," 206.

17. See, on this point, the persuasive essay by Marco Russo, "Animalitas: Heidegger e l'antropologia filosofica," *Discipline filosofiche* 12:1 (2002): 167–95.

18. Cf. Jacob Rogozinski, "Comme les paroles d'un homme ivre . . . : chair de l'histoire et corps politique," *Les Cahiers de Philosophie,* no. 18 (1994–95): 72–102.

19. See the section titled "Degeneration" in chapter 4.

20. Nonetheless, see Antonio Martone, "La rivolta contro Caligola: Corpo e Natura in Camus e Merleau-Ponty," in Bazzicalupo and Esposito, *Politica della vita,* 234–43.

21. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Philosophy and Non-Philosophy since Hegel," in *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy since Merleau-Ponty* (New York: Routledge, 1988; reprinted, Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 63.

22. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible,* trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 147.

23. See Didier Franck, *Heidegger et le problème de l'espace* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1986).

24. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible,* 248.

25. The work that has excavated this terrain the most deeply and with innovative results is Lisciani Petrini's *La passione del mondo: Saggio su Merleau-Ponty* (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2002).

26. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible,* 258–59.

27. Ibid., 264.

28. See again Petrini, *La passione del mondo,* 119.

29. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France,* ed. D. Seglard, trans. Robert Vallier (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2003), 103. In this regard, see too the chapter that Élisabeth de Fontenay dedicates to Merleau-Ponty in *Le silence des bêtes: La philosophie à l'épreuve de l'animalité* (Paris: Fayard, 1998), 649–60.

30. Maurizio Carbone has reconstructed the reasons, tracing in turn a twentieth-century genealogy of the theme of flesh in "Carne: Per la storia di un fraintendimento," in *La carne e la voce: In dialogo tra estetica ed etica,* ed. Maurizio Carbone and David M. Levin (Milan: Mimesis, 2003).

31. François Lyotard, *Discours, figure* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971), 22; and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?,* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 178.

32. Jacques Derrida, *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy,* trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005), 236, 238.

33. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World,* trans. Jeffrey S. Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 149. I have previously anticipated these critical

reflections in "Chair et corps dan la déconstruction du christianisme," in *Sens en tous sens: Autour des travaux de Jean-Luc Nancy,* ed. Francis Guibal and Jean-Clet Martin (Paris: Galilée, 2004), 153–64.

34. Davide Tarizzo provides a descriptive map of contemporary French philosophy in *Il pensiero libero: La filosofia francese dopo lo strutturalismo* (Milan: Cortina Raffaello, 2003).

35. Michel Henry, *Incarnation: Une philosophie de la chair* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000).

36. Jérôme Alexandre, *Une chair pour la gloire: L'anthropologie réaliste et mystique de Tertullien* (Paris: Beauchesne, 2001), 199ff.

37. Cf. E. Schweizer, F. Baumgärtel, and R. Meyer, "Flesh," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament,* ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1985).

38. Cf. the neophenomenological perspective of Marc Rihir in *Du Sublime en politique* (Paris: Payot, 1991).

39. Cf. Xavier Lacroix, *Le corps de chair, les dimensions éthique, esthétique et spirituelle de l'amour* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1992). On the theme of flesh in Saint Paul, see as well J. A. T. Robinson, *Le corps, étude sur la théologie de Saint-Paul* (Lyon: Éditions du Chalet, 1966).

40. *The Bible: The Authorized King James Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

41. I previously introduced these themes in *Immunitas: Protezione e negazione della vita* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002), 78–88 and 142–44. A seemingly different reading of the body is present in the ample frame that Umberto Galimberti offers in *Il corpo* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1987).

42. See in particular Aldo Bonomi, *Il trionfo della moltitudine* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1996); Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Semiotext[e], 2003); Antonio Negri, "Approximations: Towards an Ontological Definition of the Multitude," *Multitudes,* no. 9 (2002) (available at http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/space/multitude.htm); and Augusto Illuminati, *Del Comune: Cronache del general intellect* (Rome: Manifestolibri, 2003). As interesting and diverse as these perspectives are, the risk ultimately is that the reading of biopolitics that results may be, if not economistic, then minimally productivistic or workerist, and therefore impolitical. Compare, on this point, the observations of Carlo Formenti, *Mercanti di futuro: Utopia e crisi del Net Economy* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002), 237ff.

43. Cf. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art,* trans. John Goodman (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).

44. David Sylvester, *Entretiens avec Francis Bacon* (Geneva: A. Skira, 1996), 29.

45. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation,* trans. Daniel W. Smith (New York: Continuum, 2003), 67. On the relation between Deleuze and Bacon, see Ubaldo Fadini, *Figure nel tempo: A partire da Deleuze/Bacon* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2003).

46. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon,* 21.

47. Ibid., 62.

48. For a lucid genealogy of the concept of "nation," see Francesco Tuccari, *La nazione* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2000), not to mention Étienne Balibar's "History and Ideology: The Nation Form," in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities,* ed. Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (London: Verso, 1991), 88–106.

49. On the notion of "fraternity," with particular reference to France, see Marcel David, *Fraternité et Révolution française: 1789–1799* (Paris: Aubier, 1987), as well as his *Le Printemps de la Fraternité, Genèse et Vicissitudes, 1830–1851* (Paris: Aubier, 1992).

50. Eligio Resta critically interrogates the possibility of a fraternal right in *Il diritto fraterno* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2002).

51. On the relation among friend-enemy-brother, see also Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship,* trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 1997).

52. For the need of a fraternal brother in Nietzsche, see especially *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* trans. Thomas Wayne (New York: Algora Publishing, 2003), 42–43, 46–47, 161. For Carl Schmitt, see *Ex captivitate salus: Erfahrungen der Zeit 1945/47* (Cologne: Greven Verlag, 1950).

53. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred,* trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

54. Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Resemblances between the Psychic Lives of Savages and Neurotics,* trans. A. A. Brill (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2000).

55. Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism,* trans. Katherine Jones (New York: Vintage Books, 1967). On this theme, see as well my *Nove pensieri sulla politica* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1993), 92–93, as well as *Communitas: origine e destino della comunità* (Turin: Einaudi, 1998), 22–28.

56. Freud, *Moses and Monotheism,* 3.

57. Cf. Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, "Il popolo ebraico non sogna," in *L'altra scena della psicoanalisi: Tensioni ebraiche nell'opera di Sigmund Freud,* ed. David Meghnagi (Rome: Carucci, 1987).

58. Compare this reading of the mother–son relation with Angela Putino, *Amiche mie isteriche* (Naples: Cronopio, 1998).

59. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 9.

60. Cf. Eugenia Parise, ed., *La politica tra natalità e mortalità: Hannah Arendt* (Naples: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1993).

61. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 246–47.

62. Cf. A. Fagot-Largeault, "L'individuation en biologie," in *Gilbert Simondon: Une pensée de l'individuation et de la technique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994). See as well the other anthology of essays titled *Simondon,* ed. Pascal Chabot (Paris: J. Vrin, 2002).

63. Gilbert Simondon, *L'individu et sa genèse physico-biologique* (Paris: J. Millon, 1995), 77.

64. Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuazione psichica e collettiva* (Rome: DeriveApprodi, 2001), 84; my emphasis.

65. Ibid., 138.

66. Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception,* trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

67. The insurmountable aporia in which the polemics between normativism and natural right take place are in plain view in the joint publication of two essays, the first by Ernst Cassirer, "Vom Wesen und Werden des Naturrechts," *Zeitschrift für Rechtsphilosophie in Lehre und Praxis* 6 (1932–34): 1–27, and Hans Kelsen, "Die Grundlage der Naturrechtslehre," *Österreichische Zeitschrift für öffentliches Recht* 13 (1963): 1–37. In 2002, the Italian journal *Micromega,* in its second issue, published a number of essays by Angelo Bolaffi, Stefano Rodotà, Sergio Givone, Carlo Galli, and myself precisely on this theme.

68. For this juridical philosophical interpretation of Spinoza, see above all the relevant essay by Roberto Ciccarelli, *Potenza e beatitudine: Il diritto nel pensiero di Baruch Spinoza* (Rome: Carocci, 2003).

69. Baruch Spinoza, *Political Treatise,* in *Complete Works,* ed. Michael L. Morgan, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002), 683.

70. Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics,* trans. G. H. R. Parkinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 154.

71. Spinoza, *Political Treatise,* 685.

72. Étienne Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics,* trans. Peter Snowdon (London: Verso, 1998), 64–68.

73. Simondon, *L'individu et sa genèse physico-biologique,* 295.

74. Simondon, *L'individuazione psichica e collettiva,* 188.

75. Ibid.

76. Canguilhem's metapolitical reflections were already expressed in his *Traité de Logique et de Morale,* published in Marseille in 1939. See in particular the last two chapters, "Morale et Politique" and "La Nation et les Relations internationales" (259–99).

77. Georges Canguilhem, "Une pédagogie de la guérison est-elle possible?" in *Écrits sur la médicine* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002), 89.

78. Georges Canguilhem, *La connaissance de la vie* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1952), 12.

79. Cf. Guillaume Le Blanc, *Canguilhem et les normes* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1998).

80. Émile Durkheim, "Rules for the Distinction of the Normal from the Pathological," in *The Rules of Sociological Method,* trans. W. D. Halls (New York: Free Press, 1982), 92.

81. Georges Canguilhem, "New Reflections on the Normal and the Pathological," in *The Normal and the Pathological,* trans. Carolyn R. Fawcett (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 243.

82. René Leriche, "Introduction générale. De la santé à la maladie. La douleur dans les maladies. Où va la médicine?" in *Encyclopédie Française,* vol. 6, 16-I; quoted in Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological,* 91.

83. Cf. Pierre Macherey, "Pour une histoire naturelle des normes," in *Michel Foucault philosophe* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1989), 203–21.

84. Canguilhem, "New Reflections," 258–59.

85. Hans Kelsen, *General Theory of Norms,* trans. Michael Hartney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 158–62. On the complex theme of the norm, I will limit my references to Alfonso Catania, *Decisione e norma* (Naples: Jovene, 1979), as well as *Il problema del diritto e dell'obbligatoreità: Studio sulla norma fondamentale* (Naples: E.S.I., 1983). More recently, see also Fabio Ciaramelli, *Creazione e interpretazione della norma* (Troina: Città Aperta, 2003).

86. Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological,* 139.

87. Ibid., 199. For the reference to Goldstein, see Kurt Goldstein, *The Organism: A Holistic Approach to Biology Derived from the Pathological Data in Man* (New York: Zone Books, 1995).

88. Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life,* trans. Anne Boyman (New York: Zone Books, 2001).

89. Ibid., 27. See as well René Schérer's "Homo tantum, L'impersonnel: Une politique," in *Gilles Deleuze: Une vie philosophique,* ed. Éric Alliez (Le Plessis-Robinson: Institut Synthélabo pour le progrès de la connaissance, 1998), 25–42, and Giorgio Agamben,

"Absolute Immanence," in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), 220–39.

90. Deleuze, *Pure Immanence*, 27.

91. [English usage doesn't require the determinate article, "the," with any regularity, thus "life" and not "the life," but I have retained the article as Esposito's analysis makes little sense without it. The interested reader is also directed to the closing pages of *Immunitas* in which Esposito discusses at length in a different setting the use of the determinate article preceding self as in "the self." — *Trans.*]

92. Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 443.

93. Ibid., 444.

94. Deleuze, *Pure Immanence*, 29.

95. [I have translated *così* as "singular" following the English translation of Deleuze. Thus Deleuze writes: "The singularities and the events that constitute *a* life coexist with the accidents of *the* life that corresponds to it" (29).— *Trans.*]

96. Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 103.

97. Lawrence Ferlinghetti, "Il," in *Un regard sur le monde* (Paris: C. Bourgeois, 1969), 111.

98. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 103.

99. For the problematicity of the virtual in Deleuze, in relation to the logic of immanence, see the intense and acute monograph that Alain Badiou dedicates to it in *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. Louise Burchill (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

100. Simondon, *L'individu et sa genèse physico-biologique*, 260; quoted in Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 104.

101. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 107.

102. Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, 443, 444.

Index

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