

# The Management of Happiness

Economy and Ethics in Giorgio

Agamben's Account of Biopolitics



Research Institute for Philosophy,  
Theology and Religious Studies

Alphée Clay Sorel Mpassi

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*Account of Biopolitics*

Alphée Clay Sorel Mpassi

**Author: Alphée Clay Sorel Mpassi**

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Account of Biopolitics

Proefschrift ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor  
aan de Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen  
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**Alphée Clay Sorel Mpassi**

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**Promotor:**

Prof. dr. J.M.M.H. Thijssen

**Copromotor:**

Dr. A. Cimino

**Manuscriptcommissie:**

Prof. dr. C.H. Lüthy

Dr. Y.M. de Boer

Prof. dr. S.E. Lindberg (Universiteit Leiden)

Prof. dr. J.M. Halsema (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

Prof. dr. M. Ojakangas (Jyväskylä Yliopisto, Finland)

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by

**Alphée Clay Sorel Mpassi**

born on April 20, 1984  
in Loubomo (Congo)

**PhD supervisor:**

Prof. dr. J.M.M.H. Thijssen

**PhD co-supervisor:**

Dr. A. Cimino

**Manuscript Committee:**

Prof. dr. C.H. Lüthy

Dr. Y.M. de Boer

Prof. dr. S.E. Lindberg (Leiden University)

Prof. dr. J.M. Halsema (VU Amsterdam)

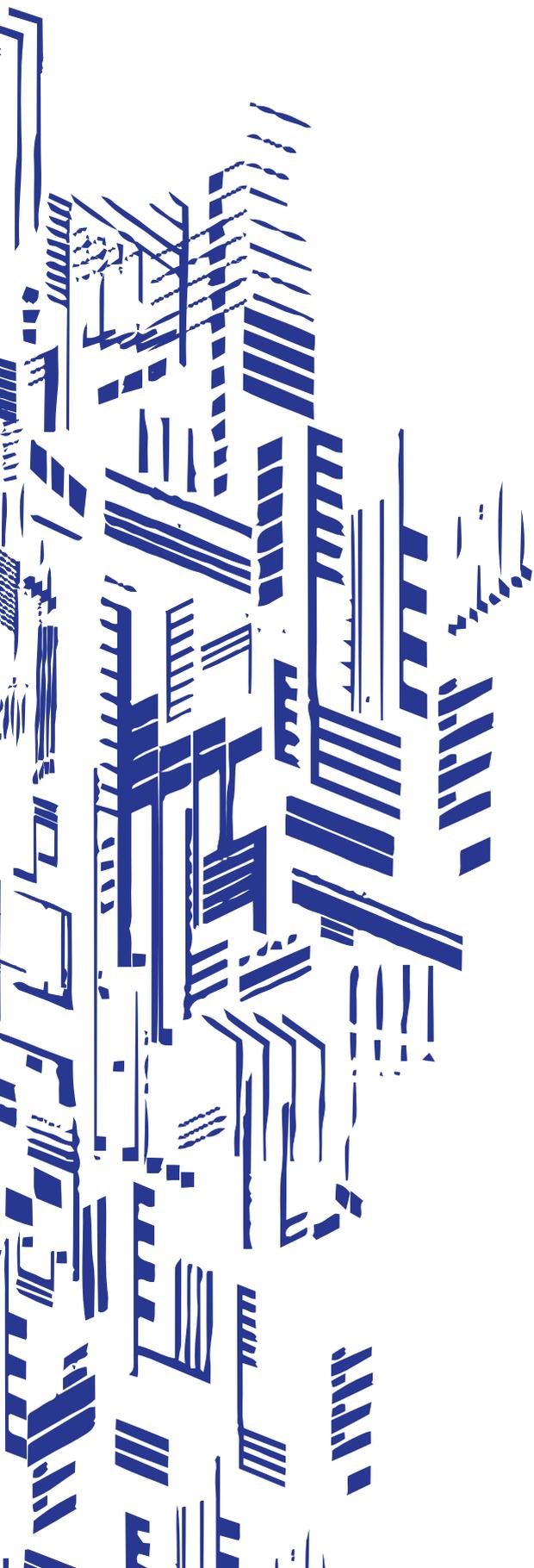
Prof. dr. M. Ojakangas (University of Jyväskylä, Finland)

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# **GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

## 1. The Subject of the Study

This study examines the problematic of happiness (or the happy life) in relation to economy and ethics in the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben's account of biopolitics.

Despite their affinities, the notions of biopolitics and economy have slightly different and overlapping connotations within the context in which Agamben elaborates on happiness. Here I provide only a brief explanation of the two notions. However, in the first chapter of this book, I elaborate extensively on their meanings and show how they overlap and differ. On the one hand, *biopolitics*, for Agamben, refers to the structure of political power, the origins of which he traces all the way back to Western Antiquity. It is the way through which political power manages life in society. Biopolitics, according to him, has become the dominant form of political power in the West. In *Homo Sacer*, he construes biopolitics as 'the politicization of life'.<sup>1</sup> By the syntagma, 'politicization of life', Agamben means the inscription and integration of biological life in general into the mechanisms and calculations of politics so as to control, govern and dominate it.<sup>2</sup> To put the same idea differently, in Agamben's view, *biopolitics* means the inclusion of natural life into politics so that the sovereign exercises power over it and, at the same time, regulates it.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, biopolitics implies the total capture and regulation of life in the grip of sovereign power.

On the other hand, *economy*, for Agamben, means 'administration'. In *The Kingdom and Glory*, in which he discusses biopolitics from the perspective of economy, Agamben defines *economy* first and foremost as the 'administration' or management of the household.<sup>4</sup> However, he later ascribes a new and specific meaning to *economy*. He characterizes economy as the management of human life.<sup>5</sup> In other words, *economy*, for him, refers to the act of governing and exercising control over humans and all the aspects of life unfolding in society. In his own words, it is 'the government of men'.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, it could be said that economy, for Agamben, is that through which the sovereign takes hold of life, integrates it into the mechanisms of politics and exercises power in society.

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<sup>1</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 120–23 and 140.

<sup>2</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 120–25.

<sup>3</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1–12 and 119–25.

<sup>4</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 17; *What is an Apparatus*, 4.

<sup>5</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 19.

<sup>6</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xi and 75, 100–109.

One may wonder now why happiness is relevant to biopolitics and economy. The fact is that, since Aristotle, humans have been defined by sociability.<sup>7</sup> It goes without saying that human beings need the organization of a *polis* to fully realize themselves. Society becomes the locus in which human beings attain and actualize their beings. In this sense, happiness—to which, according to Aristotle, human life in society is oriented—becomes the finality (*telos*) of politics understood as that which creates and organizes the conditions for the possibility of happy life in society.<sup>8</sup> Politics achieves this goal through government—that is, through all the political mechanisms put in place for regulating, managing, and facilitating life together. It is, therefore, the role of politics to insure and make happiness possible for citizens. For instance, this role can be seen in the 1776 Charter of the Declaration of the Independence of the USA, in which the quest for happiness occupies pride of place. The text reads as follows:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, —That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.<sup>9</sup>

This passage contains two ideas whose importance concerning the relation between happiness, (bio)politics and economy or government cannot be overestimated. First, the text acknowledges and defines happiness as a universal and absolute human right. This acknowledgment means both that the quest for happiness is ranked among the most fundamental of human preoccupations and that it cannot be revoked. The point is that humans exist also for the sake of achieving a happy life in society. Secondly, the text places happiness at the centre of the concerns of government. Put simply, the charter characterizes happiness as a primary focus of interest for government. Government is instituted to secure fundamental human rights, among which is happiness.

<sup>7</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, I.1.1253a1–35.

<sup>8</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, I.1.1253a1–5; *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.6.1097a5–10. See also De la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, 4–6.

<sup>9</sup> Declaration of Independence: A Transcript, 4 July 1776, §2.

The same idea appears in the 1793 document for the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (*La déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*) in France. Happiness is therein defined as an object and goal of political actions. It is equally described as one rationale behind the constitution or formation of a government. The text states that 'the goal of society is common happiness. Government is instituted so as to guarantee for man the fulfilment of his natural and imprescriptible rights'.<sup>10</sup> As in the Charter of the Declaration of the Independence of the USA, happiness seems here to be understood as a natural and inalienable human right. Moreover, happiness is described not as an individual affair but as a collective and societal one.<sup>11</sup> This means that happiness pertains to society under the guidance of the government, which regulates and organizes things. Lastly, the document says that the government's primary role is to 'guarantee', that is, to create and maintain conditions for the satisfaction and realization of the rights of which happiness is part.

The aforesaid considerations show that happiness is one of the matters with which politics is concerned. In other words, the link between politics and happiness was established long ago and has remained a constant concern for political rationality in the West. This circumstance suggests that it is the government that fixes and defines both the conditions and the features of happiness. Happiness in this context corresponds to an ideal model of society that a sovereign power puts forward and to which citizens should conform their lives. The happy life is a way of living that is shaped and promulgated by sovereignty and government. This is what Agamben calls 'bios' or 'qualified life, [which is] a form of living proper to an individual or a group'.<sup>12</sup> From this perspective, happiness is conceived as the fulfilment of the societal ideology and conventions formulated by a government. Within this framework, happiness is construed as something that can be managed, controlled and administered or governed by political actions and economic prosperity. The result is what can be called a *biopolitical* and *economic* account of happiness. It emphasizes the subjection of life to the legal order and to an increase in material wealth and consumption. In consequence, the first part of my title is 'the management of happiness'. This formulation is meant to underscore the influence of the juridical and governmental power of state order upon human and social life in the pursuit of happiness.

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<sup>10</sup> The original French text reads as follows: '[L]e but de la société est le bonheur commun. Le gouvernement est institué pour garantir à l'homme la jouissance de ses droits naturels et imprescriptibles'. Available at : Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen du 24 juin 1793, <https://www.syti.net/DDH1793.html>, accessed on 21 January, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>12</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1.

Agamben, in contrast, offers a different account of happiness, which we may call an *ethico-ontological* account of happiness. To speak about his own account of happiness, Agamben uses many terms interchangeably. These include *the* ‘good life’,<sup>13</sup> ‘the happy life’,<sup>14</sup> ‘autarchic life’<sup>15</sup> and especially ‘form-of-life’.<sup>16</sup> For him, all these terms point to the same reality: happiness, understood as a ‘form-of-life’, which is a way of living beyond sovereign power and economy.<sup>17</sup> Ethics, for him, implies one’s rapport with oneself. It does not refer to a body of values or norms that a *‘dispositif’* or an ‘apparatus’ gives and imposes on an individual or a community of individuals.<sup>18</sup> By *‘dispositif’* or ‘apparatus’, Agamben means an organ of power, such as the state, the church, the family or the juridical institution that seeks to govern human life in detail and dictate what ought or ought not to be done.<sup>19</sup> Ethics points rather to the way in which individuals constitute themselves as subjects without any reference to the law—that is, to whatever refers to any normative discourse or juridical prescriptions.<sup>20</sup> Agamben explicitly makes this claim in the *Remnants of Auschwitz* when he avers that ‘ethics is the sphere that recognizes neither guilt nor responsibility’ and ‘is the doctrine of the happy life’.<sup>21</sup> For him, guilt and responsibility are not ethical but are rather juridical concepts.<sup>22</sup>

Agamben’s account of happiness emphasizes the relation of life to itself. In his words, happiness, or the happy life, is ‘a life that cannot be separated from its form’—that is, ‘a life for which what is at stake in its way of living is living itself’.<sup>23</sup> Elaborated within the framework of his unrelenting critical remarks about biopolitics, Agamben’s conception of happiness endeavours to escape the biopolitical-economic paradigm because the latter accentuates sovereign power and control over life. For Agamben, sovereign power captures and exposes life to its mechanisms and decides upon it. He argues that a sovereign power, through its governmental mechanisms, seeks to impose its form (law) upon life. In other words, sovereign power takes hold of life and reduces it to a life that can be controlled and deprived of all its rights. From this point of view, the state order takes on a paternalistic attitude that infantilizes, dominates and governs its citizens by creating situations that jeopardize life itself and create bare life. In so doing, biopolitics, Agamben thinks, precludes the possibility of happiness.

<sup>13</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 2–3, 7.

<sup>14</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 219 and 235.

<sup>15</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 197–99, 226.

<sup>16</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 198–200, 219 and 235.

<sup>17</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xiii, *The Use of Bodies*, 235.

<sup>18</sup> Agamben, *What is an Apparatus?*, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Agamben, *What is An Apparatus?*, 2–8; *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xii, 19 and 71.

<sup>20</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 43–44.

<sup>21</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 24.

<sup>22</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 1 for more details.

<sup>23</sup> Agamben, *Means without End*, 4.

In fact, it produces a certain type of happiness that emphasizes mostly productivity, effectivity, control of life and the absolute subjection of life to juridical norms.<sup>24</sup> In this sense, the happy life corresponds to a life that blindly and uncritically follows rules, accomplishes certain duties and realizes the utilitarian call to self-realization and gain through work. As Simon Marijse puts it, 'happiness is imagined as a merit; it is something you *deserve* or are deemed *worthy* of'.<sup>25</sup> This is what could be called the *biopolitical and economic approach to happiness*, which Agamben wants to challenge. According to him, this approach captures life and subjects it to institutional and legal orders. In so doing, this approach prevents life from actualizing its possibilities.<sup>26</sup>

Contrary to the biopolitical and economic account, Agamben envisages a notion of happiness that seeks to overcome sovereign control. His account of form-of-life and, consequently, of happiness, is that life cannot be reduced to legal and economic formalities. Agamben challenges the impact that sovereign power and economy have on life. In *The Highest Poverty*, he explicitly states that he wants a notion of the happy life that is 'entirely removed from the grasp of law'.<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere, he characterizes it as an 'autarchic life', that is, a self-sufficient and perfect life.<sup>28</sup> By an 'autarchic life', and therefore, by 'the happy life', Agamben means a life over which neither a sovereign power nor its mechanisms of government have any hold nor control. This type of life is crystallized in its cognate notion of 'form-of-life'.<sup>29</sup> As has already been mentioned, 'form-of-life' designates a life that is always in relation to itself; it is a life that cannot or should not be subjected, limited and reduced to the dictates of any normative discourse.<sup>30</sup> In Agamben's own words, it is 'a life in which it is never possible to isolate and keep distinct something like a bare life. A life—human life—in which singular modes, acts, and processes of living are never simply facts but always and above all *possibilities* of life, always and above all potential'.<sup>31</sup>

The passage cited above contains two crucial ideas concerning the meaning of the notion of form-of-life in Agamben. First of all, it involves a holistic conception of life according to which nothing can be removed or extracted from life, as it is not possible to dissociate or dissect life into parts such that some parts qualify or do not qualify for politics. A holistic conception of life means that it is not possible to create

<sup>24</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 9–10.

<sup>25</sup> Marijse, 'Agamben's Happy Life', 143.

<sup>26</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 10.

<sup>27</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, xiii.

<sup>28</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 198–200.

<sup>29</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 206.

<sup>30</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 206–08.

<sup>31</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 207.

something like 'bare life'. By 'bare life', Agamben means a life that is ostracized by the legal order and can be annihilated.<sup>32</sup> Secondly, 'form-of-life' means that human life is always a *becoming*, that is, life is not pre-defined by and reduced to any dictate of power (i.e., law).<sup>33</sup> Rather, it is a life that seeks to understand and emphasize human possibilities, or what Agamben calls 'potentiality'.<sup>34</sup> The idea here is that human life is always something open, a 'being able to' with respect to possibilities that cannot be reduced to one single form.<sup>35</sup>

Since Agamben develops this theory of happiness in the context of his broader project for the 'coming politics'<sup>36</sup>—that is, his conception of the relation between politics and life—it is important to get a grasp of his account of biopolitics. It is only within this framework that his doctrine of the happy life can be adequately understood and appraised. At the very beginning of his *Homo Sacer* project, Agamben indicates that happiness is at the core of politics. While discussing the meaning of life, he says that happiness, or the happy life, is one of the most important issues with which biopolitics is concerned today.<sup>37</sup> Following Aristotle, he argues that 'the good life' or the happy life is the most fundamental end of biopolitics.<sup>38</sup>

Agamben reinforces this thesis about the centrality of the problem of happiness in biopolitics in the book which concludes his *Homo Sacer* project: *The Use of Bodies*. Therein, he defines political life as life directed to happiness.<sup>39</sup> However, according to him, this happiness is possible only through and after the 'deactivation' of the current mechanisms of biopolitics. The term 'deactivation' plays a significant role in Agamben. It means the suspension of, or the process of putting on hold, the mechanisms and *dispositifs* of sovereign power.<sup>40</sup> According to Agamben, happiness is possible only insofar as life is removed or liberated from the grasp of legal orders set in place by a sovereign power and economy. In other words, happiness is possible only when a sovereign power's grip over life is withheld. In his words, 'a political life, which is to say, a life oriented toward happiness and cohering in a form-of-life, is thinkable starting only from the emancipation from this scission'.<sup>41</sup> The 'scission' in

<sup>32</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 8–9, 136–143.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 43. I elaborate further on this idea of life as *becoming* in the third chapter.

<sup>34</sup> Agamben, *Potentialities*, 177–84.

<sup>35</sup> See Agamben, *Potentialities*, 182–84.

<sup>36</sup> Agamben, *Means without End*, 140–41.

<sup>37</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 10.

<sup>38</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1–12. He makes the same claim in *Means without End*, 4–5 and 7–8.

<sup>39</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 210.

<sup>40</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 271–79.

<sup>41</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 210.

question is the division and opposition introduced by biopolitics between life as the mere fact of living (*zōē*) and life as a specific way of living in accord with institutional and politico-economic conventions (*bios*).

According to Agamben, this scission is consequent upon the logic of exclusion that defines biopolitics. Natural life (or the mere fact of living, which also includes domestic life) is considered as something worthless and so is excluded from politics. In an attempt to go beyond this caesura, Agamben challenges the political tradition of controlling, dominating and governing life that defines Western politics. He offers a new conception of life and a new way of relating to it. In fact, he seeks to define life as a unified entity—one which can never be divided by any political and economic manipulation whatsoever. It could be said that Agamben's objective is to reach a unified form-of-life to replace the many forms of life that constitute and define the political sphere of today. He wants a notion of life that is freed from political domination and that can therefore guarantee happiness. Implicitly, the problem of the happy life which runs through most of Agamben's works constitutes, to a great extent, the reason why Agamben not only formulates critical remarks about biopolitics but, more importantly, presents one of the most challenging and intriguing attempts to analyse biopolitics. In fact, he states that his project aims 'to understand once and for all why democracy, at the very moment in which it seemed to have finally triumphed over its adversaries and reached its greatest height, proved itself incapable of saving *zōē*, to whose happiness it had dedicated all its efforts, from unprecedented ruin'.<sup>42</sup>

The momentous element in this passage is the assertion that democracy has failed to fulfil its essential role. What Agamben means here is that, in opposition to totalitarian ideologies and regimes of the past century, democracy has constituted itself as a regime that guarantees the protection and defence of life. However, he thinks that, in practice, democracy does not distance itself from 'its adversaries'. With the syntagma, 'its adversaries', Agamben implicitly refers to totalitarian ideologies such as Nazism and fascism.<sup>43</sup> Like these ideologies and regimes, today's democracy, in Agamben's view, also creates conditions that jeopardize the very life it seeks to protect. Thus, there appears to be an inner contradiction in democracy. On the one hand, it wants to save life and guarantee happiness. On the other hand, however, it is incapable of doing so. For Agamben, modern politics still captures life into its mechanisms in order to control

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<sup>42</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 10.

<sup>43</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 10–11.

and to regulate it as well as to act upon it.<sup>44</sup> Agamben makes an even more radical assertion: that the camp is not merely the central structure of Nazism but has even become the *nomos* and paradigm of modern biopolitics.<sup>45</sup>

Agamben does not intend in this to identify life in the camps with life in our time. His analysis bears instead on the juridical and political structure of the camps.<sup>46</sup> From his perspective, the state of exception, of which the camp is a concrete example, is utilized globally today as a paradigm of government. As was the case during the Nazi period, modern politics also makes constant use of the state of exception as a political way to deal with exceptional social and political occurrences.<sup>47</sup> Besides, today's law also seems to be becoming indistinguishable from life as such. The law has so thoroughly penetrated human life that life and law cannot be fully differentiated.<sup>48</sup> Agamben thinks that democracy has therefore not succeeded in procuring happiness for humans.<sup>49</sup> On this account, he sets out to critically investigate the causes of democracy's failure, or what he calls the '*arcanum imperii*'.<sup>50</sup> He wants to ask why politics has proven itself incapable of guaranteeing happiness.<sup>51</sup>

This thesis, therefore, aims to examine and elucidate the meaning of the notion of 'happiness' and its intricate relationship with economy and ethics in Agamben's account of biopolitics. In other words, I want to show that the happy life is the fundamental reason why Agamben is against and challenges the current understanding, constitutions and operations of sovereign power and economy in our time. That is to say that his account of happiness will cast light on his critical views on sovereign power and economy, and it justifies why he prefers life beyond the borders of sovereign power and economy. The subtitle of this thesis accordingly includes the terms *economy* and *ethics*. On the one hand, I herein clarify the extent to which Agamben thinks happiness is managed, governed and controlled by sovereign power and economy; on the other, I explain how Agamben envisions a new ethics of happiness that goes beyond the dictates of law and economy.

<sup>44</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 174; *State of Exception*, 2–10. In a recent study, Ype de Boer has also documented this thesis. See De Boer, 'Happy Life,' 104–06.

<sup>45</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 123 and 166–70. Agamben has been vehemently attacked for this radical claim. Laclau, for example, criticises Agamben for comparing modern life to life in the concentration camps. In the same way, Eaglestone affirms that Agamben develops a one-sided approach towards the camp and proffers unhistorical claims. See Laclau, 'Bare Life or Social Indeterminacy,' 22; Eaglestone, 'On Giorgio Agamben's Holocaust,' 57.

<sup>46</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 166.

<sup>47</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 174. See also, De Boer, 'Happy Life,' 104.

<sup>48</sup> For more details, see also Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 166–178; Ype de Boer, 'Happy Life,' 105–10.

<sup>49</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 10–11.

<sup>50</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 263.

<sup>51</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 10–12.

## 2. The Status Quaestionis

To date, the series of increasingly critical and wide-ranging studies on Agamben's work have focused largely on issues such as sovereignty, law, human rights and bare life. They have thus emphasized and further developed the political significance of Agamben's work.<sup>52</sup> However, few studies have hitherto concentrated on the issue of happiness in connection with economy and ethics in Agamben's thought. Simon Marijsse has duly remarked that,

though an increasingly growing critical material seeks to bridge his earlier, more literary work to later political and theological explorations like the recently finished *Homo Sacer* series, the concept of happiness in Agamben's work remains, strangely enough, a largely neglected and obscure trope of investigation.<sup>53</sup>

As mentioned in the first section above, however, the question of happiness is crucial to Agamben's philosophy. Not only does it intersect with his other themes, but it also helps to illuminate the crucial and complex relationship between biopolitics, economy and ethics. Examining the problem of happiness in Agamben's work will therefore yield a new and insightful picture of his philosophy by revealing the correlation between the *pars destruens* (the critique of biopolitics and economy) and the *pars construens* (the development of a new ethics) that defines his philosophical and biopolitical approach. In so doing, this analysis begins by offering a unifying understanding of Agamben's work. Secondly, this dissertation also suggests a clear lens through which Agamben's work as a whole can be better analysed and appraised regarding its philosophical and political significance.

A critical survey of the secondary literature on Agamben's work shows that some scholars have discussed economy in isolation from ethics and happiness while others have analysed ethics and happiness without discussing their relation to economy. Thus, the crucial link between Agamben's *pars destruens* and *pars construens* has not thus far been taken into serious consideration. As already indicated, this connection is elucidated by the notion of happiness, which holds together these two apparently unrelated parts of Agamben's thought. In the following, I analyse the literature to show, on the one hand, how previous scholars have overlooked this important aspect in Agamben's thought, and, on the other hand, to show how this oversight can be remedied.

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<sup>52</sup> See especially Norris, ed., *Politics, Metaphysics, and Death*; Calarco and DeCaroli, eds., *Giorgio Agamben*; Frost, *Giorgio Agamben*.

<sup>53</sup> Marijsse, 'Agamben's Happy Life', 139.

## 2.1 Economy without Ethics and Happiness

The publication of *The Kingdom and The Glory* brought the notion of ‘economy’ to the forefront of discussions of Agamben’s philosophy. However, as noted above, in most cases, no attention has been paid to the relationship between economy and ethics. For example, Alberto Toscano argues that Agamben’s interest in and analysis of economy as the paradigm of modern politics is deficient. According to him, Agamben’s genealogical account of economy does not take into consideration ‘the *chrematistics*’, which economy is normally about. By *chrematistics*, Toscano means the science of ‘accumulation, circulation and interest that is opposed to the managerial stability of the paradigm of *oikonomia*’. Put simply, *chrematistics* is the study of wealth based on money.<sup>54</sup> Toscano emphasizes that Agamben does not integrate financial transactions into his account of economy.

I am sympathetic to Toscano’s remark. However, I submit that his criticism of Agamben is to some extent deficient. The point is that Toscano overlooks what is in fact at stake in Agamben’s analysis: the relation between political power, which in the context of *The Kingdom and the Glory* Agamben describes as management or economy, ethics and life. As Primera argues, it is unquestionable that, in modern times, *economy* often refers to money, accumulation or exchange of goods, interest, etc. Agamben would not certainly object to this.<sup>55</sup> But, Agamben’s objective is to investigate why and how political power has taken the form of a way of managing life which precludes happiness.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, analysing Agamben’s account of economy from the perspective of the nexus between happiness, economy and ethics can yield a meaningful picture of his thinking.<sup>57</sup>

Unlike Toscano, who dismisses Agamben’s analysis of economy, Adam Kotsko demonstrates that Agamben’s genealogical approach to economy ‘provides a rigorous and flexible methodology for the field of political theology’.<sup>58</sup> According to Kotsko, Agamben points to the fact that today’s paradigm of politics is no longer that of a sovereign individual with power over the life and death of individuals. Rather, politics is now dominated by the figure of a ‘technocratic’ manager who controls the entire economic organization of the society.<sup>59</sup> Kotsko’s interpretation is relevant here in the sense that it exposes, to some degree, the issue at stake in Agamben’s genealogy of economy. Kotsko explains that Agamben, via the analysis of economy,

<sup>54</sup> Toscano, ‘Divine Management’, 125–36.

<sup>55</sup> Primera, ‘Economic Theology, Governance and Neoliberalism’, 113–14.

<sup>56</sup> See Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xi; *Homo Sacer*, 10.

<sup>57</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xi and xii.

<sup>58</sup> Kotsko, ‘Genealogy and Political Theology’, 107–14.

<sup>59</sup> Kotsko, ‘Genealogy and Political Theology’, 107.

examines the nature of politics. Nonetheless, Kotsko does not in any way mention the relation between economy and ethics. As mentioned, Agamben studies the genealogy of economy and its role in politics not merely to discuss the essence of biopolitics but also to suggest an alternative that takes on an ethical dimension.

This remark applies equally to Sean Capener and Mitchell Dean. To decipher how, according to Agamben, the paradigm of economy influences political views on sovereignty, Capener traces Agamben's notion of economy to ancient Greek tradition and links it to the categories of being and activity.<sup>60</sup> Likewise, Dean claims—given that Agamben seeks to unravel the 'theological conditions' which make reflection on the nature of contemporary politics possible—that Agamben's account of economy challenges modern forms of sovereign and economic power. Dean concludes that Agamben's analysis comprises a valuable 'contribution to the genealogy of government and economic management, and to our understanding of forms of power more generally'.<sup>61</sup> The crucial point in Dean's analysis is that Agamben's analysis of economy sheds light on our contemporary understanding of government and various forms of power. In fact, it brings to light the unsuspected continuities between theological and political concepts that are needed to understand the essence of government in modern politics. Moreover, the analysis of economy propounded by Agamben, according to Dean, draws attention to various discontinuities in the modern conception of government. Surprisingly, however, neither Capener nor Dean address the notion of economy in relation to ethics. They focus only on the examination of the political significance of economy in Agamben's philosophy. Such discussions present only one facet of Agamben's whole philosophical system. Therefore, connecting economy to ethics will shed more light on the reason Agamben elaborates on economy. It is my contention that the ethical perspective that defines Agamben's work is crucial to his critical analysis of economy.

In his article, '*Agamben et le mystère du gouvernement*',<sup>62</sup> Bruno Karsenti also gives a detailed account of Agamben's notion of economy that fails to link economy to ethics. He argues merely that Agamben conceptualizes a new conception of economy: one which departs from common parlance, wherein economy entails labour, production/productivity, consumption and exchange for the satisfaction of human material needs. Contrary to this, for Agamben, economy is a decisive locus for political reflection. Economy is the factory of the governmental machine of politics—that is, the framework in which the notion of government should be understood. On this

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<sup>60</sup> Capener, 'Being and Acting', 950–63.

<sup>61</sup> Dean, 'Office and Agamben's Genealogy', 200–22.

<sup>62</sup> Karsenti, 'Agamben et le mystère du gouvernement', 355–75.

point, Karsenti's analysis is similar to Dean's, discussed above. Both authors implicitly agree that, for Agamben, the notion of economy is important to understanding biopolitics. Economy indicates that politics is essentially about government or about the management of both individuals (lives) and institutions. Furthermore, Karsenti submits that, to reveal the various aspects of the governmental machine, Agamben builds his examination of economy around binary articulations: reign and glory, being and action (praxis), and ontology and pragmatics.

Like Karsenti, Jessica Whyte argues that Agamben's narrative of economy stands as a basis for understanding the 'bi-polar' essence of contemporary governmental power. Unlike Karsenti, however, Whyte locates this binary character in the relationship between sovereign power and economic power, which, according to her, are two faces of a 'single machine', that is, political power. 'They rely on each other', she says, and therefore cannot be separated.<sup>63</sup> However, neither Karsenti nor Whyte expand on the significance of this Agambenian bi-polar analysis. The relationship between these notions is left unaddressed. More importantly, they engage with Agamben's notion of economy in isolation from that of ethics, which constitutes the fundamental rationale behind which Agamben challenges biopolitics. In fact, Agamben investigates the meaning of *economy*, starting from its Greek and Christian origins, for at least two reasons. First, his analysis of economy is the summit of his rebuttal of modern politics.<sup>64</sup> As noted above, he seeks through this examination to understand how and why politics has been transformed into a government of humans which reduces them to the status of *homo sacer*—that is, to beings stripped of all rights—and, thereby, has reduced them to bare life, to a purely biological existence deprived of any political significance. In Agamben's view, such understanding of politics prevents humans from achieving the goal of politics, which is happiness.<sup>65</sup>

Second, Agamben suggests an alternative to this political rationality. This alternative is realised through his discussion of the notion of a 'form-of-life' which is freed from the shackles of political power (biopower) and which reconciles *bios*, the 'proper life' (that is, the political, cultural and social life proper to an individual or group of people), and *zōē*, the 'improper life' (the life excluded from politics and considered as the mere fact of living).<sup>66</sup> In his own words, it is now 'a question of instead thinking a politics of form-of-life, of life indivisible from its form'.<sup>67</sup> This reconciliation would

<sup>63</sup> Whyte, 'The King Reigns, but He Doesn't Govern', 145.

<sup>64</sup> See Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xi–xiii.

<sup>65</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 10.

<sup>66</sup> The expressions 'improper life' and 'proper life' have been borrowed from Bird, *Containing Community*.

<sup>67</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 206.

create a space for proper human action for the coming community. Unless this relationship is properly investigated, one is likely to misconstrue Agamben's core philosophical enterprise.

Like the foregoing authors, Dotan Leshem also discusses Agamben's genealogy of governmentality (economy) without proper relation to ethics. In his article on Agamben's reading of Foucault, Leshem criticises Agamben for establishing a direct relation between politics and economy.<sup>68</sup> For Leshem, politics and economy differ semantically. According to him, while politics is defined by a relation of exclusion, economy is characterised by three 'prolific qualities': namely, 'inclusiveness', 'constant representation of the irreconcilability of law and authority' and 'operation by accommodating to the ways of the governed'.<sup>69</sup> Leshem's remark seems very important. As discussed in the first chapter of this book, Leshem reveals an apparent conceptual confusion in Agamben's definition of biopolitics as economy. For Agamben, biopolitics entails the organization and management or government of all aspects of individual life in society. From this perspective, Agamben thinks that biopolitics is essentially economic. But Agamben himself, as I will show below, does not clarify the nature and extent of this relationship.<sup>70</sup> Leshem's remark would have gained its full analytical significance if it had demonstrated the function of this difference. On one hand, this demonstration would have shown how an inclusive economy can be a salvific framework in politics. On the other hand, it would have explained how adopting an inclusive understanding of economy could enable people to live happy lives. Leshem is also unclear about the relation between economy, ethics and happiness in Agamben's thought. Nevertheless, he affirms that Agamben's genealogy investigates the foundations of Western political power.

In his article, 'The Return of the Katechon: Giorgio Agamben contra Erik Peterson', Christoph Schmidt argues that Agamben's discourse on economy analyses the implications of economic theology in politics. Agamben's discourse seeks to understand the *modus operandi* of politics and reveals its 'inherent messianic potential' for the life of the coming world.<sup>71</sup> However, Schmidt does not bring his investigation to completion. He does not analyse the implications of the interplay of economy and the happy life in Agamben's philosophy and for our contemporary society. Instead, he expands only on Agamben's reading of Peterson's thesis regarding the (im)possibility of political theology. Moreover, in discussing the notion of life in Agamben's thinking,

<sup>68</sup> Leshem, 'Embedding Agamben's Critique of Foucault', 93–113.

<sup>69</sup> Leshem, 'Embedding Agamben's Critique of Foucault', 93.

<sup>70</sup> See Chapter 1, sections 4 and 5

<sup>71</sup> Schmidt, 'The Return of the Katechon', 182–203.

Schmidt does not characterize it as happy life. He rather describes it as aesthetic and eschatological life; he even defines it as 'eternal life'. But it is somewhat misleading to situate Agamben's notion of life in eternity. In fact, the life with which Agamben is concerned is the life of 'the coming community'. It is the life we are living. Thus, the coming community does not refer to an eschatological society but rather to a transformation of the current society and its politics. In this society, life will be liberated from the *dispositifs* of biopolitics, which, for Agamben, captures and subjects human life to its juridical conventions in a way that prevents it from realising itself.<sup>72</sup>

## 2.2 Happiness and Ethics without Economy

The question of ethics and happiness in Agamben has been discussed without proper relation to economy. For instance, this is the case for Leland de la Durantaye and Catherine Mills. Although they present illuminating and critical introductions to Agamben's work, neither provides an explicit and extensive account of the problem of happiness and ethics in Agamben's philosophy with reference to economy. De la Durantaye affirms that Agamben's discussion of ethics is related to his reflection on potentiality. For de la Durantaye, Agamben conceives ethics as humanity's search for self-realisation and the acquisition of an essence. De la Durantaye also argues that ethics, for Agamben, aims at conceiving the possibility of happy life in community.<sup>73</sup> However, de la Durantaye does not examine happiness and ethics as important components of Agamben's elaboration of economy. He rather treats them as independent aspects of Agamben's prolific work. Thus, De la Durantaye does not provide a proper account of the role the notion of the happy life plays in Agamben's philosophy.

For her part, Mills also addresses only happiness or the happy life and ethics in Agamben. She characterises the happy life, which she associates with Agamben's notion of form-of-life, as an antidote to the bare life produced by biopolitics. This is pivotal inasmuch as Agamben postulates the happy life as the new and necessary foundation for the coming politics. Not only does the happy life break the logic of division, segregation, exclusion and domination over life—which, according to Agamben, constitutes and dominates the Western political tradition—but this happy life also offers a new relation to life itself.<sup>74</sup> Mills goes on to link happiness and ethics. She argues that ethics in Agamben's philosophy is in fact 'the doctrine of the happy

<sup>72</sup> For a detailed account of the meaning of the notion of 'the coming community' in Agamben's thought, see Alex Murray, *Giorgio Agamben*, 50–54. Murray explains that the coming community is the potentiality of the present community to affect change in its course.

<sup>73</sup> De la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, 6; 7; 161; 387–89. Jason Maxwell also holds this position. Cf., Maxwell, 'Ethics', 63–65.

<sup>74</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 204 and 265.

life'.<sup>75</sup> According to Mills, Agamben suggests the happy life as a solution to the current exhaustion of biopolitics.<sup>76</sup>

Nonetheless, Mills does not explicitly address happiness and ethics in relation to economy. She situates them only within the general framework of Agamben's philosophy. Agamben does not merely diagnose what Mills calls 'the *aporia* of modern democracy';<sup>77</sup> he offers this diagnosis from the perspective of economy, which, for him, as we observed earlier, is the essential meaning of biopolitics. If this is the case, then, so far as Agamben's philosophy is concerned, an examination of the happy life and ethics can reveal their full significance when performed in relation to economy. In other words, to make sense of Agamben's philosophical project as a whole, it is necessary to take into serious consideration the nexus between happiness, ethics and economy. In fact, it is politics constituted as *oikonomia* in the Western tradition that has, according to Agamben, failed to secure happiness. He suggests as much in his *Homo Sacer* when he asserts that, in its efforts to liberate happiness, modern democracy puts life at the very place of its subjection.<sup>78</sup>

Daniel McLoughlin, on the contrary, seems to perceive the connection between economy and happiness in Agamben's philosophy. McLoughlin states that, for Agamben, economy is geared towards both wealth and well-being or happiness.<sup>79</sup> Surprisingly, however, McLoughlin never dwells on this important point in Agamben's thought: the relationship between economy and the good life. In other words, McLoughlin recognizes the central role happiness plays in Agamben's account of biopolitical management, but he does not discuss the significance of this connection. He does not elaborate on what the good life entails and how it is the goal of economy in Agamben's work. As stated earlier, illuminating this connection is crucial, as this connection bridges the gap between Agamben's criticism of biopolitics and his new coming politics.

In a similar manner, Jessica Whyte and Elisabeth Galewski argue only that Agamben's idea of form-of-life (the happy life) is in opposition to bare life and is an attempt to postulate a new ethical life. Estelle Ferrarese maintains the same idea. She explains that through the notion of form-of-life, Agamben not only challenges modern politics but also puts the reflection on *bios* (life) at the centre of his philosophical inquiry.

<sup>75</sup> Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, 5, 69–77 and 97–134. See also Mills, 'Happiness/Happy Life', 87–89.

<sup>76</sup> Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, 69–70.

<sup>77</sup> Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, 72.

<sup>78</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 9–10.

<sup>79</sup> McLoughlin, 'On Political and Economic Theology', 53–68.

In this way, he proposes a new relation to the living body and to life itself.<sup>80</sup> This life should depart from the self-defeating dynamics of sovereignty that define and constitute life as bare life.<sup>81</sup> In her paper, 'The King Reigns, but He Doesn't Govern: Thinking Sovereignty and Governmentality with Agamben, Foucault and Rousseau', Jessica Whyte further observes that the notion of life in Agamben's thought is related to that of inoperativity, which shares the same semantic significance as potentiality, as de la Durantaye also observes.<sup>82</sup> She argues that Agamben understands inoperativity as that which enables life to hold its own power of living and unites *bios* and *zōē*.<sup>83</sup> However, Whyte does not adequately explain the relation between life as inoperativity and economy in Agamben's thinking.

However, none of these scholars provide an adequate account of the question of happiness in relation to economy and ethics in Agamben's philosophy. In fact, Agamben's account of happiness explains his critical stance on biopolitical economy. It is because biopolitics, with its emphasis on governing life, has not succeeded in providing happiness that Agamben undertakes to challenge it and propose a new way of thinking about life. This new perspective consists in understanding life beyond the realm of biopolitics. The same thing can be said about Jenny Edkins. Though she shows that Agamben's notion of form-of-life stands at the foundation of his 'coming politics', she does not link it to economy to bring out the most essential purpose of Agamben's criticism of biopolitics: i.e., to reveal its failure and propose a new way of living. She merely notes that this notion of the form-of-life expresses Agamben's attempt to rethink politics beyond the bounds of biopolitics (or law), which operates via the dualistic distinction between human natural life and political life.<sup>84</sup> Arguing from the same perspective, Ian Hunter also fails to link Agamben's notion of the form-of-life with economy and ethics. He is interested only in highlighting a Heideggerian influence on Agamben's conception of form-of-life.<sup>85</sup>

### 2.3 Happiness, Ethics and Economy

A few scholars have tried to study the relationship between happiness, ethics and economy in Agamben's thought. Scott W. Blanchard, for example, examines

<sup>80</sup> Ferrarese, 'The Use of Bodies', 126–36.

<sup>81</sup> Whyte, 'Its Silent Working was a Delusion', 86–81 and Galewski, 'Founding to Me', 395–404. See also Whyte, 'Particular Rights and Absolute Wrongs', 147–61. She argues that form-of-life, contrary to bare life, which is produced by the capture of life by sovereignty, signals Agamben's hope for a new, non-judicial politics and inaugurates a happy life.

<sup>82</sup> De la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, 6–7.

<sup>83</sup> Whyte, 'The King Reigns, but He Doesn't Govern', 143–61.

<sup>84</sup> Edkins, 'Whatever Politics', 70–91.

<sup>85</sup> Hunter, 'Giorgio Agamben's Form-of-Life', 135–56.

Agamben's notion of form-of-life 'in the context of economic and social relations.' He shows how, according to Agamben, the Franciscan tradition can provide a paradigm for human behaviour and relation to the world.<sup>86</sup> Blanchard establishes a connection between economy, ethics and happiness. Despite his brilliant analysis, Blanchard's argument does not sufficiently explain how the form-of-life leads to happiness. As a matter of fact, the form-of-life, for Agamben, is not *per se* a path to the happy life. Close inspection of the occurrences of these terms in Agamben's corpus shows that the 'form-of-life' is, in fact, 'the happy life' itself: a life that is possible outside the bonds of legal norms (as is illustrated by the Franciscan paradigm, which Agamben uses).<sup>87</sup> As Blanchard rightly contends, this life challenges modern capitalism and proposes a view and form of life that is based on 'restricted consumption'. In other words, Blanchard shows how, according to Agamben, economic exchanges, excessive consumption and possessions or ownership—all of which characterize capitalism—do not lead to happiness.

Sergei Prozorov has tried to highlight the relation between happiness, ethics, and economy in Agamben.<sup>88</sup> Prozorov analyses this nexus from the perspective of the general framework of Agamben's discussion of biopolitics and his project of the coming community. The objective of Prozorov is to demonstrate how and why Agamben's philosophy is optimistic, which is to say, inhabited by an implicit orientation towards the possibility of a better life. Prozorov develops this idea in his monograph on Agamben's political thought, *Agamben and Politics: A Critical Introduction*. He avers that Agamben's philosophy affirms the possibility of happiness achieved through the deactivation of 'the structures of power that capture and confine human existence'.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, Prozorov notes that Agamben's notion of the happy life has been ignored 'or scornfully, and a little too hurriedly, dismissed' by mainstream readings of Agamben's work. These have not properly considered 'the persistent references throughout his work "to happiness" that come at the end of the tradition whose reign has indeed been tragic and, moreover, going from bad to worse'.<sup>90</sup>

The crucial aspect of Prozorov's analysis, and one with which I agree, is his criticism of Agamben's conception of happiness and the way to attain it. Prozorov argues that Agamben's analysis has a methodological flaw. Agamben does not elaborate on 'the pathway' which leads to the new form-of-life and, therefore, to happiness, which he proposes as the basis for the coming politics. He merely affirms that the

<sup>86</sup> Blanchard, 'Forms of Power, Forms of Life', 525–48.

<sup>87</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, xi–xiii.

<sup>88</sup> Prozorov, 'Why Giorgio Agamben is an Optimist', 1053–73.

<sup>89</sup> Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 3–4.

<sup>90</sup> Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 13.

radically different form-of-life needed to guarantee happiness is not to be attained through revolutionary patterns or social struggles but, rather, through ‘the *subtraction* of the subjects from existing apparatuses, whereby they reappropriate their own potentiality for “whatever being”’.<sup>91</sup> This problem notwithstanding, Prozorov merely situates the notion of happiness (form-of-life) within the general framework of Agamben’s philosophy. In doing so, however, he does not say much about the intricate relation between these notions: happiness, economy and ethics. In other words, Prozorov emphasizes only the significance of the notion of the happy life in Agamben but does not show how it relates to economy and ethics.

What remains to be analysed and explained is, first, Agamben’s understanding of how biopolitics, with its emphasis on economy or government of human life, is an obstacle to happiness. Prozorov affirms merely that the happy life, in Agamben’s view, is achieved through the ‘subtraction’ of life from the mechanisms of biopolitics. We should consider why and how this capture of life is problematic insofar as happiness is concerned. Second, we must examine the relevance of Agamben’s account of happiness with reference to economy and ethics. This examination must be carried out by considering the happy life as the leitmotiv that underpins Agamben’s account of biopolitics and ethics.

### 3. Research Questions

In the previous section, I noted that critical studies of Agamben’s thought have not hitherto sufficiently examined the nexus between economy, ethics and happiness. This lacuna opens a horizon for further investigation to make better sense of Agamben’s philosophical discourse regarding the economic aspect of politics and his theory of happiness. Such an investigation will bring to light ‘the ethical elements’ inherent in his work.<sup>92</sup> In fact, through his analysis of economy as the paradigm of modern politics, Agamben aims not only to point out the essence and shortcomings of biopolitics but, more importantly, to arrive at ‘a form of life that is wholly exhausted in bare life and a *bios* that is only its own *zōē*’.<sup>93</sup> Put simply, Agamben aims for a way of living that breaks up the partition of life; he considers life as a whole and single entity. Consequently, and as has already been explained, this thesis aims ultimately to illuminate the relation between Agamben’s *pars destruens* and *pars construens*.

<sup>91</sup> Prozorov, ‘Why Giorgio Agamben is an Optimist’, 1054.

<sup>92</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 21.

<sup>93</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 188.

To achieve this objective, this study addresses the following main question: What role does the notion of “happiness” play within Agamben’s account of economy and ethics, and how does it bring together his *pars destruens* and his *pars construens*?

In view of this question, the following sub-questions are addressed in what follows:

- a. How does Agamben’s notion of economy help to illustrate the essence and functioning of biopolitics, and why does he propose to depart from it?
- b. How does Agamben conceive of the new political ethics, and what are its underpinnings?
- c. What is Agamben’s conception of happiness, and how is it related to economy and ethics?
- d. Is Agamben’s proposition relevant or even plausible for our society?

Addressing the first question will enable me to reconstruct and elucidate the context of Agamben’s account of happiness. In so doing, I will consider why he thinks that biopolitics is unable to guarantee the happy life such that a new relation to life must be considered. In responding to the second question, I will explore the foundations of Agamben’s new ethics and analyse its significance. This will ultimately show the relationship between Agamben’s unrelenting critical account of biopolitics and his new conception of life. The elaboration of this question will therefore provide the background we require to understand the meaning of happiness in Agamben’s work. The response to the last question will contextualize and problematize Agamben’s narrative and allow us to evaluate it based on current studies on happiness, ethics and economy. I will consider in particular Badiou’s account of ‘real happiness’,<sup>94</sup> Nussbaum’s ‘capabilities approach’<sup>95</sup> and Pope Francis’s approach to economy and happiness. The main reason for using them to evaluate Agamben’s take on happiness and economy is that all these contemporary thinkers share with Agamben a critical attitude towards the modern constitution of economy and capitalism.

## 4. Methodological Considerations

Agamben does not address the problem of happiness in relation to ethics and biopolitics in just one book. His conceptualization of the happy life is spread throughout his writings. In fact, it is spread across many seemingly unconnected essays and books and through many divergent themes. Agamben’s philosophical work

<sup>94</sup> Badiou, *Happiness*, 41.

<sup>95</sup> Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 24.

seems to lack an internal, thematic coherence. Addressing the relationship between economy and ethics from the point of view of the problem of happiness will reveal how these themes and dimensions of Agamben's works are related and concomitantly constitute the multiple faces of a single philosophical project: rendering inoperative the *dispositifs* of biopolitics 'in order', as Greg Bird says, 'to arrive at an ontological ethos, a way of being, or a form-of-life that is inoperative and free to use things without resorting to proprietary categories'.<sup>96</sup>

It could be argued that Agamben's elaboration of biopolitics reveals its full meaning better when it is examined in relation to his analysis of a new political ethics—his 'coming politics'—that can guarantee human happiness. From this perspective, the main philosophical question guiding Agamben's project could be summarized as follows: How could human life lose its value through (bio)politics? What has led to the alienation of human life, and how can human dignity be restored?<sup>97</sup> This last question led Agamben to investigate the essence and operational modes of biopolitics in the hope that his critical analysis of those modes can suggest a way forward.<sup>98</sup> Therefore, Agamben's account of economy becomes more meaningful when it is considered in relation to his conception of ethics and happiness.

His discussion of happiness and ethics first appears in his early works. For instance, the notion of *ethos* plays a pivotal role in *Language and Death*. In addition, he dedicates a fragment of *The Coming Community* to the subject of ethics, which he associates with cognate notions such as 'whatever being' and 'potentiality'. Furthermore, his essay in *Potentialities* on 'Benjamin and the Demonic' is a discussion of the place and role of happiness in Walter Benjamin's historical thought. Agamben continues his analysis of happiness in the nine books that constitute his *Homo Sacer* series. Though this question appears as a by-theme in the first four volumes of the series, he elaborates amply on it in subsequent volumes. It is not, therefore, an overstatement to affirm that his thematization of happiness is at the crossroad of economy and ethics and develops over time.

This fact poses a few methodological problems. First, it exposes Agamben's inconsistency in using key notions such as economy and biopolitics. A closer inspection of his works reveals a shift of both meaning and emphasis in his conceptualization of biopolitics and economy. Second, there is the difficulty of clearly singling out what Agamben means by 'happiness' and 'ethics'. Though he constantly uses the terms

<sup>96</sup> Bird, *Containing Community*, 42.

<sup>97</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 166.

<sup>98</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 10.

*happiness* and *the happy life* and gives them a pivotal place in his works, Agamben does not provide an explicit definition of these terms. He instead associates them with the syntagma ‘form-of-life’ and other notions such as potentiality and ‘whatever being’ without providing any proper elaboration or clarification. As a result, the correlation of happiness, ethics and economy appears to be unclearly thematized. Yet, as we have already pointed out, Agamben sets out from the very beginning of his project to show that there is a close connection between biopolitics and happiness.

To solve these problems and thereby present a clear and coherent account of the crucial role that happiness—which unites his *pars destruens* and *pars construens*—plays in Agamben’s work, this study is primarily focused on the *Homo Sacer* series. It proceeds by critically reading the *Homo Sacer* corpus and analysing both implicit and explicit occurrences of the notion of happiness, thereby working out Agamben’s key ideas on the happy life and ethics in correlation with economy. Since Agamben’s account of happiness also appears in his other writings, these are also referenced and discussed as necessary. Hence, I employ both diachronic and systematic approaches to reading and analysing Agamben’s texts, thereby presenting a comprehensive understanding of the issue at stake in this dissertation. This diachronic approach is used to trace the inception and development of Agamben’s discourse on the happy life and economy at work in his narrative of biopolitics. In this way, special attention is given to shifts of meaning and emphasis in Agamben’s elaboration so that we can analyse the coherence and relevance of Agamben’s submissions and appraise the conceptual clarity and consistency of his thought.

## 5. The Structure of the Work

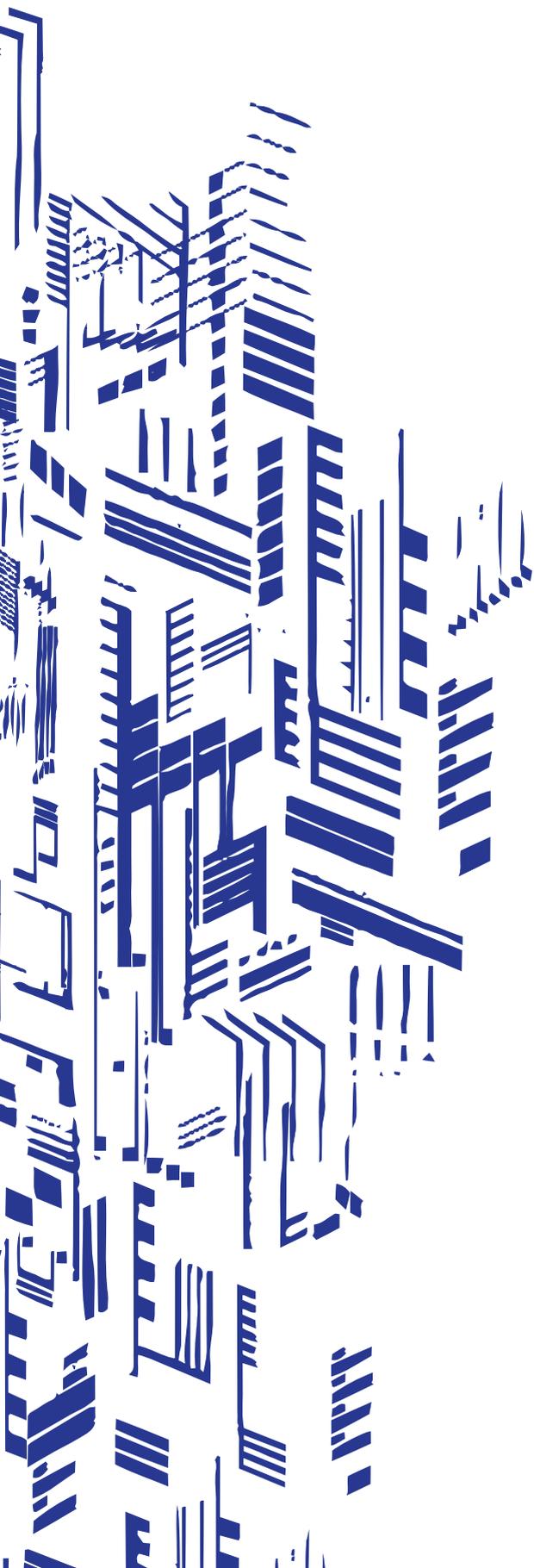
I develop my arguments in four chapters. Each chapter is devoted to various key concepts that constitute the theme of the work. More precisely, each chapter provides a response to the research questions articulated above. In the first chapter, ‘*Oikonomia*: a Paradigm and Pole of Biopolitics’, Agamben I provide a detailed analysis of Agamben’s account of economy, understood as one of the most fundamental paradigms of biopolitics. In this way, I show why and how, according to Agamben, biopolitics has been unable to secure happiness as he conceives it. The chapter also addresses the conceptual relationship between biopolitics and economy in Agamben. It therefore illuminates the general framework within which Agamben’s new ethics and his conception of the happy life arise.

Chapter Two, 'Beyond Biopolitics: Towards a New Political Ethics', addresses Agamben's conception of ethics. I discuss the essence of Agamben's account of ethics and describe it as an 'ethics without the law' or an 'ethics of the ungovernable'. Given his *pars destruens*—that is, his unrelenting critique of biopolitics—it is unsurprising that he conceptualizes an account of ethics that understands life in society beyond law and sovereign power, and economy. His ethics rather emphasises the freedom of living outside the realm of sovereign power. This ethics is elaborated through a logic of inoperativity, that is, of rendering ineffective all ethical categories that have dominated the history of ethics. These categories are, according to him, contaminated by law and should therefore be thought and reconceptualized outside the framework of sovereignty and economy (biopolitics). Chapter Two accordingly discusses the foundations of Agamben's ethics and considers how it is the path for achieving happiness.

The third chapter, '*Form-of-Life: The New Politico-Ethical Life*', elaborates on how Agamben develops and characterizes happiness. Importantly, I trace its inception and crystallisation into the notion of form-of-life. However, form-of-life cannot be understood without putting it in relation to potentiality and 'whatever being'.<sup>99</sup> Hence, I discuss the relations between these three notions and show how they illuminate Agamben's account of the happy life. In so doing, I demonstrate that the happy life in question, for Agamben, is nothing but a life subtracted from sovereign power, that is, a life that reconciles *zōē* and *bios*. I intend here to show that the problem of happiness links the *pars destruens* and the *pars construens* of Agamben's philosophy.

The overall aim of the final chapter, 'Happiness beyond Capitalism', is to assess Agamben's conception of happiness, economy and ethics and examine its implications in relation to what is arguably the most pressing issue of our time when it comes to economy and life: the ecological crisis. Accordingly, Chapter Four pursues two goals. First, based on a critical examination of the theories of happiness and economy put forward by Badiou, Nussbaum and Pope Francis, I analyse whether and to what extent Agamben's theory comprises a relevant alternative to the question of happiness and economy. Second, I use Agamben's ideas on happiness and economy to provide a plausible framework within which to examine the conundrum of ecology and show that the ecological crisis may be articulated from the perspective of biopolitics. In this case, the ecological crisis could be seen as a direct consequence of the way in which happiness and economy are understood in the contemporary world.

<sup>99</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 1; Edkins, 'Whatever Politics', 73–74.



## **CHAPTER I**

# *OIKONOMIA: A PARADIGM AND POLE OF BIOPOLITICS*

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## 1. Introduction

In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault examines the historical path through which life in general has become a crucial and strategic object of the mechanisms of political power. Arguing that there is ‘a historical break, a discontinuity in political practice’,<sup>100</sup> Foucault notes that a new form of power in relation to life has emerged in modernity. He calls this power ‘biopower’ and contrasts it with sovereign power.<sup>101</sup> He argues that the latter form of power—that is, sovereign power—operates as a power of domination. Sovereign power takes ‘hold of life in order to suppress it’.<sup>102</sup> We could say that sovereign power relates negatively to life, in Foucault’s account, in that he characterizes it as an absolute right to kill or let live. According to Foucault, the sovereign exercises this right over its subjects to defend itself in the event of any danger.<sup>103</sup> Foucault expresses this idea as follows:

Sovereign power was exercised mainly as a means of deduction (*prélèvement*), a subtraction mechanism, a right to appropriate a portion of the wealth, a tax of products, goods and services, labor and blood, levied on the subjects. Power in this instance was essentially a right of seizure: of things, time, bodies, and ultimately of life itself; it culminated in the privilege to seize hold of life in order to suppress it.<sup>104</sup>

However, at the end of the classical period, Foucault submits, sovereign power underwent a ‘profound transformation’, such that the domination and suppression of life which defined it were no longer the most prominent forms of power.<sup>105</sup> A new form of power, biopower, emerged, and it was constituted as a power to administer, ensure, maintain and develop life.<sup>106</sup> Foucault maintains that, though biopower still integrates the possibility of death in its operations, it changed the political meaning

<sup>100</sup> Lemke, *Biopolitics*, 33. See also Mills, ‘Biopolitics, Liberal Eugenics, and Nihilism’, 182.

<sup>101</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* I, 135–41.

<sup>102</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* I, 136.

<sup>103</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* I, 135. Both Colebrook and Maxwell also demonstrate that Foucault distinguishes biopower from sovereign power. They add that, while ‘the sovereign model of power (as power over life and death) was ‘negative’ in the sense that it was exercised as power of ‘execution and torture’, ‘modern biopower for Foucault is productive. It operates not by excluding or abandoning “life” but by producing life through various practices of knowledge and discipline’. See Colebrook and Maxwell, *Agamben*, 59.

<sup>104</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* I, 136.

<sup>105</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* I, 136.

<sup>106</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* I, 136–37.

of death. Death became something that can happen as part of the general and internal process of the preservation of life.<sup>107</sup> Therefore, he states that,

there has been a parallel shift in the right of death, or at least a tendency to align itself with the exigencies of a life-administrating power and to define itself accordingly. This death that was based on the right of the sovereign is now manifested as simply the reverse of the right of the social body to ensure, maintain, or develop its life.<sup>108</sup>

Briefly, in Foucault's work, biopower can be understood as power that integrates life into the mechanisms and strategies of politics to govern, administer and frame it in accord with the will of power.<sup>109</sup> He asserts that biopower constitutes itself as 'a power that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavours to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations'.<sup>110</sup> Foucault goes on to stress that political power,

would no longer be dealing simply with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death, but with living beings, and the mastery it would be able to exercise over them would have to be applied at the level of life itself; it was taking charge of life, [...], that gave power its access even to the body.<sup>111</sup>

What Foucault precisely means is that the momentous element in politics is biological existence, that is, the 'simple fact of living'.<sup>112</sup> As Agamben properly puts it, life in general forms an important part of the 'mechanisms and calculations of state power'.<sup>113</sup> Foucault goes on to say that, from the late seventeenth century to the nineteenth century, this new form of power over life developed itself into two distinct but complementary forms of power. He calls the first of these the 'anatomy-

<sup>107</sup> Commenting on Foucault's account of biopolitics as 'the governance of life', Esposito puts forward the same idea: that Foucault's 'new biopolitical order subordinated even death to the demands of reproducing life'. Esposito later uses this idea to develop his account of the biopolitics of immunity. See, for instance, Esposito, 'Biopolitics', 340–41.

<sup>108</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* I, 136. See also Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* I, 138: '[O]ne 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'. For a more elaborate and detailed analysis of this aspect of Foucault's thought, see Mills, *Biopolitics*, 15 and Lemke, *Biopolitics*, 35–37.

<sup>109</sup> See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, I, 136–37 and 143.

<sup>110</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* I, 137.

<sup>111</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* I, 142–43.

<sup>112</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1.

<sup>113</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 3.

*politics of the human body*' and the second a '*bio-politics of the population*'.<sup>114</sup> *Anatomo-politics* treats the human body as a machine. On the basis of the knowledge of the human body provided by sciences such as biology and medicine, Foucault argues that anatomo-politics regards the body as a 'machine' that must be examined, disciplined, controlled and optimized to produce efficient and useful outcomes for economic purposes.<sup>115</sup> What is at stake in these practices is the production of what Foucault calls 'docile bodies', that is, bodies that are formed and framed according to the dictates and regulations of power.<sup>116</sup> He elaborates extensively on this form of power in *Discipline and Punish*.<sup>117</sup> For instance, he shows that schools in the seventeenth century were instituted as a 'mechanism of training' for the purpose of making students into docile and productive citizens.<sup>118</sup> According to Foucault, students were selected and gathered into different classrooms on the basis of particularities, such as age, sex, intelligence and character, thereby to maximise their productivity.<sup>119</sup>

In Foucault's opinion, the second pole of biopower, the biopolitics of the population, concerns the supervision and regulation of the body of the population. He claims that this power considers the population as a 'species of body' marked by biological characteristics and functions, such as life, birth, death, health and longevity. Biopolitics regulates and controls the population as a whole through a series of control mechanisms which Foucault calls 'regulatory controls'.<sup>120</sup> In Foucault's view, the *anatomo-politics of the human body* and the *bio-politics of the population* constitute two poles of a single form of power, that is, biopower. One of these forms of power is interested in the body in order to singularize it and exploit its internal forces; the second concentrates on the life of the population as a social body in general.<sup>121</sup>

According to Foucault, biopolitics, that is, the integration of life into the strategies of politics, constitutes the 'threshold of [biological] modernity'.<sup>122</sup> In other words, the

<sup>114</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* I, 139.

<sup>115</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* I, 139.

<sup>116</sup> See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 135–69.

<sup>117</sup> Mills also puts forward this idea. See Mills, *Biopolitics*, 15.

<sup>118</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 173.

<sup>119</sup> See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 170–84.

<sup>120</sup> See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* I, 139.

<sup>121</sup> See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* I, 139–40. For more details and elaborations, see Lemke, *Biopolitics*, 37–38.

<sup>122</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* I, 143. Note that the adjective *biological* does not appear in the English translation. However, the French version of Foucault's text speaks of 'le seuil de la modernité biologique'. See Foucault, *Histoire de la Sexualité* I, 188. This specification is important because it indicates that politics in modernity is defined by the insertion into politics of the life of the population or of human beings understood, not as rational beings, but rather as biological species.

fact that biological life becomes a central object of politics signals the beginning of a new era in politics. This is so because, according to him, modernity places life at the core of its activities. He argues that modernity thereby achieves a transformation in the constitution of politics. This transformation breaks from Aristotle's tradition. Aristotle considered the human being simply as a 'living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence'.<sup>123</sup> The life of the human being as a whole was not directly integrated into politics. A part of that life, *zōē*, was excluded from politics. In contrast, for Foucault, the modern man is an 'animal' whose entire life becomes without exception an important element of political practice.<sup>124</sup> But why must politics become so interested in controlling human lives and bodies? In other words, why has politics become—why even *should* it become—more and more interested in looking at the lives of human beings and their bodies?

This is the question Agamben sets out to address in *The Kingdom and the Glory*. In the opening lines of the book, Agamben clearly states that he wants to investigate 'the paths by which and the reasons why power in the West has assumed the form of an *oikonomia*, that is, a government of men'.<sup>125</sup> Analysing Agamben's responses will help us better understand how politics works and why and how economy is presently one of the most dominant trends of both politics and life in general. To tackle the object of his inquiry, Agamben painstakingly examines the history of the notion of economy. He 'provides a genealogy of *oikonomia* from its Greek origins as the art of household management through the Trinitarian theology, which deployed the term to conceptualise the divine management of the world, up to its reactivation by modern theorists of government'.<sup>126</sup>

Agamben does not merely offer a historiography of the notion of economy. More significantly, he strategically and meticulously scrutinizes this notion in a bid to elaborate the essence and practice of biopolitics in our era. The notion of economy is decisive because, according to him, it brings to light one of the profound meanings and characteristics of politics apprehended as biopolitics. However, as sections 3, 4 and 5 below will show, Agamben provides a complex account of biopolitics. At times—especially in *Homo Sacer*, *State of Exception* and *Remnants of Auschwitz*—he describes biopolitics as the exercise of sovereign power over life in the exception, which, for him, has become the normal political situation.<sup>127</sup> I emphasize this point more explicitly in subsequent sections. Biopolitics, from the aforesaid perspective,

<sup>123</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* I, 143; Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 119.

<sup>124</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* I, 143.

<sup>125</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xi.

<sup>126</sup> McLoughlin, *Agamben and Radical Politics*, 3.

<sup>127</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 9; *State of Exception*, 1–10.

implies the absolute right of the sovereign to take control of life and produce bare life, that is, life fully exposed to the domination of the sovereign. Moreover, Agamben understands bare life as a life that is ostracised from the city and devoid of any right and political significance. It is a life that can be terminated at any moment under the guidance of the sovereign command.<sup>128</sup> However, in *The Kingdom and the Glory*, Agamben draws from the meaning of economy to portray biopolitics as the government of men and life in general.<sup>129</sup>

Far from contradicting or excluding each other, these two dimensions of Agamben's account of biopolitics are interwoven. His elaborations on economy in *The Kingdom and the Glory* aim to expand and complete those contained in *Homo Sacer*. The notion of economy allows him to show that it is impossible to consider biopolitics only from the angle of sovereignty. Rather, biopolitics is a conflation of sovereign power and government.<sup>130</sup> The notion of economy and its meanings, for Agamben, therefore constitute an important 'paradigm' of the entire Western political tradition.<sup>131</sup> Consequently, we should discover what this economy consists of and how it has informed the definition of biopolitics. In other words, I set out in this chapter to consider how Agamben's discourse on economy can help us to better comprehend his account of biopolitics. I will critically engage with *The Kingdom and the Glory* to provide a detailed and critical analysis of Agamben's account of economy. The question that confronts us here is thus the following: Given that biopolitics, for Agamben, is the core of modern politics, what does his account of economy tell us about biopolitics? In view of this question, the chapter turns on four points, whose interconnection is functional in following and apprehending the pertinence of Agamben's discourse.

I shall first discuss the notion of economy in Agamben. The aim here is to provide a concise but clear overview of the meanings of economy found in his works. To detect the various meanings which Agamben attributes to economy, my terminological and conceptual analysis follows the genealogical displacement of the notion in question as considered by Agamben. This excursion is important here for at least two reasons. First, it will help us understand Agamben's conception of economy. Second, it will enable us to point out possible connections between the various meanings of economy in Agamben's thought.

<sup>128</sup> See, for instance, Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 6; *State of Exception*, 23–25; and *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 49–50.

<sup>129</sup> See Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xi.

<sup>130</sup> See especially Section 5 below.

<sup>131</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xi, 1 and 66. See also Karsenti, 'Agamben et le mystère du gouvernement', 356.

Then, in the second point, I will explore the connection between biopolitics and economy. In particular, I will analyse the relevance of Agamben's conception of economy to the question of happiness. Agamben's overemphasis on the economic paradigm encourages us to wonder what it adds to his description of politics as biopolitics and happiness. We must already stress that Agamben's construal of happiness within his account of biopolitics is complicated and ambivalent. He puts forward two different ideas of happiness. The first one, which he criticizes, describes happiness as a direct outcome of the action of the sovereign power over life. The happy life is a form of life that is lived in accord with the control of the sovereign; it is the life that is constituted under the rule of sovereignty and economy. Because it is directly dependent on the regulations imposed by sovereign power and government, I will refer to this account of happiness as *biopolitical happiness*.

The second idea of happiness, for which Agamben advocates, emphasizes the relation of life with itself. He describes the happy life as the life that is lived outside the bounds of sovereign power and economy. It is the life of self-sufficiency.<sup>132</sup> In other words, it is a form of life that exceeds sovereign power and economy, and seeks to realize itself. I use the term *ethico-ontological happiness* to qualify and talk about this Agambenian account of happiness. Agamben's account is ethical because it focuses on the individual's particular way of living; it is ontological because, as discussed briefly in section 3.3 below and extensively in chapters 2 and 3, this construal of happiness seeks the full expression of life itself beyond any constraint from the sovereign.<sup>133</sup> So, our fundamental task here is to examine the role Agamben's notion of economy plays in his account of happiness within his account of biopolitics.

Third, I will consider the intricate relationship between political theology and economic theology in Agamben's thinking. The point of the matter is that Agamben provides a very complicated and nuanced account of the interaction of these two paradigms. His analysis differs in many ways from Schmitt's depiction of the relationship between the political and the theological. Briefly speaking, Schmitt subordinates the political to the theological and poses the latter as the foundation of the former.<sup>134</sup> On his part, Agamben traces both models back to a more foundational level. I therefore analyse how, according to Agamben, these two paradigms relate to each other.

<sup>132</sup> Agamben, *Means without End*, 114.

<sup>133</sup> Agamben, *Means without End*, 114–15.

<sup>134</sup> See Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 36–37.

Finally, I will provide a critical evaluation of possible shifts and contradictions in Agamben's account of power. As mentioned above, Agamben begins his *Homo Sacer* series with a critical discussion of biopolitics from the perspective of sovereign power and the influence of law on human life. However, from *The Kingdom and the Glory*, it appears that he focuses on the importance of economy in his account of power. Taking this fact into consideration, I show that Agamben's conception of power within the framework of biopolitics and economy is complex and intricate.

## 2. Agamben's Genealogy of Economy: Terminological and Conceptual Analysis

In this section, I briefly elaborate on and provide a clear overview of the various meanings Agamben attributes, whether explicitly or implicitly, to the notion of economy in his works. It might be helpful at this stage to note that he started to theorize about economy (with its Greek stem, *oikos*) in 1995 with the publication of *Homo Sacer*, which was translated into English in 1998. In this book, the term *economy* appears 11 times.<sup>135</sup> The term *oikos* occurs therein only three times.<sup>136</sup> However, none of these occurrences are accompanied by a precise description of the term. It is only later, especially in *The Kingdom and the Glory*—which was published originally in 2007 as *Il Regno e la Gloria* and translated into English in 2011—that Agamben tries to clarify his understanding of economy. He seems to ascribe three specific and correlated meanings to economy. Agamben construes economy as an administration, as a rhetorical arrangement of linguistic elements and as a *theologoumenon* that refers to the divine management of the world. However, it must already be noted that Agamben does not invent these meanings by himself. Rather, he draws on and expounds already existing traditions of use in Greek, Stoic and Christian traditions. In the following, I elaborate only on the first and third meaning. These are the meanings that are most closely related to the aim of this study: examining the relevance of Agamben's discourse on economy in his account of biopolitics. To address these different meanings and their connections, it will be helpful to start with the etymological meaning of the word *economy*.

### 2.1. The Concept of Economy

The Greek expression, *oikonomia*, to which the English term *economy* traces, originates from a combination of two Greek words. The first is *oikos* (in plural, *oikoi*). It has meanings that range from 'a household', 'a home' or 'a family house' to 'an abode' or 'a

<sup>135</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 5, 140–45 and 187–88.

<sup>136</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 2, 131 and 188.

dwelling place'.<sup>137</sup> For Ancient Greeks, *oikos* referred to three correlated, though different, aspects of the household: namely, the family, the properties of the family (among which are slaves and farmlands) and the house itself.<sup>138</sup> The second word is either *nomos* or *nemō*. *Nomos* means 'anything assigned', 'a usage', 'law' or an 'ordinance'.<sup>139</sup> *Nemō*, on the other hand, is the first-person singular of the Greek verb *nemein*, which means 'to pasture, to graze the flocks, to drive them to pasture'. It also means taking care of them at a feeding-place, 'to distribute', 'to deal out' or 'to dispense'.<sup>140</sup>

Since both *nomos* and *nemō* apply in this context to the *oikos*, *oikonomia* (*economy*) denotes the practice that pertains to the administration or ordering of the household. It involves taking care of the particular day-to-day circumstances that arise within the family house.<sup>141</sup> This management of the household included the activities of raising money and looking for the resources needed for the subsistence of the family. From this point of view, the head of the house (*oikonomos*) ought to ensure that the family had what was required for its subsistence.<sup>142</sup> He did this by either 'increasing the production or moderating the consumption' of goods.<sup>143</sup> With specific inflections, this etymological meaning permeates the entire ancient philosophical tradition from which Agamben draws his conception of economy, beginning from Aristotle up until the Christian theological world.<sup>144</sup>

## 2.2 Economy as Administration

As has been said, Agamben started to discuss the notions of *oikos* and economy with the publication of *Homo Sacer*. The notion continues to figure in most of his subsequent writings, but without being properly defined.<sup>145</sup> The first attempt to provide a definition of the notion in question was not made until the publication of *What Is an Apparatus?*<sup>146</sup> In this book, the term appears seven times, and its Greek equivalence, *oikonomia*, occurs 16 times.<sup>147</sup> Each time, it refers to the supervision, or better still the 'administration'

<sup>137</sup> Liddell et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 446. See also Singer, 'Oikonomia: An Inquiry into Beginnings', 30.

<sup>138</sup> See Liddell et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 446; Singer, 'Oikonomia: An Inquiry into Beginnings', 30; Leshem, 'Retrospectives', 226.

<sup>139</sup> See Liddell et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 437.

<sup>140</sup> Singer and Leshem also put forward this point. See Singer, 'Oikonomia: An Inquiry into Beginnings', 36–37 and Leshem, 'Retrospectives', 225.

<sup>141</sup> Singer, 'Oikonomia: An Inquiry into Beginnings', 36.

<sup>142</sup> See Leshem, 'Retrospectives', 229; Singer, 'Oikonomia: An Inquiry into Beginnings', 30–32.

<sup>143</sup> See Leshem, 'Retrospectives', 229.

<sup>144</sup> See Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 17–52.

<sup>145</sup> See, for example, Agamben, *Means without End*, 140–41, where Agamben uses the term *oikonomia* only twice; *The Coming Community*, 31 and 86, where the term *economy* appears three times; and *Stasis*, 5, 8 and 9.

<sup>146</sup> *What Is an Apparatus?* was originally published in 2006 under the title *Che cos'è un dispositivo* and was translated into English in 2009.

<sup>147</sup> Agamben, *What is An Apparatus?* 4, 9, 10–11, 13, 16 and 22–23.

of daily occurrences within the context of a family house. In this context, Agamben opposes it to science understood ‘in the proper sense’. What he means is that economy does not follow a set of predefined rules and principles. It is understood as a way of being and administrating things that depends solely on the administrator’s ability to make decisions and give orders based on the circumstances that arise within the *oikos*.<sup>148</sup> Agamben still paraphrases the etymological meaning of the term. For instance, he writes as follows: ‘[I]n Greek, *oikonomia* signifies the administration of the *oikos* (the home) and, more generally, management’.<sup>149</sup>

Agamben’s most extensive and elaborate definition of economy appears in *The Kingdom and the Glory*, a book specifically dedicated to the genealogy of economy. At the outset, and drawing from the etymology of the term *economy*, Agamben emphasises the correlation between *oikonomia* (*economy*) and the *oikos* (the house). In this case, following the Greek tradition, especially Aristotle, he argues that economy is essentially related to the domestic organization of a restricted family life, portrayed as a conglomeration of ‘complex’ relations: i.e., as that which unites the husband to his wife, the father to his children and the master to his slaves.<sup>150</sup> In Agamben’s own words, economy ‘implies decisions and orders that cope with problems that are each time specific and concern the functional order (*taxis*) of the different parts of the *oikos*’.<sup>151</sup>

This passage highlights the fact that Agamben sees economy as an activity. It concerns the managerial practice of the daily happenings in the household. Hence, Agamben carefully notes in the above excerpt that *oikonomia* deals ‘with problems that are each time specific’. This latter point, in my opinion, seems to suggest the idea that economy consists in taking care of the unexpected and unplanned events that break into a home. To put it differently, economy deals also with situations that exceed the normal organization of a household, that is, with whatever is specific and happens at a particular time and must be dealt with. We could infer from this point that economy, so far as Agamben is concerned, includes in the management of the *oikos* what does not originally belong to the *oikos*. *Oikonomia* can be said to be a kind of frontier that creates an indetermination between the inside and the outside of the *oikos*. If this reading is correct, we can say that the notion of economy in Agamben shares some similarities with his notion of the exception. In both *Homo Sacer* and *State of Exception*, Agamben characterises the exception as the borderline or as that which stands between the juridical and the non-juridical. It is in fact the extrajudicial, but,

<sup>148</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 17. See also Capener, ‘Being and Acting’, 951.

<sup>149</sup> Agamben, *What is An Apparatus?* 4; *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 17.

<sup>150</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 17.

<sup>151</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 17–18.

at the same time, it maintains a relationship with the juridical.<sup>152</sup> The exception, for him, is a political situation or space whereby that which does not fall directly into the normal organization of the society is taken into politics. More precisely, the exception, in his view, is a space where life is taken and put into a direct relation with sovereign power.<sup>153</sup> In the exception, the sovereign deals with life, we could say, just as the *oikonomos* (the administrator) of a household deals with events that break into his house. Just as economy allows the *oikonomos* to bring problems that are ‘each time specific’ into the ‘functional order’ of the household, so also the exception permits the sovereign to bring life into politics and act upon it.

The connection between economy and exception in Agamben becomes more evident when one considers his interpretation of the prescriptions of the canon law of the sixth or seventh centuries with regard to the baptism given by schismatics. He writes as follows:

The origin of the evolution that leads the term *oikonomia* to assure the meaning of “exception” can be grasped in a letter that the Cappadocian theologian Basil wrote to Amphilochius. Asked about the question of the value of the baptism administered by schismatics, Basil answers that, contrary to the rule that would have wanted it to be invalid, it was initially accepted as valid “for the sake of the economy of the majority.”<sup>154</sup>

In this quote, Agamben clearly associates economy with the exception. He states that economy ‘assures the meaning of exception’. This is to say that economy acquires the meaning of, and can be understood as, the exception ‘defined as a decision that does not apply the law strictly, but makes use of the economy’.<sup>155</sup> Both economy and exception are related in the sense that they are concerned, *mutatis mutandis*, with taking charge of what initially is outside the normal order of things.<sup>156</sup> From this perspective, we can already understand why the notion of exception plays a very significant role in Agamben’s account of biopolitics.

However, Agamben himself is not always coherent about the relationship between economy, exception and biopolitics. In *Homo Sacer* and *State of Exception*, he emphasizes and conflates biopolitics and sovereignty through the paradigm of the exception. In *The Kingdom and the Glory*, on the contrary, he reads biopolitics

<sup>152</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 17–18 and 38; *State of Exception*, 1.

<sup>153</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 28.

<sup>154</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 50.

<sup>155</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 49.

<sup>156</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 50.

within the framework of economy. Nonetheless, in doing so, he also makes some connections with the exception, as we have shown above. Despite this discrepancy, however, one point seems clear in Agamben: Both biopolitics, understood from the angle of the government of life, and the state of exception are captured in the notion of the economy.<sup>157</sup> He expresses this point as follows: '[T]he paradigm of government and of the state of exception coincide in the idea of an *oikonomia*'.<sup>158</sup> In a recent online interview, Agamben argues that it is within the state of exception that life, the subject matter of politics, is administered.<sup>159</sup> Similarly, in the *State of Exception*, he posits that human life is trapped by the grip of law and is subjected to the juridical order in the exception. He goes so far as to affirm that the exception has become the most dominant paradigm of politics.<sup>160</sup> It is worth mentioning here, as the next section shows, that politics is from its origin essentially biopolitics for Agamben.<sup>161</sup> In this way, Agamben emphasises the fact that, for him, biopolitics, understood from the perspective of *oikonomia*, consists in controlling and regulating all the aspects of life as it unfolds in the *oikos*, 'adapting at each turn to the nature of the concrete situation against which it has to measure itself'.<sup>162</sup>

Though Agamben himself does not mention it, his account of economy contrasts with the general understanding of economy in our time. In common parlance, when we talk about economy, the first idea that comes to mind is that of money or finances. In this case, economy is associated with economics, understood as the 'social science that seeks to analyse and describe the production, distribution and consumption of wealth'.<sup>163</sup> However, Agamben's narrative shows that economy is not primarily to 'be confused with modern economics', which is connected to money and production.<sup>164</sup> Rather, it concerns first and foremost the private governing, controlling, organization or managing of the day-to-day events of the household. Nonetheless, the understanding of economy as a managerial paradigm has serious implications for how biopolitics is to be conceived, in Agamben's opinion. For Agamben, biopolitics is

<sup>157</sup> See, for instance, Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xi, xii, 29, 37, 46 and 278–79.

<sup>158</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 50.

<sup>159</sup> Agamben, 'Agamben on Biopolitics'.

<sup>160</sup> Agamben, *State of Exception*, 2.

<sup>161</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 6; *State of Exception*, 2–3 and 86.

<sup>162</sup> See Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 19 and 50. In his article, Nicholas Heron puts forward a similar opinion. He states that 'through the mobilisation of the term *oikonomia*', Agamben emphasizes that *economy* refers to 'the effective management of the household'. See Heron, 'Dispositif/Apparatus', 60.

<sup>163</sup> Blaug, 'Economics', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, October 23, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/economics>, accessed on December 14, 2020. See also Karsenti, 'Agamben et le mystère du gouvernement', 355; Luigino, 'The Technology of Happiness', 23–25.

<sup>164</sup> Zartaloudis, 'Government/*Oikonomia*', 84. This opinion has also been documented by Karsenti, 'Agamben et le mystère du gouvernement', 355–57.

essentially about the government, the administration of life and human beings as they live in society.<sup>165</sup> Following Zartaloudis's remark, we could say that 'it is this *oikonomic* or managerial paradigm that leads, according to Agamben, to modern biopolitics and the current domination of economic and managerial logics over all aspects of social life'.<sup>166</sup> However, one might ask how economy is related to politics. As I demonstrate in section 3 below, at the beginning of *The Kingdom and the Glory*, Agamben restricts *oikonomia* to the administration of the household, the *oikos*. And later in the same work, he expands *oikonomia* into a model of biopolitics, and in *Homo Sacer*, he opposes the *oikos* to the *polis*, which he describes as the proper locus for politics. How, then, does economy move from the *oikos* to bear on the *polis* and so become a paradigm of politics? I return to this point when I discuss the political relevance and implications of economy in Agamben's account of biopolitics.<sup>167</sup>

### 2.3 Economy as a *Theologoumenon*: From the Economy of the Mystery to the Mystery of Economy

In this part, I reconstruct and evaluate the pertinence of Agamben's notion of economy in the Christian tradition. Along the way, I explain the rationale behind the emergence, the centrality, and the relevance of the term *economy* in theological doctrinal formulations—especially in Paul and the Church Fathers. This analysis pays particular attention to the tension between the Pauline syntagma, 'economy of the mystery', and its reversal into 'mystery of the economy' in or by the Church Fathers.<sup>168</sup>

After showing that *oikonomia* evokes an administrative and arrangement praxis, Agamben addresses its meaning in the Christian tradition. He opens his examination with a rebuttal of the opinion that Paul ascribes theological significance to the term *economy*. It refers to the fulfilment of God's plan of salvation revealed in history.<sup>169</sup> Through a painstaking analysis of the occurrences of the term *oikonomia* in Paul's texts, Agamben, on the contrary, argues that the term in question preserves and extends the semantic and managerial meaning it has in Ancient Greek tradition.<sup>170</sup> He states that *economy* in Paul designates, the fulfilment of a task of domestic

<sup>165</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xi.

<sup>166</sup> Zartaloudis, 'Government/*Oikonomia*', 84.

<sup>167</sup> See Chapter 1, Section 3.

<sup>168</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 50.

<sup>169</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 21.

<sup>170</sup> Agamben examines several key texts in the Pauline corpus. They include, for instance, I Corinthians 9:16-17, I Timothy 1:3-4, Colossians 1:24-25, Ephesians 1:9-10, Ephesians 3: 9 and I Corinthians 4:1. In his commentary, Primera also exactly defends the same idea that, in Paul, according to Agamben, the term *economy* still relates to its primitive and semantic significance. Primera states that 'here, as Agamben shows, *oikonomia* does not acquire a teleological or a political sense as it remains of the domain of the administration'. See Primera, *The Political Ontology of Giorgio Agamben*, 77.

administration; the task that God assigned to Paul, something that is assigned; it is, therefore, an activity and a task, not a “plan of salvation” that concerns the divine mind or will.<sup>171</sup>

Simply put, for Agamben, the term *economy* in Paul denotes three things—a task, an activity and a mission—which are functionally correlated by virtue of belonging to an administrative paradigm.<sup>172</sup> What Paul is entrusted with here is the mandate to spread God’s news of ‘the coming of the Messiah’<sup>173</sup> and the accomplishment of God’s hitherto hidden promises. According to Agamben, Paul received this charge because God had trust (*pistis*) in him.<sup>174</sup> In this sense, *oikonomia* means and applies to the overseeing, carrying on or taking care of one’s property. We can say that *oikonomia* does not imply ownership over things. Instead, it means managing and acting on behalf of the other—namely, God.

According to Agamben, Paul applies this managerial paradigm of economy to the Church—to *ekklesia*, which he conceives as ‘an economic, not political’ community.<sup>175</sup> That the Church is first and foremost an economic community means that it should apprehend itself fundamentally as steward and servant. Its function, like Paul’s, is to carry out and spread God’s message, to administer the mysteries of God. In Agamben’s opinion, this administrative paradigm justifies Paul’s use of terms that apply to the context of house management. These terms include concepts such as *doulos* (‘slave’), *diakonos* (‘servant’), and *oikonomos* (‘administrator’).<sup>176</sup> We can conclude that, for Agamben, *economy* in Paul strictly refers to its private and administrative connotation. It simply means the activity of managing the mystery entrusted to him by God; it is an ‘*oikonomia* of the mystery’.<sup>177</sup> However, Agamben carefully notes that this Pauline understanding of economy was later changed by the Church Fathers. They reversed the Pauline ‘*oikonomia* of the mystery to the mystery of economy’.<sup>178</sup>

<sup>171</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 22–23.

<sup>172</sup> See also Reumann, ‘*Oikonomia—Terms in Paul*’, 165.

<sup>173</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 22.

<sup>174</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 22.

<sup>175</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 24.

<sup>176</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 24. Agamben’s exposition, as examined above, expounds the mainstream position held by many exegetical and theological studies on the meaning of the Pauline *oikonomia*. While it is outside the scope of this work to consider these studies in detail, it is worthwhile noting that most of them concur that Paul’s usage of the term *oikonomia* is not a theologoumenon; it does not primarily carry any specific theological meaning. Rather, it is used as an administrative paradigm that brings it back to its Greek origins. For more details see, for example, Garland, *I Corinthians*, 426; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 420; Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 153–54; and Reumann, ‘*Oikonomia—Terms in Paul*’, 147–67.

<sup>177</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 23.

<sup>178</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 25–29 and 35.

With this reversal, Agamben argues, *economy* was turned into a technical term with theological significance. It now refers to the management of divine life and mysteries within the Trinity in relation to the world. Agamben maintains that the connection between *oikonomia* and Trinity, and therefore the technicization and theologisation of the term, was first established by Irenaeus, who opposed heresies such as Gnosticism. Irenaeus thus, Agamben argues, defended the doctrine of the Trinity—that is, the relation of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit—and the world. Through the theologisation of the term *economy*, theologians and Church Fathers after Irenaeus—especially Tertullian and Hippolytus—explain and reconcile both the unicity and the plurality found in God between being and action. Agamben explicitly expresses this point when he asserts that,

the preoccupation that had led the Fathers who first elaborated the doctrine of the *oikonomia* was, by all accounts, to avoid a fracture of monotheism that would have reintroduced a plurality of divine figures, and polytheism with them.<sup>179</sup>

This passage contains at least two important ideas. First, Agamben explains the rationale behind the Church Fathers' use of the term *economy* in their elaborations. According to him, the term was used as a strategic device to provide a coherent and cogent account of the essence of God. The idea was to prove rationally that God is one in substance but three both in action (or what Agamben calls 'praxis') and in the way God relates with the world and administers it.<sup>180</sup> The second idea is that, by articulating the being of God from the point of view of economy, the Fathers of the Church not only fought against polytheistic heresies in defence of trinitarian monotheism but also rescued God from division.<sup>181</sup> We can conclude that, according to Agamben, *economy* designates the delegation of an activity for Paul, and, for the Church Fathers that follow after Paul, it characterizes God's relation with himself

<sup>179</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 53. Agamben repeats the same idea in many other places. See, for instance, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 35–40 and 54–61.

<sup>180</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 42 and 54–58.

<sup>181</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 36. On this point, I fully agree with Primera who, in his book, *The Political Ontology of Agamben*, 78, argues that 'Agamben shows that early Christian theologians used the term "*oikonomia*" in order to solve the problem posed by the presence of the three divine figures by locating the real mystery not in the *being* of God but in its [*sic*] *praxis*, while at the same time avoiding polytheism. What is at stake in the Trinitarian paradigm is not only the articulation of the divine figures but also the conciliation of the rupture between the transcendent Trinitarian God and the history of salvation, that is, between the transcendent substance of a non-temporal transcendental God and His divine intervention on the earthly world through an immanent government'. See also Zartaloudis, *Giorgio Agamben*, 65.

and his soteriological plan for the world. Thus, *oikonomia* is the explanation of the mystery of the trinitarian life and how God *governs* the world.<sup>182</sup>

At the end of this section, it is worth recalling the starting point and gathering together what has been discovered. My aim was to clearly identify and elaborate on the various explicit or implicit meanings Agamben ascribes to the notion of economy in his works. I have identified three modes of terminological and conceptual significance in Agamben's account of economy: namely, administrative, rhetorical and theological. However, I have elaborated only on the first and third meanings, which have proven to be relevant to my study. First, drawing on its etymological framework, Agamben understands economy as the practice of administering and managing whatever arises daily in the context of a household. Second, I have shown that Agamben conceives economy as a *theologoumenon*, that is, as a theological category and activity meant to articulate and carry out a divine mandate and governance of the world. Agamben expands these acceptations of the notion of economy and posits it as one of the cradles of biopolitics, which, according to him, also concerns the administration of life and men. Hence, as is discussed in the following section, the notion of economy plays a significant role in Agamben's construal of biopolitics.

### 3. Biopolitics and Economy

In this section, I develop and analyse the relevance of economy in the context of Agamben's account of biopolitics. I explore three axes: namely, (i) the relation of economy and biopolitics in the West, (ii) the relation of economy and government, and (iii) the notion of happiness that emerges from these axes. My aim in this context is to map out the two accounts of happiness that Agamben puts forward, as indicated in the introduction to this chapter. First, there is *sovereign happiness*, which he criticizes; second, there is *ethico-ontological happiness*, which he defends.

#### 3.1. Biopolitics: The Management of Life

Agamben finds some insights in the notion of economy that elucidate the essence of biopolitics in the West. To put it differently, the notion in question enables him to unearth 'the 'roots' of the problem of modern government as form and as praxis.<sup>183</sup> This becomes clear through the analysis of passages in *The Kingdom and the Glory* and other works by Agamben. I concentrate my analysis on two points, which, in my opinion, play a significant role in Agamben's discourse. First, I consider how

<sup>182</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 54–55.

<sup>183</sup> Zartaloudis, 'Government/Oikonomia', 84.

economy explains the essence and practice of biopolitics. Second, I analyse the relation between economy and the state of exception, which Agamben describes as the fundamental paradigm of biopolitics.<sup>184</sup>

The notion of economy sheds light on Agamben's account of biopolitics. At the outset of *The Kingdom and the Glory*, Agamben clearly states that he sets out to examine why politics in the West has been transformed into the management of human life.<sup>185</sup> Shortly afterward, he continues thus:

We show instead how the apparatus of *oikonomia* may constitute a privileged laboratory for the observation of the working and articulation—both internal and external—of the governmental machine. For within this apparatus the elements—or the polarities—that articulate the machine appear, as it were, in their paradigmatic form.<sup>186</sup>

Taken in the context of their occurrence, these affirmations contain at least two important ideas. First, Agamben seems to suggest that there has been a change in the constitution and understanding of politics. According to him, previous analyses of political power have focused on issues such as 'popular sovereignty and the rule of law'.<sup>187</sup> In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben clearly states that the traditional approach to politics is focused on 'the problem of power, which is based on juridico-institutional models (the definition of sovereignty, the theory of the State)'.<sup>188</sup> However, politics, in his view, should be understood from its origin as biopolitics, that is, as essentially concerning the management of human life.<sup>189</sup> Second, to account for why and how politics is biopolitics, that is, is interested in life and human beings, Agamben uses the term *economy* (*oikonomia*).<sup>190</sup> A crucial element here is his treatment of economy as both an 'apparatus' and 'a privileged laboratory'. In other words, Agamben uses the notion of economy as an instrument, a tool with which to highlight the important features that constitute biopolitics. Not only does economy, in Agamben's opinion, unravel the foundations and constitute a crucial paradigm of biopolitics; it also allows him to genealogically trace and otherwise make intelligible the shifts that have occurred in the history of Western politics.

<sup>184</sup> See Agamben, *State of Exception*, 1.

<sup>185</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xi.

<sup>186</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xi.

<sup>187</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xi–xii.

<sup>188</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 5.

<sup>189</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xi.

<sup>190</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xi.

In this context, *The Kingdom and the Glory* stresses the fact that economy is one of the strategic keys needed to understand how political power operates. As noted briefly above, through his analysis of economy, Agamben demonstrates that biopolitics is about the administration and supervision of life in general. What Agamben precisely means is that the primary aim of biopolitics is to control, direct and give meaning to the life of the population. Accordingly, what is central in Agamben's account of biopolitics is the relation between political power and life. While in *Homo Sacer* he analyses this relationship from the perspective of sovereign power, in *The Kingdom and the Glory*, Agamben treats it from the angle of economy. And the life in question is bare life. Agamben depicts biopolitics as the administration and 'the production' of bare life, that is, of a form of life that is totally subjected to the domination and control of political power.<sup>191</sup> As Paul Patton explains, bare life for Agamben is 'life endowed with a particular status that is achieved by the subjection of an individual life to sovereign power'.<sup>192</sup> Agamben holds that political power captures life, administers it and acts on it in the exception.<sup>193</sup> This means that it is in the exception that, for Agamben, life is politicized and exposed to the political power.

It is from this perspective that Foucault, even before Agamben, as Patton suggests, conceived of biopolitics as a praxis that consists in the 'subjection of an individual life to sovereign power', as a 'biological existence that is, in addition, subjected to a particular form of inclusive exclusion from the political domain'.<sup>194</sup> This means that biopolitics is essentially defined and oriented towards enacting a particular form of life on the individuals. Biopolitics seeks to control and regulate how people should live in society. If this is accurate, it could be said that Agamben's thesis is not *per se* ground-breaking; he merely expands an insight that was already present in Foucault. The latter had already defined biopolitics as the exercise of political power over the population and as a power through which life is captured and administered. However, Agamben departs fundamentally from Foucault in locating the genesis of biopolitics. While Foucault situates the rise of biopolitics from the seventeenth century onwards,<sup>195</sup> Agamben situates biopolitics in Antiquity. This difference is very substantial. As Ojakangas notes, by tracing biopolitics to Antiquity, Agamben's approach rewrites the entire history of Western biopolitics.<sup>196</sup> He indicates that biopolitics is not peculiar to modernity. Rather,

<sup>191</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 6, 88 and 90.

<sup>192</sup> Patton, 'Agamben and Foucault', 210–11.

<sup>193</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 67.

<sup>194</sup> Patton, 'Agamben and Foucault', 211.

<sup>195</sup> See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* I, 136.

<sup>196</sup> Ojakangas, *On the Greek Origins of Biopolitics*, 17.

biopolitics is ‘as old a phenomenon as Western politics and political thought itself’. It goes back to ancient Greek tradition.<sup>197</sup>

Thus, to account for the ancient roots of biopolitics, Agamben investigates two ancient sources. First, he examines the distinction Aristotle establishes between *zōē* and *bios*. Agamben specifies that, while *zōē* refers to natural life understood as biological and ‘common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods)’, *bios* designates political life.<sup>198</sup> In Agamben’s view, this Aristotelian partition of life indicates the inclusion of life, taken in the sense of *zōē*, into politics.<sup>199</sup> And as Mills remarks, this inclusion ‘allows for the production of the biological subject—that is, bare life’.<sup>200</sup> While referring to Aristotle, Agamben’s contention is that the integration and capture of life into the mechanisms of politics is not an invention of modernity. Rather, biopolitics is a structure that defines Western politics from its origin. In his words, ‘the inclusion of bare life in the political realm constitutes the original—if concealed—nucleus of sovereign power’.<sup>201</sup> For Agamben, political power always defines itself as a relation to life, which it seeks to manipulate and dominate in all its aspects. This relation, according to him, is what founds politics and the organisation of the city.<sup>202</sup>

The second source which Agamben examines to substantiate his thesis about the ancient roots of biopolitics is the Ancient Roman law figure of *homo sacer*. Agamben even presents this figure as the ‘protagonist’ of his book.<sup>203</sup> In Ancient Roman jurisdiction, Agamben states, *homo sacer* is a man ‘who may be killed and yet not sacrificed’.<sup>204</sup> What is at stake in Agamben’s analysis of the *homo sacer* is the fact that the *homo sacer* represents a life that is caught up into a direct relation with law and sovereign power in a form of an ‘exclusive inclusion’.<sup>205</sup> This means that life in the figure of *homo sacer* is excluded from the realm of law, but, paradoxically, continues to maintain a relation with law through that very exclusion.<sup>206</sup> Agamben expresses this idea when he writes that *homo sacer* is ‘an obscure figure of archaic Roman law, in which human life is included in the juridical order solely in the form of its exclusion (that is, of its capacity to be killed)’.<sup>207</sup> Agamben identifies this inclusion of life into

<sup>197</sup> Ojakangas, *On the Greek Origins of Biopolitics*, 17.

<sup>198</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1.

<sup>199</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 4–5.

<sup>200</sup> Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, 61.

<sup>201</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 6 and 88.

<sup>202</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 7.

<sup>203</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 8.

<sup>204</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 8.

<sup>205</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 22.

<sup>206</sup> See also Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, 62–64.

<sup>207</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 8.

politics by way of its exclusion as a relation of exception. He writes that, ‘we shall give the name relation of exception to the extreme form of relation by which something is included solely through its exclusion’.<sup>208</sup> The relation (or the state) of exception, Agamben avers, refers to the political space and ‘structure in which law encompasses living beings by means of its own suspension’.<sup>209</sup> However, it does not mean that the exception is totally unrelated to the law. Rather, it means that what is excluded from the rule of law continues to be in relation with law through its exclusion. The law relates to the excluded by keeping it outside the law.<sup>210</sup> As does Agamben’s investigation into the Aristotelian definition of life, the figure of *homo sacer* allows Agamben to show how political power, from its origin, deals with life and produces bare life, that is, a life that is wholly taken under the grasp of power, a life that is governed and ultimately devoid of any legal value.

Upon establishing the ancient root of biopolitics, as Lemke has observed, Agamben argues that ‘modernity is not marked by a break with the historical tradition, but it only generalises and radicalises what was always present in the beginning of politics’.<sup>211</sup> To put this differently, for Agamben, neither the entry of life into politics nor the entry of political interest into life is a typically modern phenomenon. On the contrary, for him, modern biopolitics merely brings forth what has long secretly characterized Western politics or has come forth only in specific cases, such as in the Nazi concentration camps. For him, therefore, modern biopolitics makes explicit the relationship between power and life, ‘thereby reaffirming the bond (derived from a tenacious correspondence between the modern and the archaic which one encounters in the most diverse spheres) between modern power and the most immemorial of the *arcana imperii*’.<sup>212</sup> A conclusion that we can draw from Agamben’s contention is that politics, understood from the perspective of biopolitics, is concerned with what is situated at the margins of the society.<sup>213</sup> It is in this sense that we may understand why he spends time studying figures that are excluded from society, such as ‘refugees’ and ‘stateless persons’.<sup>214</sup> Moreover, because biopolitics, in Agamben’s view, is about the relation between sovereign power and life or about the production of bare life in society, it implies that all human beings in society are potentially reducible to bare

<sup>208</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 19.

<sup>209</sup> Agamben, *State of Exception*, 3.

<sup>210</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 22–25. For further considerations on the exception within Agamben’s work, see Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, 62–63.

<sup>211</sup> Lemke, ‘A Zone of Indistinction’, 6.

<sup>212</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 6.

<sup>213</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 9. He makes it clear that, with biopolitics, ‘the realm of bare life—which is originally situated at the margins of the political—gradually begins to coincide with the political realm’.

<sup>214</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 126–35. For further discussion, see also Murray, *Agamben*, 67–68.

life. This is so because their lives enter the realm of sovereign power, which can act on the lives of individuals even to the point of deciding whether they live or die.

Society, that is, the space for politics, potentially becomes a sort of camp in which the sovereign power manufactures bare life. In this regard, Agamben stresses that ‘the sovereign is the one with respect to whom all men are potentially *homines sacri*’.<sup>215</sup> All human life that is caught up into biopolitics may be terminated with impunity, spoliated of its political significance and reduced to the simple fact of living, that is, *zōē*.<sup>216</sup> Since biopolitics for Agamben is written under the signature of sovereign power, what is the relation between this power and his elaborations on economy? In other words, what does Agamben’s discussion of economy add to his account of biopolitics? The discourse on economy, which he deploys in *The Kingdom and the Glory*, shows that biopolitics is not only about domination but also about the government or administration of life. Through the notion of economy, Agamben argues that biopolitics is made up of two correlated aspects: namely, sovereign power and government. And this government of life obeys the administrative logic that defines economy. I expand on this point in sections 4 and 5, below.

The perspicacity of Agamben’s argument here cannot be denied. However, at this juncture, at least one critical remark can be formulated against his account of biopolitics. It concerns his description of economy and his presentation of it as a paradigm of biopolitics. In *Homo Sacer* and *The Kingdom and the Glory*, Agamben makes a sharp distinction between the *oikos* (the household) and the *polis* (the city), thereby following ancient Greek tradition, especially Aristotle.<sup>217</sup> Based on this difference, he argues in *The Kingdom and the Glory* that economy (*oikonomia*) pertains to the private domain of the household, considered in opposition to the city, which was regarded as the locus of politics.<sup>218</sup> While the *oikos* was only about procreation and the subsistence of family life as a pure biological substance, the *polis* was considered the place of civilization and socialization wherein people lived in a certain way for the purpose of happiness.<sup>219</sup> However, later in *The Kingdom and the Glory*, Agamben identifies economy with biopolitics; in fact, economy becomes, as we have seen, an important paradigm of political power in the West. He argues that political ‘power in the West has assumed the form of an *oikonomia*, that is, a government of men’.<sup>220</sup> Furthermore, he writes that ‘modern biopolitics up to the current triumph of economy and

<sup>215</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 38, 84 and 139–40.

<sup>216</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 159.

<sup>217</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1–4; *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 17–18.

<sup>218</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 17.

<sup>219</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 2.

<sup>220</sup> See Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xi; 89–91.

government over every other aspect of social life derive from' economic theology: the way God relates to the created world.<sup>221</sup> From this moment, it could be said that the *oikos* is integrated into the *polis* and equally informs the organisation of the later.

If this observation is plausible, it could be argued that there is an apparent inconsistency and incoherence in Agamben's conception of biopolitics. There is an unresolved tension in his account of biopolitics between, on the one hand, the exclusion of the *oikos* from the *polis* and, on the other hand, the inclusion of the *oikos* in the *polis*. This tension extends equally to the relation between economy and politics, given that *oikonomia* was circumscribed to the *oikos* and politics was proper to the city.<sup>222</sup> The aforesaid tension comes to the fore in both *Homo Sacer* and *The Kingdom and the Glory*. In *Homo Sacer*, as noted above, Agamben draws attention to the difference between the *oikos* and the *polis* based on the Greeks.<sup>223</sup> And in *The Kingdom and the Glory*, concentrating on Christian sources, he demarcates political theology from economic theology and presents them as two 'antinomical but functionally related' paradigms that have inspired our conception of both political philosophy and biopolitics. He argues that 'political philosophy and the modern theory of sovereignty' draw on political theology, while 'modern biopolitics up to the current triumph of economy and government' over human life derive from economic theology.<sup>224</sup> What is the difference between these paradigms—political theology and economic theology—and how do they relate to each other? This question is dealt with in detail in section 4 below. Suffice it to say at this juncture that, from *Homo Sacer* to *The Kingdom and the Glory*, Agamben appears to change his view and emphasis on the essence of biopolitics. In *Homo Sacer*, he conflates it with sovereign power. Therein, he characterizes biopolitics as 'an exercise of sovereign power to decide on bare life'.<sup>225</sup> In *The Kingdom and the Glory*, however, he reads biopolitics from the perspective of economy.<sup>226</sup>

In *Stasis*, Agamben tries to analyse and solve this tension—which is at the heart of his account of biopolitics—between his depiction of the *oikos* and the *polis* and between *politics* and *economy*. He provides a possible explanation of how economy becomes a paradigm of biopolitics. He elaborates on this tension while commenting on Nicole

<sup>221</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 1.

<sup>222</sup> Agamben often works by following this paradoxical dialectic. For instance, he builds his *Homo Sacer* around this paradigm, especially when he discusses the status of the *homo sacer* in relation to law (politics) and the logic of sovereignty. See *Homo Sacer*, 6–12, 15–29 and 71–86.

<sup>223</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1–6.

<sup>224</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 1.

<sup>225</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 142.

<sup>226</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 1. For further considerations on Agamben's change of perspective, see Mills, *Biopolitics*, 38–45.

Loraux's work, *La Cité divisée*, and he examines the origin of civil war (*stasis*) in Ancient Greek society.<sup>227</sup> In substance, Agamben's argument is that *stasis* originates within the context of the family house (*oikos*). In other words, Agamben poses the household as the birthplace of civil war.<sup>228</sup> *Stasis*, he argues, is a conflict within a family.<sup>229</sup> But, since the *oikos* is an integral part of the *polis*, Agamben goes on to say that the civil war that begins in the family also affects the *polis* and its organization, in that whatever occurs in the *oikos* directly or indirectly bears on the city. Agamben clearly states that 'an essential ambivalence inheres in the *oikos* (and in the *stasis* that is connatural to it), in that it is simultaneously what causes the destruction of the city and the paradigm of its reunification'.<sup>230</sup> A fundamental point Agamben makes here is that *stasis* stands between the *oikos* and the *polis*.<sup>231</sup> Emerging from within the family, civil war extends its effects to the city of which the household is a part. Thus, Agamben submits that civil war marks and radicalizes the indistinction or the inseparability between the *oikos* and the *polis*. *Stasis*, therefore, for Agamben, shows that both the household and the city co-penetrate each other to the point that it is difficult to differentiate them.<sup>232</sup>

Standing thus between the *oikos* and the *polis*, *stasis*, from Agamben's perspective, is the point at which the apolitical becomes political and the political is depoliticized. He emphasizes this point when he asserts that civil war, 'constitutes a zone of indifference between the unpolitical space of the family and the political space of the city. In transgressing this threshold, the *oikos* is politicised; conversely, the *polis* is "economised," that is, it is brought to an *oikos*.'<sup>233</sup> Consequently, we can say that, for Agamben, both natural life (which was originally confined to the household) and political life indistinctively become objects of biopolitics, that is, of sovereign power. From this perspective, we can argue that the opposition between the *oikos* and the *polis* collapses and gives way to a new set of ambivalent and co-penetrating relations between the household and the city. Neither diametrically excludes the other.

If this reading is correct, it implies that economy, which is the art of administrating the *oikos*, can also apply to the *polis*, and that politics, which is the art of organizing the city, can equally apply to the house. We can assert that, in Agamben, *oikonomia* is a dimension of politics that constitutes it as bio-politics, that is, as 'an administration

<sup>227</sup> Agamben, *Stasis*, 5–24.

<sup>228</sup> Agamben, *Stasis*, 9.

<sup>229</sup> Agamben, *Stasis*, 7–8 and 13.

<sup>230</sup> Agamben, *Stasis*, 13.

<sup>231</sup> Agamben, *Stasis*, 14–15.

<sup>232</sup> Agamben, *Stasis*, 15.

<sup>233</sup> Agamben, *Stasis*, 16.

of individuals, things, and wealth ordered according to the model of the family'.<sup>234</sup> In this case, the *oikos* and *oikonomia*, in Agamben's view, can be seen as elements of a theoretical framework that illuminate the city and politics. As Agamben says, the analysis of *stasis* shows that politics is 'economised' and economy is 'politicised'.<sup>235</sup> In other words, the *polis* becomes a large *oikos* and, inversely, the *oikos* becomes a *polis* in miniature. Logically, therefore, *oikonomia* may apply to politics and vice versa. Agamben testifies to this interpenetrability in *The Kingdom and the Glory*. He says that, since the 'Hellenistic age and then more explicitly in the Imperial age, the political and economic vocabularies enter a relation of mutual contamination, which tends to render the Aristotelian opposition between *oikos* and *polis* obsolete'.<sup>236</sup> So, if there is 'a relation of mutual contamination' between economy and politics, it means that, for Agamben, we cannot strictly separate economy and politics. Both paradigms are crucial to his understanding of biopolitics. The latter can be seen as a site of indeterminate tensions between two poles that interpenetrate each other each time. Agamben himself reaches this conclusion in his analysis of the nature and origin of *stasis*.<sup>237</sup> I will emphasise this point further in sections 4 and 5. At this juncture, however, I wish to elaborate on the implication of Agamben's account of economy by focusing on what it tells us about his understanding of government.

### 3.2 Government as Providence

In the previous sub-section, I discussed the relevance of Agamben's notion of 'economy' to his account of biopolitics. I argued that Agamben considers *oikonomia* to be an important paradigm of biopolitics. Through *oikonomia*, he describes biopolitics as the administration of life. Along the same line, he finds insights, through his discourse on economy, that help him elaborate his views about government. Concentrating on Christian sources, Agamben conceives government from the perspective of and in a relation of identity with providence.<sup>238</sup> To better understand this connection, it will be helpful first to get a sense for his gloss of divine providence. Agamben argues that providence is defined as the way God relates to and governs the world through a constellation of secondary causes (agents).<sup>239</sup> This means that, through providence, God is always at work in the world. But God works via intermediaries who, in this case, are angels. This is why Agamben conceives providence as a structure that has two distinct, but related poles. On the one hand,

<sup>234</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 110.

<sup>235</sup> Agamben, *Stasis*, 16.

<sup>236</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 24.

<sup>237</sup> See Agamben, *Stasis*, 23.

<sup>238</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 111–12. Lemm has held a similar opinion. See Lemm, 'Michel Foucault', 57.

<sup>239</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 111.

there is God, who coordinates movements and the world; on the other hand, there are angels, who execute and apply God's orders regarding the world.<sup>240</sup> To account for the divine providential governance of the world, Agamben bases his argument on the distinction medieval Christian authors established between general providence (*providentia generalis*) and special providence (*providentia specialis*).<sup>241</sup>

The former, according to Agamben, concerns the way God 'provides for the world only by means of general or universal principles'.<sup>242</sup> Note that Agamben himself does not explain what these 'universal principles' are that define *providentia generalis*. As far as I can understand, they denote God's universal rule over the entire world, as Agamben later writes that what is at issue in the notion of '*providentia generalis*' is 'the possibility of a divine government of the world'.<sup>243</sup> From this perspective, *general providence* refers to the way in which God, 'not in the sense of a substance, but in that of an activity', orders the world in the sense of '*arranging*' it. In this sense, *general providence* implies an administration (*oikonomia*).<sup>244</sup> Special providence, on the other hand, applies to the delegation God entrusts to angels, understood as secondary causes who freely execute divine orders. Hence, this providence is called *executio*.<sup>245</sup> Agamben rightly specifies that these two paradigms are not opposed to, and do not exclude, each other. On the contrary, they constitute God's providential way of relating to the world.<sup>246</sup> They are, in fact, the manner in which God governs the world. God's government of the world is channelled through angels, who execute and implement divine orders for the world. This is precisely how to understand Agamben's statement that 'the second level presents itself as an execution (*executio*) of what has been arranged and ordered on the first (*ordinatio*)'.<sup>247</sup>

Agamben sees in this providential paradigm both a precursor to and the paradigm of our form of government. He excavates the roots of the constitution of political power and locates it in the Christian tradition. He thinks that the same double structure that defines the divine administration of the world also characterizes the political structure of our society. 'The government', he writes, 'is possible only if the Kingdom and the Government are correlated in a bipolar machine: the government is precisely what results from the coordination and the articulation of special and

<sup>240</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 114.

<sup>241</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 113.

<sup>242</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 113.

<sup>243</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 114.

<sup>244</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 89.

<sup>245</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 134–35.

<sup>246</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 129–32.

<sup>247</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 141.

general providence'.<sup>248</sup> In other words, there is a double structure at work in modern governments which cuts across the entire political system of the West. It is articulated in the division and nexus between power understood as that which orders for action (*auctoritas*) and power understood as that which executes (*potestas*).<sup>249</sup> According to Agamben, this dual characteristic is epitomized by the traditional philosophical aphorism that 'the king reigns, but does not govern',<sup>250</sup> which introduces an intertwined division of 'kingdom and government'<sup>251</sup> and 'legislative power and the executive power'.<sup>252</sup> The former, Agamben claims, establishes universal laws and principles that are carried out by the executive branch. This analysis shows us that, according to Agamben, the forms of government in our world today have their roots in a Christian theological tradition dating back to the Middle Ages.<sup>253</sup> In a certain way, it shows the implicit influence of Christian thought on modern thinking.<sup>254</sup>

Agamben radicalizes this thesis when he analyses the function of glory in politics. He does this from the perspective of the Christian theological doctrine of angelology—the study of the nature and function of the hierarchy of angels. The hierarchy of angels does not mean subordination of angels to God. Rather, it designates a principle of activity or administration through which angels participate in God's providential ruling of the world.<sup>255</sup> As a matter of fact, angels have two roles: to serve and contemplate God. As servants, they function as mediators between God and the world (specifically humans). As contemplators, they continuously stand in worship of God's glory.<sup>256</sup> As applied to politics, Agamben argues that this angelology has bequeathed and informed the democratic understanding of political power as constituted by two arms or a double structure.<sup>257</sup> On the one hand, there is sovereign power or the legislative power; on the other hand, there is the executive or governmental power. These two arms of power are interwoven and complement each other in the exercise of power. The legislative power issues rules or principles for the organization of the state, while the executive power puts them into practice. I will elaborate further on the complementarity of these paradigms below (see section 4). Agamben clearly expresses this point as follows:

<sup>248</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 114.

<sup>249</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xi, 103 and 139; *State of Exception*, 78.

<sup>250</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 71–72.

<sup>251</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xi, 78–79.

<sup>252</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 274–75.

<sup>253</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 142–43.

<sup>254</sup> Hence, Carl Schmitt, for instance, has postulated that modern thought is nothing else than the secularization of Christian thought. See Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 36.

<sup>255</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 153–54.

<sup>256</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 148–49.

<sup>257</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 167.

At each turn, it [political power] wears the regal clothes of providence, which legislates in a transcendent and universal way, but lets the creatures it looks after be free, and the sinister and ministerial clothes of fate, which carries out in detail the providential dictates and confines the reluctant individuals within the implacable connection between the immanent causes and between the effects that their very nature has contributed to determining. The providential-economical paradigm is, in this sense, the paradigm of democratic power.<sup>258</sup>

That economic theology and angelology are foundations for modern democracy seems to suggest two things. First, following the Christian tradition, which Agamben uses as one of the main sources of his thinking, Agamben holds that from a Christian perspective, history is conceived as the administration of the interim time in the expectation of its final fulfilment in the end time. Against this background, politics, for Agamben, could thus be defined as the management of what happens in the present, in the exception, here and now—as has already been pointed out.<sup>259</sup> In his words, ‘history is an administrative and governmental problem’ that bears the marks of economic theology.<sup>260</sup> We have already seen that administration or economy means taking care of *ad hoc* occurrences in the household in particular and in society at large. Second, political power is enacted through substitutes and subordinates. In this sense, every form of government is vicarious in essence and operates via the delegation and deputization of powers.<sup>261</sup> Agamben’s thesis that modern political power derives from God’s providence (his being and action) in the world may suggest or imply two crucial ideas about how political power should be conceived and how life in society may be organised in our time.

First, the government of the world by political power should be characterised by both the equality of and respect for individual singularities in the society. Like God’s *providentia generalis*, the role of political power would thus consist in setting up general principles that the population will apply individually and collectively. Second, as God is one in being and multiple in acting, so also should human beings—who are ‘created in the image of God’<sup>262</sup> and who form a political community—live in unity despite their differences. They all participate in the government of the world, and everyone has a particular role to play in the administration of the world. Thus, as Losoncz and Takacs argue, political life should be conceived as the activity of citizens

<sup>258</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 142.

<sup>259</sup> See Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 3, 44 and 148–49.

<sup>260</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 3.

<sup>261</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 141.

<sup>262</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 3.

who are 'equal in the public sphere'.<sup>263</sup> This is to say that a political community must be characterised by equality of both rights and duties. No form of life and no individual should be excluded from the political space.

However, as discussed above, Agamben's account of biopolitics has an internal deficiency. It concerns the purpose of his investigation. He says that his study has a double objective: to provide an explanation of both the process and the reasons why political power, at least in the West, has taken the form of biopolitics—the management of humans.<sup>264</sup> Agamben asks the same question at the beginning of *Homo Sacer*; that is, he wants to consider why life is crucial to politics. Specifically, he writes that 'we must instead ask why Western politics first constitutes itself through an exclusion (which is simultaneously an inclusion) of bare life'.<sup>265</sup> There is no doubt that, through his genealogy of political power, Agamben has accomplished one important thing: He has shed light on the double structure of biopolitics. He has shown that biopolitics is simultaneously sovereignty and government. Besides this, Agamben has outlined how biopolitics operates from its inception: As I discussed in Section 3.1 above, biopolitics is, from its beginning, the activity of political power over life. However, it seems to me that, in both *Homo Sacer* and *The Kingdom and the Glory*, Agamben inadequately addresses the second aspect of his inquiry. In other words, he does not convincingly explain why political power is biopolitics from the beginning, that is, why biopolitics is interested in integrating human life into its mechanisms, thereby administering life. Thus, the question of why human life is crucial to biopolitics remains to be investigated.

In a book chapter entitled 'An Equivocal Concept: Biopolitics', Paolo Virno provides an interesting account of biopolitics, that is, of the relation between political power and life. Virno's analysis is relevant to our discussion because he explains, more explicitly than Agamben does, why human life is central to biopolitics. In so doing, Virno brings forth more clearly what is implicit in Agamben's account. To a great extent, Virno also helps us better articulate and understand why and how economy is an important and integral part of biopolitics. According to Virno, biopolitics integrates life into its calculations because it sees life as an exploitable commodity. He utilizes the notion of '*labor-power*' to account for biopolitics.<sup>266</sup> He argues that, for biopolitics, human life is a 'faculty, labor-power', that can be exploited.<sup>267</sup> He writes as follows: '[W]hy is life, as such, managed and controlled?

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<sup>263</sup> See Losoncz and Takacs, 'Biopolitics', 4.

<sup>264</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xi.

<sup>265</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 7.

<sup>266</sup> Virno, 'An Equivocal Concept: Biopolitics', 269.

<sup>267</sup> Virno, 'An Equivocal Concept: Biopolitics', 272.

The answer is absolutely clear: because it acts as the substratum of a mere faculty, labor-power, which has taken on the consistency of a commodity'.<sup>268</sup>

According to Virno, labor-power designates the general (be it linguistic, physical, mental, psychological or intellectual) potentiality to produce. This potentiality, Virno argues, takes on an economic and political value because it can be exploited, exchanged and put in practice at any time.<sup>269</sup> This is why he contends that capitalists, for instance, are interested in the bodies and lives of workers. Life represents what embodies the capacity or power to produce and is therefore regarded as an exploitable commodity. Virno submits that politics governs life because, 'this life, this body, are what contains the faculty, the potential, the *dynamis*. The living body becomes an object to be governed not for its intrinsic value, but because it is the substratum of what really matters: labor-power'.<sup>270</sup> From this contention, we can extrapolate that life is captured, governed (or managed) and controlled by sovereign power, and that it is a decisive object of politics because life acts as and is regarded as the *substratum* of productivity, to which legal norms must apply. As a matter of fact, life in general is used as a means to an end. The intellectual, physical and psychological capacities of living beings stand as important assets that can be used for multifaceted production.

I should mention that the idea that life is seen as a commodity or labor-power is not *per se* new.<sup>271</sup> It already appears in Aristotle's *Politics*, especially where Aristotle discusses the essence and function of slaves in the *oikos*, which for him is made up of two categories of people: slaves and free people. Free people include the husband (the master of the family), the wife and the children.<sup>272</sup> The point that is relevant to our analysis is Aristotle's definition of a slave. He defines a slave as one whose existence (body and life) depends completely on the master's. Aristotle goes even further to characterize the slave as a property (or commodity) that belongs wholly to the master of the household (*oikonomos*). He compares the slave to an instrument the master uses for action and for achieving the good life by securing what is necessary for the livelihood of the family.<sup>273</sup> From this perspective, we can say the body and life of the slave are considered as a potential power for labour or action in the same sense that Virno considers life in relation to politics. For this reason, the master must manage and control the life of the slave so it may be used for the good of the household. If, as we have already seen with Agamben, the *oikos* can be 'politicised' and the *polis* can

<sup>268</sup> Virno, 'An Equivocal Concept: Biopolitics', 272.

<sup>269</sup> Virno, 'An Equivocal Concept: Biopolitics', 269–70.

<sup>270</sup> Virno, 'An Equivocal Concept: Biopolitics', 271.

<sup>271</sup> Virno himself draws this idea from Marx. See Virno, 'An Equivocal Concept: Biopolitics', 269–70.

<sup>272</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, I.1.1253b1–10.

<sup>273</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, I.1.1253b25–1254a1–15.

be 'economized',<sup>274</sup> one may conclude that the management of the family may also inform the administration of the city to a great extent. Just as the master of a house controls the bodies and lives of the people under him, especially those of the slaves, so does a sovereign power exercise control over its citizens and have rights of life and death over them. It is from this perspective that biopolitics can be better understood as the exercise of power over human life. The point here is that life and men are essential objects of politics because they are labor-powers; they are exploitable and can be used for diverse purposes relevant to the political power.

In *The Use of Bodies*, Agamben comments extensively on and interprets Aristotle's text, which we have briefly discussed, in the context of his elaboration on the theory of use.<sup>275</sup> Agamben rightly indicates that Aristotle defines the slave as one who lives for another person: the master. He also acknowledges that Aristotle treats the slave as both the property of the master and as a tool for use by the master. He even affirms that, for a Greek, the slave was considered as 'machinery or a fixed capital'.<sup>276</sup> However, it is even more striking that Agamben does not connect this part of *The Use of Bodies* to *Homo Sacer* and *The Kingdom and the Glory*. He does not seem to recognize the root of biopolitics in Aristotle's theory of the master-slave, that is, why life and people are integrated into the mechanisms of politics. As we know from Virno's analysis, the crucial point is that politics is biopolitics from its inception, as sovereign power sees life and bodies as 'fixed capital'<sup>277</sup> or equipment for use.<sup>278</sup> For this reason, the sovereign must act on life, control it and administer it accordingly. If life, as Agamben says at the beginning of *Homo Sacer*, is divided for Aristotle into *bios* and *zōē*, and if it is included in the mechanisms and calculations of political power, this is because life is seen as a commodity that must be governed for the sake of living well in society.<sup>279</sup>

### 3.3 The Happy Life between Biopolitics and Economy

Agamben builds his idea of the happy life in opposition to the tradition that defines happiness as a 'measurable ideal, an end to which you need to aspire'.<sup>280</sup> For him, rather than being a struggle to fulfil a certain goal, real happiness consists in a life of self-contentment and self-sufficiency, a life that transcends any hold from the

<sup>274</sup> Agamben, *Stasis*, 22.

<sup>275</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 3–23.

<sup>276</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 11.

<sup>277</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 11.

<sup>278</sup> Virno, 'An Equivocal Concept: Biopolitics', 272.

<sup>279</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 2; *The Use of Bodies*, 196 and 199–200.

<sup>280</sup> Marijsse, 'Agamben's Happy Life', 140.

sovereign.<sup>281</sup> We recall that two accounts of happiness can be found in Agamben's philosophy. The first account is the one he criticizes, which I call biopolitical happiness. The second is his own idea of happiness, which I have characterized as ethico-ontological. As I have already indicated in the introduction to this chapter, biopolitical happiness emphasises the subjection of life to the sovereign management of society: The happy life is the life over which the sovereign has total control. On the contrary, Agamben's notion of ethico-ontological happiness emphasises a form of life that escapes the reach of the sovereign, that suffices to itself and that seeks to realise its potentiality. In this section, I focus only on biopolitical happiness, as this chapter deals primarily with Agamben's account of biopolitics, which stresses the relation of political power and life. I wish to examine how the question of happiness is relevant to his description of biopolitics and economy. The ethico-ontological account of happiness is discussed in Chapter Two in relation to his ethical project.

The analysis of Agamben's idea of biopolitical happiness must begin by determining how Agamben conceives of the relation between politics and life. This is important because his conception of happiness is a consequence of what he thinks about how politics deals with or should deal with life. To examine this relation, Agamben has put forward concepts such as 'bare life', '*homo sacer*' and 'form-of-life'. Consider also 'the happy life' with its cognates: namely, 'the good life' and 'living well'.<sup>282</sup> In the wake of Mills, we can say that these notions could be considered among the most important contributions Agamben has made to the debate on biopolitics.<sup>283</sup> As will be seen, on the basis of the notions like the happy life and form-of-life, Agamben advocates for a 'different economy of bodies' which implies a new politics and a new relation to life.<sup>284</sup> And as is examined in what follows, through the notion of 'bare life', Agamben elucidates how, according to him, biopolitics and economy deal with and define life in general.

However, it must be noted that Agamben's conception of life in relation to politics is ambivalent and paradoxical. He speaks at once of 'natural life' and 'qualified life'.<sup>285</sup> In *Homo Sacer*, he describes natural life as excluded from the *polis* and included in

<sup>281</sup> See Agamben, *Means without End*, 114.

<sup>282</sup> For the notion of bare life, see, for instance, Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 4–10. For *homo sacer*, see Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 8, 71–74 and 80–84. For 'form-of-life', see Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 188 and *The Use of Bodies*, xxi, 191 and 206–19. For the 'good life', see Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 2 and 7. For 'living well', see Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 197–226. For the 'happy life', see Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 173 and *The Use of Bodies*, 7, 219 and 235.

<sup>283</sup> See also Mills, 'Biopolitical Life', 76–77.

<sup>284</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 206; *Homo Sacer*, 187.

<sup>285</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1–2.

politics.<sup>286</sup> He argues that the relationship between life and politics is based on an ‘exclusive inclusion’.<sup>287</sup> In his view, this ‘exclusive inclusion’ of life constitutes the *fundamental structure* that characterizes the relation between sovereign power and life. It demonstrates how the sovereign power deals with life in the exception, as discussed above. That is, sovereign power can decide to do away with life, but, at the same time, to integrate that life into its political calculations. This means that the sovereign exercises an absolute right over the lives of its subjects. Elsewhere, Agamben even says that the sovereign has an ‘unconditional authority’ over its subjects.<sup>288</sup> All of this emphasizes the fact that, for Agamben, sovereign power not only takes hold of life but even regulates it and decides who may or may not belong to the society and who, therefore, can be eliminated or reduced to a bare life without any value. In other words, given that sovereign power has a complete right over life, it can create bare life at any time. Sovereign power can decide to despoil life from its rights and reduce it to a mere biological life that is deprived of any political significance.<sup>289</sup> This structure of biopolitics, which defines the relation between sovereign power and life, Agamben claims, is not only the ‘originary structure’ of ‘Western politics’, but is in fact ‘consubstantial with Western politics’.<sup>290</sup> Western politics, from Agamben’s point of view, constitutes itself as a relation to life whereby the sovereign defines and manufactures the type of life and being of its subjects.

In the wake of Aristotle, Agamben argues that Western metaphysics has introduced an important partition between a life confined to the private and domestic sphere of the house and a life worthy of politics. To illustrate this dual conception of life, Agamben uses two Greek terms: *zōē* and *bios*. *Zōē* refers to life as a biological substance. It is excluded from politics and, consequently, restricted to the house, the sphere of natural survival and reproduction. It is considered unworthy of taking part in politics. *Bios*, on the other hand, applies to life lived in a certain way, according to political ordinances. While *zōē* belongs to the *oikos*, *bios* is proper to the *polis*, the city, that is, the political community. For Agamben, the city is the locus of socialization where life passes from being a mere natural datum to assuming its social and political meanings. From this perspective, we can say that, to truly assume humanity, natural life must be integrated into the *polis* and politics as if they were, Agamben says, ‘the place in which life had to transform itself into good life and in which what had to

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<sup>286</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 2.

<sup>287</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 107.

<sup>288</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 87 and 100–101.

<sup>289</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 100–101.

<sup>290</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 7 and 12.

be politicized were always already bare life'.<sup>291</sup> This means that the *polis* is the place where *zōē* is politicized and becomes a core element of political deliberations.

In accord with this Aristotelian framework, Agamben stresses that a political community is formed for the sake of the 'good life' or happiness.<sup>292</sup> According to Agamben, however, the good life is in this case the type of life that fulfils the sovereign's ideal for the community. The happy life is considered a collective affair that consists in realising the form of life proposed—or perhaps imposed—by the sovereign power. In this sense, it could be argued that, for Agamben, the good life is 'a qualified life, a particular way of life proper to an individual or group' in the *polis*.<sup>293</sup> Following the Aristotelian metaphysical tradition, Agamben argues that the entire Western political tradition has constituted politics not only as an activity of sovereignty but also as the government of life as such for the sake of the good life.<sup>294</sup> Consequently, both natural life, originally confined to the household, and political life have become objects for biopolitical rationality, that is, sovereign action. From this perspective, Agamben contends that sovereign power is always already in the position of maintaining a direct relation to (bare) life. Sovereign power constitutes itself as an activity over life. Its original principle is to exercise control over life in all its various aspects and to divide it into different forms.<sup>295</sup>

According to Agamben, the inclusion of life into politics therefore stands at the foundation of politics and explains why politics has from antiquity and must always be understood as biopolitics. Section 3.1 explained that, to illustrate the sovereign's activity and control over life, Agamben has studied the Roman figure of *homo sacer*. Recall that, in Agamben, *homo sacer* evokes the situation of someone who is condemned to and suffers from a double exclusion: from both human and divine jurisdictions. However, paradoxically, *homo sacer* still maintains a relation to law in the sense that the law allows such a person to be killed without punishment. This is to say that the exclusion of *homo sacer* from the realm of law corresponds to its inclusion in the latter. The law that removes *homo sacer* from society continues to relate to him by exposing him to the possibility of death. Agamben expresses this when he notes that *homo sacer* is a figure of life that is caught in 'a continuous relationship with the power that banished him precisely insofar as he is at every instant exposed to an unconditioned threat of death'.<sup>296</sup> The crucial point in Agamben's construal of *homo*

<sup>291</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 7.

<sup>292</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1–3.

<sup>293</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1.

<sup>294</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 7.

<sup>295</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 110.

<sup>296</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 183–84.

*sacer* is that it demonstrates how politics, in his opinion—through the person of the sovereign—deals with life and defines itself as a relation to and exercise of power upon life, an exercise of total control and domination of life that is captured in the grip of, and defined according to the will of, sovereign power.<sup>297</sup>

Conceived in this relationship between sovereign power and life, sovereign happiness, or happiness conceived from the perspective of the sovereign, entails at least two things in Agamben. First, happiness—the good life—is what is expected to emanate from how power manages life in the city, which, in Agamben's view, is the place where natural life is politicized and transformed into the good life.<sup>298</sup> Since the 'good life', as Agamben stipulates, is 'the *telos* of the political'<sup>299</sup> and is realised in the city, we can extrapolate that happiness in this case is to be seen as the product of sovereign power. Happiness becomes something that can be managed and controlled by the sovereign. It is an ideal that can be attained in accord with the calculations of sovereign power. A happy person, then, is one who lives life according with the will of the sovereign. The happy life is, in effect, the life that is wholly subjected to the general control and regulation of sovereign power and the government, whose primary function, Agamben says, is 'giving form to the life of people'.<sup>300</sup>

Second, coupled with 'the current triumph of economy',<sup>301</sup> biopolitical happiness emphasizes productivity through work. As Marijsse states, biopolitics 'has sought to reduce human life, and this fascination [the fascination towards work], to the blindfolded following of a duty or an abstract moral law'.<sup>302</sup> If this interpretation is plausible so far as Agamben is concerned, we can affirm that happiness, conceived from the perspective of biopolitics, is measured in terms of fidelity to the rule of law and productivity. The happy life is that which is expected to result from the management and control that political power is supposed to exercise on bare life. This is why I affirmed earlier that biopolitical happiness, in Agamben's account, emphasizes the relation between power and life. The good life is considered the fulfilment of the sovereign ideal for the city, wherein life is taken into and becomes an object upon which sovereign power acts. Not only does sovereign power take control

<sup>297</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 4–5. Paul Patton holds a similar opinion. He also comments that, for Agamben, *homo sacer* is an elucidation of how the life of an individual is caught in a special relationship with political power. See Patton, 'Agamben and Foucault', 210.

<sup>298</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 2 and 7.

<sup>299</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 7.

<sup>300</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 148.

<sup>301</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 1.

<sup>302</sup> Marijsse, 'Agamben's Happy Life', 140.

over life, it also divides life into natural life and political life.<sup>303</sup> This division of life involves dialectical categories—such as *inclusion* and *exclusion*, *proper* and *improper*, *worthy*, and *unworthy*—that are used to qualify life with respect to politics.<sup>304</sup> Agamben expresses this idea as follows:

What we call politics is above all a special qualification of life, carried out by means of a series of partitions that pass through the very body of *zōē*. This means that the concept of life will not truly be thought as long as the biopolitical machine, which has always captured it within itself by means of a series of divisions and articulations, has not been deactivated.<sup>305</sup>

A striking point in this passage is Agamben's idea that biopolitics makes it impossible to carefully think the notion of life. This impossibility results from the fact that biopolitics does not consider life as a whole. Biopolitics divides life, manages it and takes it into its mechanisms. Pushed to its extreme, Agamben's statement implies that biopolitics promises a happy life that is not really happy in his sense, which characterizes a life lived freely and beyond sovereign restrictions. To say the least, happiness in the biopolitical account of life corresponds to a life lived or carried out in accord with political and societal prescriptions and restrictions. To live happily can thus be described as a way of living following the dictates of law or political norms. Political jurisdictions in this sense come to shape human life in way that is authorized (or 'qualified', as Agamben says).<sup>306</sup> To put the matter differently, it is the sovereign that defines the conditions for happiness and decrees a way of living that its subjects must follow. The happy life in this context means a life that is framed by and in accord with the regulations of the sovereign. This is what Agamben terms *bios*.<sup>307</sup> It is a life caught up into the realm of political power, which thereby becomes a life aligned with the demands of power.

Agamben criticizes this sovereign account of happiness because it reduces life to a blind fulfilment of the way of life proposed by the sovereign.<sup>308</sup> For Agamben, such happiness prevents life from unfolding its potentiality because life is thereby confined to the accomplishment of given tasks.<sup>309</sup> Rather than being subject to

<sup>303</sup> See Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, xix, 203.

<sup>304</sup> On the opposition between the proper and improper life, see, Agamben, *Means without End*, 116. See also, Campbell, *Improper Life*, 33.

<sup>305</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 203.

<sup>306</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1.

<sup>307</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1.

<sup>308</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 188.

<sup>309</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 43.

the rule of power and a struggle towards a goal and productivity, real happiness characterizes a self-sufficient life, a life lived outside the sovereign hold.<sup>310</sup> In other words, for Agamben, the *true* happy life is not exposed to the direct dominion of law. He expresses this in the following terms:

The “happy life” on which political philosophy should be founded thus cannot be either the naked life that sovereignty posits as a presupposition so as to turn it into its own subject or the impenetrable extraneity of science and of modern biopolitics that everybody today tries in vain to sacralize [*sic*]. This “happy life” should be, rather, an absolutely profane ‘sufficient life’ that has reached the perfection of its own power and of its own communicability—a life over which sovereignty and right no longer have any hold.<sup>311</sup>

This passage contains two important theses. First, Agamben poses the happy life as the new foundation for any reflection on political philosophy.<sup>312</sup> He defines the happy life as a life that is not left at the mercy of sovereign power. Second, the happy life for Agamben corresponds to a self-sufficient life and does not depend on the political for its realisation. It is a life that cannot be divided into parts but is complete in itself. It is a life lived freely without pressure from the political counterpart. This type of life, according to Agamben, is realised in the notion of form-of-life. Agamben elaborates extensively on these points. I will accordingly consider at length in subsequent chapters—especially in chapters two and three—how the form-of-life actualises Agamben’s call for happiness. In the next section, I focus on discussing the relationship between political theology and economic theology. These important aspects of Agamben’s account of biopolitics provide the framework in which, according to him, the relationship between political power and life has been worked out and articulated in the Western tradition.<sup>313</sup>

## 4. Political Theology and Economic Theology

In the preceding sections, I analysed the significance of economy in Agamben’s account of biopolitics. I showed that, based on the notion at issue, Agamben describes biopolitics as the management of human needs, desires and ends, modelled after

<sup>310</sup> See Agamben, *Means without End*, 114.

<sup>311</sup> Agamben, *Means without End*, 113–14.

<sup>312</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 204; *Homo Sacer*, 187–88. See also Mills, ‘Biopolitical Life’, 76–77.

<sup>313</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xi.

God's providential governance of the world. In this section, I wish to elaborate on the nexus between political theology and economic theology and show how both archetypes relate to each other according to Agamben. My main claim is that Agamben provides a very complex and subtle description of the interaction of these two paradigms. In the end, Agamben's description demonstrates that economic theology, for him, points to a dimension of biopolitics that cannot be reduced to sovereignty. In other words, biopolitics is a combination of sovereignty and government.

Contemporary discourse on political theology—i.e., the inspection of the nature and meaning of sovereignty in connection with Christian thought considered as the framework for the formation of political concepts—traces back to Carl Schmitt's book, *Political Theology*. It either expands or attacks Schmitt's thesis that

All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development—in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver—but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts.<sup>314</sup>

In this excerpt, Schmitt both annexes a theory of the state to theology and describes this theory of the state as an offspring of theology. He thinks that the theory of the state draws its basic concepts from theology. Using analogy as a method, Schmitt identifies the sovereign or 'lawgiver' with the single God who rules the world. Similarly, he juxtaposes the state of exception, on which the sovereign exercises its power, to the theological notion of 'miracle' through which God breaks natural laws and intervenes in history.<sup>315</sup> With this, Schmitt institutes a kind of hierarchy between both disciplines. He gives precedence to theology over politics. In fact, he wants to demonstrate that, despite its exclusion from public space, theology continues to secretly influence modern thought and 'continues to be present and active in an eminent way'.<sup>316</sup>

The importance of Schmitt to Agamben cannot be overestimated. Throughout his works, Agamben either criticises Schmitt's ideas or uses them to advance his own

<sup>314</sup> Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 36.

<sup>315</sup> Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 36.

<sup>316</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 4.

theses.<sup>317</sup> In this regard, Agamben seems to adopt a different stance from Schmitt on the relationship between politics and theology. Agamben examines not only political theology in general, but, more precisely, political theology in connection with economic theology. In doing so, Agamben provides a very complicated and intricate account of how these two paradigms relate. At the outset, Agamben does not clearly establish a ‘hierarchy’ between political theology and economic theology; nor does he subordinate the former to the latter or vice versa.<sup>318</sup> It could be said that he pushes both paradigms back to and locates them in a deeper comprehensive ‘zone of indistinction’, such that they both emerge from a common source and so are intertwined.<sup>319</sup>

From the inception of *The Kingdom and the Glory*, Agamben makes it clear that

[T]wo broadly speaking political paradigms, antinomial but functionally related to one another, derive from Christian theology: political theology, which founds the transcendence of sovereign power on the single God, and economic theology, which replaces this transcendence with the idea of an *oikonomia*, conceived as an immanent ordering—domestic and not political in a strict sense—of both divine and human life. Political philosophy and the modern theory of sovereignty derive from the first paradigm; modern biopolitics up to the current triumph of economy and government over every other aspect of social life derive from the second paradigm.<sup>320</sup>

This passage is very dense. Let us try to parse it to get a sense of what it embodies. Agamben here realizes a genealogy of political power in the West. He says that two models form the single governmental machine or political power: political theology and economic theology. He then argues that both originate from Christian theology. Nonetheless, Agamben concludes that the two paradigms are essentially different in that political theology is strictly related to the doctrine of the transcendent and monotheistic rule of the world and so has given birth to the modern theory of sovereignty, whereas economic theology draws on the Christian doctrine of economy and constitutes modern politics as biopolitics, that is, as government of human life.

<sup>317</sup> Agamben’s affiliation with Schmitt and the influence of the latter on Agamben’s political thought has already been extensively documented. See, for instance, de la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, 363–64; Murray, *Giorgio Agamben*, 62–63; Cimino, ‘Agamben’s Political Messianism’, 103–07; and Colebrook and Maxwell, *Agamben*, 48–58.

<sup>318</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xi.

<sup>319</sup> Regarding the notion of “zone of indistinction”, see, for instance, Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 4, 6, 19, 25, 47 and 181.

<sup>320</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 1.

Though he wishes to go beyond Schmitt, Agamben, at this juncture, remains very Schmittian. By establishing that political theology derives from the notion of ‘the single God’, Agamben does nothing, it seems, but repeat Schmitt’s thesis. Agamben extensively develops this theory of sovereignty and its relation to life in both *Homo Sacer* and *State of Exception*, depending to a great extent on the foundation provided by Schmitt. One might therefore wonder whether Agamben really departs from Schmitt. Agamben indeed departs, or claims to depart, from Schmitt for at least two reasons.

First, he conflates the approaches of Schmitt and Foucault into a single philosophical approach. He supplements Schmitt’s account of sovereignty and exception with Foucault’s theory of biopolitics. As a result, Agamben examines sovereign power from the perspective of biopolitics—a perspective that was not available to Schmitt. Second, Agamben’s distance from Schmitt becomes even clearer when Agamben introduces the second paradigm of political power—economic theology—and contrasts it with political theology. By adding the question of economic theology, Agamben reconceptualizes the nature of political theology. In fact, his genealogy of *oikonomia* and government in *The Kingdom and the Glory* seems to indicate that economic theology overwrites, or at least informs, political theology. Agamben appears to present economic theology as the framework in which biopolitics—conceived of as a combination of sovereignty and government—is to be articulated and understood. One can therefore conclude that he seems to give precedence to economy theology rather than to political theology.<sup>321</sup> Is this really the case?

Agamben asserts that, despite their essential difference, the two paradigms are interrelated. As a matter of fact, they not only emerge from the same source but even form the double structure that defines biopolitics.<sup>322</sup> ‘The two paradigms’, Agamben states, ‘live together and intersect with one another to the point of constituting a bipolar system, whose understanding preliminarily conditions any interpretation of the political history of the West’.<sup>323</sup> What Agamben means is that both political theology and economic theology are central to the understanding and constitution of biopolitics. They show how political power works and takes charge of life. Through political theology, power applies to human life and seeks to control it through law. Through economic theology, power manages and administers all the activities of people in society. I elaborate further on this point in the next section.

<sup>321</sup> See, for instance, Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xi and 110–11.

<sup>322</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xi, 103 and 142.

<sup>323</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 66.

Shall we infer, then, that Agamben intends to equate these two paradigms by tracing them back to a zone of indistinction? Or does he give priority to one paradigm over the other? There is apparently some incoherence in Agamben's account which complexifies the relationship he establishes between political and economic theology. In fact, if we consider only the first instalments of the *Homo Sacer* cycle—especially *Homo Sacer*, *State of Exception* and *Stasis*—we gain the impression that Agamben gives precedence to political theology, thereby subscribing to Schmitt's thesis.<sup>324</sup> In these books, Agamben devotes a great deal of attention to developing the theory of sovereignty. He shows how, according to him, sovereign power relates to and deals with life through juridical norms. As has already been pointed out, biopolitics in this context seems to be read from the viewpoint of the sovereign power and its relation to life. The sovereign exercises its power and right over life by deciding on the life and death of individuals who are under its jurisdiction and control.<sup>325</sup> This is why Agamben thinks that the inclusion of life in the mechanisms of politics constitutes the most decisive characteristic of biopolitics. '*It can even be said*', he argues, '*that the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power*'.<sup>326</sup>

In this short passage, the '*biopolitical body*' designates a human life which is left completely at the mercy of a political power that can dispose of it at will and even empty it of every human right and political value. Elsewhere, Agamben refers to this body as 'bare life' (in Italian *nuda vita*, that is, 'naked life').<sup>327</sup> It is the life of *homo sacer*, that is, a life that can be terminated at any moment.<sup>328</sup> It is situated at the crossroads—i.e., at the zone of indistinction—between the qualified life (*bios*) and the natural life (*zōē*). In other words, it is the life that becomes the object of sovereign violence.<sup>329</sup> It comes about as a result of sovereign power exercised over life. If we push this point to the extreme, *bare life* in Agamben could also refer to a life that is ostracized from the community. This is why some scholars think Agamben's political thought emerges from a reflexion on those confined to the margins of society and brings them to the fore of political analysis.<sup>330</sup> Agamben extends this logic in the *State of Exception*. He presents the state of exception as primarily a locus in which political power is fully deployed and in which life is submitted to the power and control of the sovereign.<sup>331</sup>

<sup>324</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 15–17.

<sup>325</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 87–90.

<sup>326</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 6.

<sup>327</sup> See, for instance, Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 4.

<sup>328</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 8–11 and 71–86. He describes the figure of *homo sacer* as the prototype of life that is impoverished.

<sup>329</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 88–90.

<sup>330</sup> See Norris, 'The Exemplary Exception', 264; Ross, 'Agamben's Political Paradigm of the Camp', 423.

<sup>331</sup> Agamben, *State of Exception*, 1–31 and *Homo Sacer*, 166–99.

When, however, we consider subsequent parts of the *Homo Sacer* series, especially *The Kingdom and the Glory*, we see that Agamben's position with respect to political theology changes and even gets more complex. On the one hand, Agamben claims that the relation between political theology and economic theology must not be understood in terms of 'a hierarchy of causes, as if a more primordial genetic rank would necessarily pertain to theology',<sup>332</sup> for they both form part and parcel of a single and unique entity: biopolitics in the West. Agamben describes this bipartite constitution of biopolitics in *The Kingdom and the Glory*. He clearly expresses and stresses this point at the beginning of the book when he affirms that 'the double structure of the governmental machine, which in *State of Exception* appeared in the correlation between *auctoritas* and *potestas*, here takes the form of the articulation between Kingdom and Government'.<sup>333</sup> It suffices to mention that the term 'Kingdom' in this passage refers to political theology represented in the person of the king, while 'Government' is related to economic theology. The connection between government and economic theology is explained by the fact that Agamben traces the governmental machine of modern biopolitics back to economic theology.<sup>334</sup>

Thus, before speaking of the two models, Agamben identifies theological discourse on *oikonomia* as the intellectual matrix that sheds light on the essence of government in the West. He writes as follows:

We show instead how the apparatus of the Trinitarian *oikonomia* may constitute a privileged laboratory for the observation of the working and articulation—both internal and external—of the governmental machine. For within this apparatus the elements—or the polarities—that articulate the machine appear, as it were, in their paradigmatic form.<sup>335</sup>

Agamben defines the trinitarian (theological) doctrine of economy as the key that will unlock the mystery of 'the governmental machine'. It is interesting to notice here that Agamben does not speak of political theology or the theory of sovereignty. He merely focuses on the paradigm of economic theology, as it allows him to trace genealogically and make intelligible the shifts that have occurred in the history of politics. Economic theology helps him first to locate the moment of origination of political concepts and practices, then to relate those concepts and practices to the present. This is why Agamben says that economy reveals the 'working and articulation of the governmental

<sup>332</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xi.

<sup>333</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xi–xii.

<sup>334</sup> See his genealogy of government on the notion of *Oikonomia* in Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 17–52.

<sup>335</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xi.

machine'.<sup>336</sup> Agamben therefore presents economic theology as an important hidden foundation of the political. Economic theology becomes the framework within which modern discourse on biopolitics, understood from the angle of government, is articulated and understood.<sup>337</sup> It is economic theology that, for Agamben, has 'exercised a decisive influence' on Western biopolitics. The elaborations that follow in subsequent chapters of *The Kingdom and the Glory* demonstrate and corroborate this point. Agamben painstakingly excavates the meaning of economy. He shows how it has been articulated through history and how it has influenced the constitution of Western biopolitics. In fact, he presents it as the foundation of modern biopolitics. In this sense, it can be said that Agamben's *The Kingdom and the Glory* demonstrates the extent to which biopolitics comprises not only sovereignty (political theology) but also government (economic theology). Agamben stresses this point even more at the end of his book. He affirms that today's biopolitics manifests the 'economy's overwhelming domination' of a 'theological inheritance'.<sup>338</sup>

This point becomes more apparent when we consider Agamben's attempt to redefine and supplement Schmitt's thesis that all modern concepts of politics are secularized theological concepts.<sup>339</sup> Agamben argues that Schmitt's famous statement is fully meaningful only if it is pushed back and related to a more fundamental domain, that is, to the notion of *oikonomia*.<sup>340</sup> As Kotsko has already observed, Agamben further contends that 'it is not simply a matter of extending the thesis to include economic concepts as well—it's the more radical move of claiming that the theological concepts *already were* economic concepts, all long'.<sup>341</sup> If political theology, as defined by Schmitt, must be pushed back to the theological discourse on economy—as Agamben himself seems to argue in *The Kingdom and the Glory*—then this implies that economic theology is also an important context from which and within which modern biopolitics becomes meaningful.

<sup>336</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xi.

<sup>337</sup> This is also one of the conclusions of Karsenti, who holds that Agamben's theological genealogy of economy demonstrates that political discourse can be better understood from the perspective of the economic language that has characterised Christian theology in that it traces political concepts back to their origin and reveals their meanings. In this way, he claims that economic theology is the foundation of politics. See Karsenti, 'Agamben et le Mystère du gouvernement', 355–56.

<sup>338</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 276.

<sup>339</sup> Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 36; Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 2.

<sup>340</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 2–3. Agamben also reads the debate that opposed Peterson and Schmitt on the (im)possibility of political theology from the perspective of the pre-eminence of the economic paradigm. See Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 6–14.

<sup>341</sup> Kotsko, 'Agamben's Notes', n.p.

We can conclude that Agamben's account of the nexus between political theology and economic theology is not straightforward. It is instead characterised by shifts of focus and meaning that make it difficult to adopt one interpretive stance. While Agamben locates both paradigms in a place of indeterminacy and presents them as complementary at some points, at other points he seems to emphasise either political theology or economic theology. The relationship he describes between the two models can therefore be qualified as a domain of overlaps and tensions at the heart of modern biopolitics. It is as if Agamben is battling with himself about how the relationship between these paradigms is to be understood and described. This becomes apparent in the conclusion of his book. He writes as follows:

[T]hat the two poles of this apparatus are not antagonistic, but remain secretly in agreement until the end, is evident in the thinking of the theologian who has brought the providential standpoint to such an extreme that it appears to resolve itself completely and without remainder in the image of the world of modernity. At this point, theology can resolve itself into atheism, and providentialism into democracy. Modernity, removing God from the world, has not only failed to leave theology behind, but in some ways has done nothing other than to lead the project of the providential *oikonomia* to completion.<sup>342</sup>

This passage shows the indecision with which Agamben demarcates political and economy theology. He presents the paradigms as working together such that it is almost impossible to separate them. In fact, Agamben seems to institute a 'zone of indetermination':<sup>343</sup> i.e., a situation of relationships in which both political theology and economic theology co-habit with each other.

## 5. Biopolitics of Sovereignty and Government

Like his account of the relationship between political theology and economic theology, Agamben's construal of power is characterized by shifts of emphasis and inconsistencies. Early in *The Kingdom and the Glory*, for example, he states that

<sup>342</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 286–87.

<sup>343</sup> On this notion, see Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 164.

this study will inquire into the paths by which and the reasons why power in the West has assumed the form of an *oikonomia*, that is, a government of men.<sup>344</sup>

This incipient statement explains the aim of Agamben's philosophical and political thought. He is interested in doing an archaeology of power to decipher 'the place and the originary structure of politics'.<sup>345</sup> He begins this inquiry with *Homo Sacer* and concludes it with *The Use of Bodies*.

In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben analyses biopolitics from the point of view of the relationship between sovereignty and life. He shows that biopolitics is defined and exercised through the seizure of life into the political realm. This apprehension of life, according to him, is realized in the structure of sovereignty. It is sovereign power that takes control of life in the form of the '*ex-ceptio*', an inclusion that is exclusive.<sup>346</sup> This formula suggests that life, as a biological datum, is at first confined to the *oikos* and regarded as apolitical. At the same time, however, sovereign power inscribes life into its calculations. Life becomes that upon which the sovereign exercises power and to which law must apply.<sup>347</sup>

In thematizing sovereign power as a pole of biopolitics, Agamben relies heavily on Schmitt's definition of the sovereign as the one who exercises power through and in the state of exception.<sup>348</sup> In the wake of Schmitt, Agamben describes sovereign power in a paradoxical way. The paradox consists in the fact that the sovereign, in holding the juridical power to decide on the exception, stands at once in and out of the juridical order. It is simultaneously an object of law, in the sense that the law applies to it, and beyond law, in the sense that it has legal power to suspend the law.<sup>349</sup> The sovereign power is therefore defined by the fact that it includes itself in, and excludes itself concomitantly from, the rule of law. Agamben goes on to say that this logic of sovereignty is best expressed in the dynamics at work in the structure of the

<sup>344</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xi.

<sup>345</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 263.

<sup>346</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 263.

<sup>347</sup> See also Mills, *Biopolitics*, 37–40. She also underscores the fact that what is at stake in Agamben's account of biopolitics in *Homo Sacer* is to demonstrate that sovereign power is essentially violent in its relation to individual subjects in that, in applying law to them, it dominates them.

<sup>348</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 15.

<sup>349</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 15–16.

(state of) exception, which he conceptualizes after Schmitt.<sup>350</sup> As indicated above, *the state of exception* refers, by definition, to a political situation wherein the constituted law is temporarily suspended. For Agamben, however, the state of exception is not a momentary political circumstance; rather, the state of exception lies at the heart of politics and constitutes it as biopolitics.<sup>351</sup>

With the exception, the sovereign is invested with the power to enter into people's lives, to control their minutest details and to dictate how the population should live in society. The analysis of the state of exception allows Agamben to demonstrate how sovereign power takes control of life and puts it into direct relation with law. In fact, the exception is the primary locus whereby power enters into immediate contact with life through the rule of law. This is why Agamben asserts that the originary task of sovereign power is the production of bare life.<sup>352</sup> And this is why Agamben thinks there is no substantial demarcation between modern democratic political systems and the totalitarian regimes of the past, *mutatis mutandis*.<sup>353</sup> What relates them is the fact that, in both cases, life is taken into the grip of sovereign power and exposed to its violence. In this context, life can be terminated at any moment. Hence, politics, for Agamben, turns into *thanatopolitics*, that is, a politics of death. As he later says in *The Use of Bodies*, politics, through the lens of sovereignty, becomes a 'killing machine'.<sup>354</sup> The thanatological character of politics is better expressed, according to Agamben, in camp-like situations where individuals are stripped of their legal rights, banned from society and reduced to simple living bodies.<sup>355</sup>

In *The Kingdom and the Glory*, Agamben adopts a different approach by reading biopolitics from the perspective of government. Biopolitics is presented as the management of life as such. Agamben's analyses in *The Kingdom and the Glory* tend to show that political power is exercised not only by the sovereign but also by an

<sup>350</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 16. See also Primera, who makes a similar point in his article, 'Potentiality, Sovereignty and Bare Life', 82. However, Primera reads Agamben's construal of sovereignty in light of the Aristotelian metaphysical discourse on potentiality, which Agamben further uses to expatiate on the relation between constituting power and constituted power.

<sup>351</sup> To substantiate this radical thesis, Agamben meticulously examines the history and the processes that, through the entire history of politics in the West, have led to the declaration of various states of exception. His key idea is that once it was proclaimed and actualized, the state of exception continued to be maintained and was basically used as a regular political paradigm. For him, the state of exception becomes part of the norm in politics. See Agamben, *State of Exception*, 11–22; *Homo Sacer*, 37–38.

<sup>352</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 28 and 83.

<sup>353</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 10.

<sup>354</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 265. See also de la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, 226–30; Mills, *Biopolitics*, 44–45.

<sup>355</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 166–80. See also his analysis of 'The Muselmann' in *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 41–86.

apparatus that involves various levels.<sup>356</sup> Power no longer applies directly but is channelled through several mediations. This change of perspective in Agamben's account of power has led scholars to question the coherence of his works. Mills, for instance, argues as follows:

[T]he thesis Agamben presses in *The Kingdom and the Glory* may require considerable revision of his earlier claims about biopolitics in *Homo Sacer*. In other words, despite being identified as a volume in the *Homo Sacer* series, the thesis of *The Kingdom and the Glory* may not complement that of the initial volume, but may, in fact, contest it.<sup>357</sup>

Mills suggests that, given their emphasis on the economic paradigm, the theses contained in *The Kingdom and the Glory* correct, revise or contrast with those outlined in *Homo Sacer*.<sup>358</sup> According to Mills, Agamben sets out to correct his positions in *The Kingdom and the Glory* because he was criticized for overemphasizing sovereign power in *Homo Sacer*. Consequently, Agamben no longer defines biopolitics as the capture of life through sovereign power but rather as management of life. Besides, Mills quotes Agamben himself to show that he locates the origin of political philosophy and the modern theory of sovereignty in political theology even though he founds 'modern biopolitics' in the paradigm of *oikonomia*. Mills therefore concludes that Agamben opposes the theory of sovereignty to biopolitics. Sovereignty, she argues, finds its clear expression in *Homo Sacer*, whereas biopolitics is developed in *The Kingdom and the Glory*.<sup>359</sup>

I am very sympathetic to Mills' thesis, but I disagree with her contention that *The Kingdom and the Glory* corrects, contrasts, or revises *Homo Sacer*. We could perhaps say that *The Kingdom and the Glory* corrects *Homo Sacer* if the theses contained in the latter were proven inaccurate. However, I contend that this is not the case. Instead of seeing opposition between *Homo Sacer* and *The Kingdom and the Glory*, I see Agamben shifting focus. This shift does not contradict his previous elaborations but rather reveals another aspect of power. He goes from analysing biopolitics from the angle of sovereignty to analysing it from the angle of government. Agamben's elaborations in *The Kingdom and the Glory* show that power—understood as the rule of sovereignty in *Homo Sacer* and as the combination of *auctoritas* and *potestas* in *State of Exception*—

<sup>356</sup> Agamben emphasises this point in the last chapter of *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 'The Archaeology of Glory'. In the wake of Schmitt, he specifies that the exercise of power in modern society involves many parties. See Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 254–56.

<sup>357</sup> Mills, *Biopolitics*, 119. Mills repeats the same position a number of times in this book.

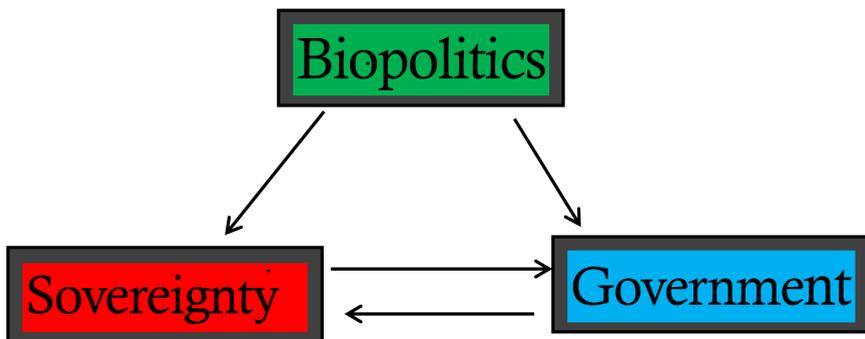
<sup>358</sup> Mills, *Biopolitics*, 44, 116–19 and 130.

<sup>359</sup> Mills, *Biopolitics*, 44–45.

is defined by a 'bipolar structure'.<sup>360</sup> Agamben's genealogy of the economy not only complements what he does in *Homo Sacer* but also reveals another facet of the same reality that preoccupies him: the structure of biopolitics. In this sense, the theses contained in *The Kingdom and the Glory* highlight a crucial fact. On the one hand, there is an aspect of power related to domination over life—that is, to sovereignty. On the other hand, there is the side concerned with the surveillance, management and control of people—that is, government. However, the two aspects are not opposed to each other. On the contrary, they are interwoven with each other. Unlike Foucault, who seems to oppose sovereignty to government and considers them as two different forms of power, Agamben, as Jessica Whyte has justifiably observed, demonstrates that

sovereignty and government are the two poles of a single machine. In Agamben's view, these seemingly distinct forms of power in fact rely on each other, and it is not in one pole or the other, but in the constant oscillation between them that the key political problem lies.<sup>361</sup>

The relationship between these paradigms—sovereignty and government—becomes very apparent in connection with Agamben's incipient remark in *The Kingdom and the Glory*. He states that political power in the West is made up of two hands: sovereignty and government. Though conceptually distant from each other, they are 'functionally related'.<sup>362</sup> Agamben argues that there is 'a continuity between sovereignty and government'.<sup>363</sup> What he means is that sovereign power and economic management cannot be separated from each other. Rather, they coexist to the point of forming the



<sup>360</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 229.

<sup>361</sup> Whyte, 'The King Reigns But Doesn't Govern', 145.

<sup>362</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 1.

<sup>363</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 111.

bipolar structure of biopolitics in the West.<sup>364</sup> For him, biopolitics therefore involves both sovereignty and government. Agamben examines the relationship between biopolitics and sovereign power in *Homo Sacer*, and, in *The Kingdom and the Glory*, he focuses on the connection between biopolitics and government or management. To put it differently, biopolitics—the analysis of political power and how it has operated in the West from Antiquity to the contemporary era—must be understood as the articulation of sovereignty and government. This can be visualized with the aid of the following diagram:

This diagram illustrates the fact that biopolitics, so far as Agamben is concerned, is described and understood as a composite of two forms of power: sovereignty and government. Although these differ, they are nonetheless interrelated, such that one cannot exist without the other. While the activities of government concern the management of the life of citizens in society, the sovereign power formulates regulations that legitimate and command the government of men.<sup>365</sup> Sovereign power makes and enforces laws and policies that stipulate how society must be organised and governed. It is, then, the supreme power that exercises authority and control over the state through government. In this case, government executes and applies laws that have been passed by sovereign power. These two arms, in Agamben's view, constitute the essence of biopolitics. As Primera argues, it is only through the 'mutual exposure of the two poles of the governmental machine that power becomes operative'.<sup>366</sup>

To bring this bipolar conception of power to the fore, Agamben examines Rousseau's theory of sovereignty and government. The location of this analysis is strategic. It intervenes in the appendix to *The Kingdom and the Glory*, where Agamben summarizes and situates the outcome of his inquiry with respect to modern discussions on economy. In this context, Agamben states that Rousseau has also closely defined the 'correlation' between sovereignty and government. Commenting on Rousseau, Agamben stipulates that 'what is decisive from this point of view is the distinction and articulation of sovereignty and government, which is at the basis of Rousseau's political thought'.<sup>367</sup> In this short passage, Agamben restates the fundamental thesis that sovereignty and government are different but, far from being separated, they together constitute the fundament of biopolitics.<sup>368</sup> Accordingly, we can better understand Agamben's reading of the maxim, 'The king reigns, but he does not

<sup>364</sup> See Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 64–66.

<sup>365</sup> See Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 129.

<sup>366</sup> Primera, *The Political Ontology of Giorgio Agamben*, 99; Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 142.

<sup>367</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 274.

<sup>368</sup> See Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 274.

govern', which is expressed in the figure of the *roi mehaignié*.<sup>369</sup> The *roi mehaignié* is a legend of a king who, though mutilated and rendered incapable of governing his people, still reigns over them through the mediation of his servants. Unlike Schmitt's account that stresses sovereign decisionism as the foundation of political power, Agamben suggests that the *roi mehaignié* represents an 'anticipation' of the double structure that characterizes biopolitics.<sup>370</sup> It is therefore only by acknowledging this dual structure that can we better understand the nature of biopolitics and how it operates, from Agamben's perspective.

## 6. Conclusion

At the end of this first chapter, it is appropriate to recapitulate our results. The aim of the chapter was to identify and elaborate on the political significance and implications of the Agambenian genealogy of economy in his account of biopolitics. To address this question, I first provided an overview of the various meanings Agamben attributes to the notion of economy in his works. I then discussed the relevance of economy in relation to biopolitics, with a focus on elaborating what the notion of economy adds to Agamben's construal of biopolitics. In this context, I supplied a brief description of the notion of happiness that emerges from the interaction of biopolitics and economy. The relationship between political theology and economic theology in Agamben's thinking formed the next object of analysis. This discussion was followed by a critical examination of Agamben's conception of political power, with emphasis on the nexus between sovereignty and government. Four main conclusions crucial to our study have emerged from our analysis.

1. Agamben's definition of economy is greatly influenced by Ancient Greek tradition and, more remarkably, by Christian conceptions. Drawing on these traditions, Agamben has described economy as, among other things, both an administrative activity and God's providential management of the world. For him, modern politics, which he describes as the government of life, derives its meaning from that divine providential management of the world.
2. Agamben does not provide a straightforward account of the relationships which hold between the *oikos* and the *polis*, between politics and economy and between sovereignty and government. At the same time, he seems to oppose sovereignty and government and yet insists that they are related. For instance, in *Homo Sacer*,

<sup>369</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 68.

<sup>370</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 69.

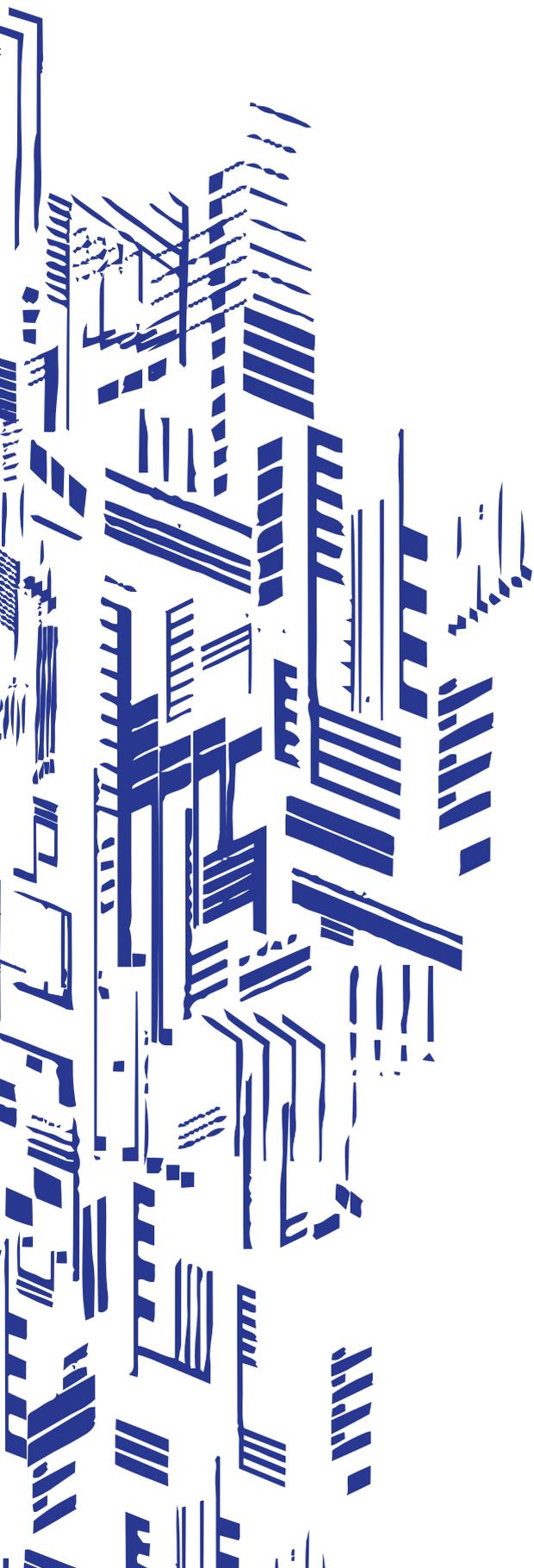
and at the beginning of *The Kingdom and the Glory*, Agamben excludes economy from politics and confines it to the *oikos*, given that he opposes the *oikos* to the *polis*. Later in *The Kingdom and the Glory*, however, economy plays a pivotal role in the constitution of biopolitics. Nonetheless, Agamben does not properly explain this transition in the context of *The Kingdom and the Glory*. It becomes apparent only upon considering his elaborations in *Stasis*, where he discusses the essence and origin of civil war. In that context, Agamben seems to hold that just like what happens in the *oikos* can have an influence on the *polis*, so also can *economy* have a bearing on politics. Thus, economy does not apply only to the management of the household; it also extends to some part of political life. He clearly notes that civil war establishes the inseparability of the household and the city. He writes that ‘the *stasis*, through a double displacement, confuses what pertains to the *oikos* with what is particular to the *polis*’.<sup>371</sup>

3. Agamben's account of economy supplements his description of biopolitics. It shows that biopolitics, for him, must be understood as a double-structured phenomenon that is comprised of sovereignty and government. In other words, the notion of economy reveals the fact that, for Agamben, biopolitics is characterised as a domain of overlaps and complex relationships between sovereignty and government. It is, therefore, impossible, so far as he is concerned, to think of biopolitics only from the perspective of a theory of sovereignty. In Agamben's view, the discourse on political power, in the West at least, is formulated and shaped in accord with a paradigm that is also administrative or managerial in nature. Consequently, political power, as developed in the context of *The Kingdom and the Glory*, not only concerns the sovereign but also involves the managerial or governmental paradigm.
4. Agamben supplies a very complicated and intricate account of the relationship between political theology and economic theology. At some points, he seems to give priority to political theology as in *Homo Sacer*. At other points, economic theology emerges as his paradigm of politics—especially in *The Kingdom and the Glory*. However, Agamben pushes both concepts back to their roots and presents them as two inseparable paradigms—at least in the West. The same logic applies to his construal of the nexus between sovereign power and economic or governmental power. Instead of categorically excluding them, he presents them as two interconnected poles that constitute the single machine of biopolitics. It is through this bipolar constitution that biopolitics takes control over life in society, dominates it and proposes a certain type or idea of the good life which

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<sup>371</sup> Agamben, *Stasis*, 15.

people in society must fulfil. The happy life that emerges from this context is, from Agamben's perspective, conceived as a result of the interplay between sovereignty and government. Agamben, on the contrary, seeks to elaborate a different account of life. The latter passes through the deactivation of the current political categories and the introduction of a new ethics. Chapter Two is dedicated to an examination of the foundations of this new ethics and politics, which Agamben proposes as the basis for the happy life.



## **CHAPTER II**

# BEYOND BIOPOLITICS: TOWARDS A NEW POLITICAL ETHICS

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## 1. Introduction

One of the major theses that emerged from the preceding chapter is that Agamben's genealogy of economy points to the fact that, for him, biopolitics is a two-edged sword. It is a combination of two paradigms: sovereignty and government. Through this double structure, and by means of laws that are equally inherent in it, sovereign power captures life, integrates it into its calculations and governs it *ad libitum*. In this way, sovereignty and government regulate, organise and shape life in society in accord with juridical and economic norms. It is from this perspective that, in *Homo Sacer*, Agamben develops and puts forward his critical political examinations of the biopolitical conditions that, in his view, define our contemporary epoch. He argues that our time is characterised by the subjection of life in all its forms and details to the dynamics and apparatuses of sovereign power and economy/government. In this context, ethics and, consequently, biopolitical happiness mean nothing other than the sheer enactment of the model of life that the sovereign power and the government promulgate and impose on the population both as individuals and collectively. In other words, the biopolitical happy life is defined by the sovereign and government. This is what Agamben calls 'bios' or 'qualified life', that is, life that is subjected to the legal order promulgated by sovereignty and government.<sup>372</sup> Consequently, Agamben thinks that ethics and happiness, understood within this framework of biopolitics, are thought through fundamentally juridical categories that preside over the logic and apparatuses of sovereign power and economy.

But Agamben calls such a conception of the happy life into question; in fact, he finds it problematic. In his view, it not only places life in an immediate and uninterrupted relation to the law but also seems to reduce life to the predicates of law. He argues that life becomes the primary and specific object that sovereignty and economy seek, through law, to protect or exclude, and that they may, in so doing, expose life 'to the most extreme risks'.<sup>373</sup> Conversely, as will be seen in the course of this chapter, Agamben seeks to elaborate a different account of life by putting forward a new conception of ethics. This chapter provides an account of the meaning and function of the notion of ethics in Agamben's works in relation to his construal of biopolitics. The aim of this examination is to uncover the foundations of Agamben's redefinition of life and its relation to political power. This redefinition is premised upon an understanding of ethics that, according to him, casts life in society outside the law and the seizure of sovereign power, thereby to present a unified description of life. In this vein, the chapter claims that ethics in Agamben is an attempt to free the Western ethical and

<sup>372</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1.

<sup>373</sup> Agamben, *Where are We Now*, 80.

political categories from the apparatuses of the sovereign power and government that dominate life and incorporate it into biopolitics. Accordingly, this chapter addresses the following questions: How should one understand the notion of ethics, so far as Agamben is concerned? How does ethics relate to law, politics and life?

In view of these questions, the chapter is structured around three main points with a focus on making sense of Agamben's discourse on ethics beyond biopolitics. I first examine the relation between ethics and law in Agamben. The crucial point in this first part is to determine whether ethics for Agamben should be dependent on the law or not. Second, while expanding Agamben's account of ethics, I discuss how Agamben conceives of the relationship between ethics and politics. In this context, I consider whether ethics should replace politics or if it is possible as regards Agamben to envisage an account of ethics that intersects with politics. In the last section, I elaborate on the relationship between ethics and the happy life. I address the question of how life should, according to Agamben, be considered and lived to achieve happiness.

## 2. Ethics and Law

This section clarifies how Agamben conceives the relationship between ethics and law. In it, I argue that, for Agamben, ethics must be divorced from law. He seeks 'to profane' the categories and the influence of law to put forward an ethics that is constituted apart from the law.<sup>374</sup> Prior to this, however, it is important to make a few remarks concerning terminology: I must explain the meaning of *ethics* and *law* in Agamben.

### 2.1 What Is Ethics and What Is Law?

As I indicated briefly in the general introduction, *ethics*, for Agamben, denotes an art of living and a subjective conduct of life that breaks the exclusive logic of biopolitics.<sup>375</sup> In *The Coming Community*, he makes it clear that, for him, ethics is a way of constituting oneself a subject and relating to life as a pure potentiality. He argues that ethics is not a sphere of laws that must govern human life and behaviour, whether individually or collectively, such that life becomes a mere accomplishment of duty or given tasks. On the contrary, ethics is the domain in which the human being—

<sup>374</sup> In Agamben, *to profane* means to render concepts (and conceptions) inoperative or inactive and to dispose them for a new use. Put differently, *to profane*, for Agamben, is to remove concepts from a particular use or understanding and make them available for a new one. In this way, *to profane law* is to remove its influence from ethics and dispose the latter for a new meaning and understanding. For more elaborations, see Agamben, *Profanations*, 87. See also Ojakangas, 'Conscience, the Remnant and the Witness', 698 and De la Durantaye, 'Homo Profanus', 28–35.

<sup>375</sup> See 'The General Introduction' above. See also Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 21.

or life—is exposed to inoperativity and experiences itself as pure potentiality.<sup>376</sup> Agamben's argument is that humanity has essentially no prior tasks or destiny that it must accomplish or fulfil. In fact, humanity in his view lacks any determined and specific vocation or identity. Consequently, Agamben concludes that humanity is essentially a potentiality to be this or that.<sup>377</sup>

Agamben underscores this characterization of ethics in *Language and Death*. In this book, he reflects on the essence of language, understood as that which separates humans from animals and confronts humanity with itself.<sup>378</sup> In this context, he defines ethics as 'humanity's proper dwelling place'.<sup>379</sup> What is at stake here is that Agamben puts forward a non-normative account of ethics. For him, ethics is the locus in which humans are immanent to themselves, that is, where they find themselves and relate to themselves as living beings or subjects.<sup>380</sup> Given that humanity is deprived of any specific and predefined identity for Agamben, as we have seen, ethics in his understanding concerns the way in which people constitute themselves and live out their lives. To put it differently, ethics entails an individual's self-rapport. This is why we earlier said that ethics refers, for Agamben, to the relation which one has with one's own life regardless of the law.

Agamben frequently uses the term *law* in his writings—especially in *Homo Sacer* and *State of Exception*.<sup>381</sup> It is therefore surprising that he does not provide a clear and straightforward definition of it. Nonetheless, his account of law can be understood if it is situated within the context of his discussion of 'the paradox of sovereignty' and the state of exception, upon which he elaborates in both *Homo Sacer* and *State of Exception*.<sup>382</sup> Recall that, in Agamben's thought, *the paradox of sovereignty* indicates the situation in which the sovereign is simultaneously inside and outside law. This means that, like any individual in the society, the sovereign is subjected to law; the law applies to the sovereign. At the same time, however, the sovereign transcends the law by virtue of possessing the legal authority to suspend the regular guarantees of the law and institute or declare the state of exception.<sup>383</sup> Agamben submits that the paradox of sovereignty is the structure of the exception.<sup>384</sup> The relation between

<sup>376</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 43–44.

<sup>377</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 43.

<sup>378</sup> Agamben, *Language and Death*, 91–92.

<sup>379</sup> Agamben, *Language and Death*, xiii and 92.

<sup>380</sup> See Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 102–04.

<sup>381</sup> For instance, the term *law* occurs 406 times in *Homo Sacer*, 470 times in *State of Exception*, 205 times in *The Highest Poverty* and 161 times in *The Kingdom and the Glory*.

<sup>382</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 15–29; *State of Exception*, 1–31.

<sup>383</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 15.

<sup>384</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 15–17.

the two is that the state of exception is an act of sovereign power. It entails the suspension—upon the sovereign's decision—of the validity of the actual law and the establishment of a new law both to deal with the exception and to bring life into direct contact with sovereign power and government.<sup>385</sup> As Agamben himself writes,

What is at issue in the sovereign exception is not so much the control or neutralization of an excess as the creation and definition of the very place in which the juridico-political order can have validity. In this sense, the sovereign exception is the fundamental localization (*Ortung*), which does not limit itself to distinguishing what is inside from what is outside but instead traces a threshold (the state of exception) between the two, on the basis of which outside and inside, the normal situation and chaos, enter into those complex topological relations that make the validity of the juridical order possible.<sup>386</sup>

In other words, the exception, for Agamben, is primarily a situation that escapes regular juridical conditions. At the same time, however, the exception is the principle that founds the juridical order.<sup>387</sup> Thus, in Agamben's view, the sovereign and the state of exception are borderline concepts or figures that stand between the juridical and the non-juridical. They mark the limit of the juridical order and, in the same breath, constitute it. As Mills explains, Agamben argues that, through the sovereign exception, 'the defining characteristic of sovereignty is that the sovereign determines when law is applicable and what it applies to, and in doing so, must create the conditions that are necessary for law to operate since the law presupposes normal order for its operation'.<sup>388</sup> According to Agamben, the state of exception is the political space in which, through the act of the sovereign, the outside and inside, juridical and non-juridical, regular and irregular meet, coincide and enter into a zone of indifference, thereby to constitute the zone of sovereign action.<sup>389</sup>

It must be noted that Agamben's definitions of the sovereign and the exception draw on Schmitt's thesis that the sovereign decides on the exception.<sup>390</sup> According to Agamben, the sovereign, through the exception, by virtue of being both inside and outside the law, 'creates and guarantees the situation that the law needs for its own

<sup>385</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 15; *State of Exception*, 2. See also Mills, 'Agamben's Messianic Politics', 42.

<sup>386</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 19.

<sup>387</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 18–19.

<sup>388</sup> Mills, 'Agamben's Messianic Politics', 44.

<sup>389</sup> See Agamben, *State of Exception*, 1–2.

<sup>390</sup> See Agamben, *State of Exception*, 1.

validity'.<sup>391</sup> In other words, it is the sovereign which decides under which conditions the law should or must apply. Through the exception, the sovereign includes in the sphere of law what is primarily excluded from law. It is this 'inclusive exclusion' which is characteristic of the sovereign exception that most interests Agamben.<sup>392</sup> He draws attention to the fact that the law colonizes everything. It applies not only to the normal or regular situation but also to the non-normal or irregular situation, the outside, which it captures and integrates within its calculations.

According to Agamben, what is captured in the exception and included in the sphere of the *nomos*, is life. Therefore, the state of exception is the space in which sovereign power and decision seize life, bring it into direct relation to law and govern it accordingly.<sup>393</sup> In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben makes this point even more explicit. In the form of a rhetorical question, he writes, 'but what is excepted and captured in sovereignty, and who is the bearer of the sovereign ban?'<sup>394</sup> He immediately answers that, 'both Benjamin and Schmitt, if differently, point to life ("bare life" in Benjamin and, in Schmitt, the "real life" that "breaks the crust of a mechanism rigidified through repetition") as the element that, in the exception, finds itself in the most intimate relation with sovereignty.'<sup>395</sup> Agamben repeats the same claim in *State of Exception*, where he endeavours to show that the state of exception has become the paradigm of government in the contemporary world. In that context, he contends that the state of exception is 'the immediately biopolitical original structure in which law encompasses living beings by means of its own suspension'.<sup>396</sup>

These passages indicate that Agamben investigates the essence of sovereignty and the state of exception in order to show how the law relates to and specially deals with life itself. The exception is the space in which sovereign power, the law and life enter into a blurring type of relation, such that the sovereign attempts to integrate the outside—life—into law.<sup>397</sup> From this perspective, we can postulate that, for Agamben, the law denotes an instrument, a mechanism or, better, a dispositive of sovereign power. The law is that through which the sovereign not only captures life into politics in the exception but also, and more importantly, that through which it micro-controls and micro-subjects life to found the city. In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben emphasizes that, 'the law has a regulative character and is a "rule", not because it

<sup>391</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 17.

<sup>392</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 18.

<sup>393</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 26–28; *State of Exception*, 1.

<sup>394</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 67.

<sup>395</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 67.

<sup>396</sup> Agamben, *State of Exception*, 3.

<sup>397</sup> See Agamben, *State of Exception*, 1.

commands and proscribes, but because it must first of all create the sphere of its own reference in real life and *make that reference regular*.<sup>398</sup> What defines law is therefore not the fact that it officially states what is allowed and banned in society but the fact that it creates a sphere that captures life.

In a recent publication, *Where Are We Now?*, which reflects on the political significance of the Covid-19 pandemic, Agamben explicitly states the above point. He contends that

From the first decades of the twentieth century, the law tended towards the incorporation of life, by making life its own specific object—either to protect, or to exclude it. Law taking on living does not only have, as one might expect, positive consequences: in fact, it paves the way for the extreme risks. As the law begins to deal explicitly with the biological life of the citizens as a good that needs taking care of, this interest immediately takes a dark turn towards the idea of a life that is [...] “unworthy of life.”<sup>399</sup>

Two points in this passage must be very briefly underscored. First, according to Agamben, since the early years of the previous century, life understood as a biological substance has become the primary, if not the essential, object to which law applies. Second, on capturing life and acting on it, the law—which, as we have already seen, is the dispositive of sovereign power—produces a life that may not be considered real life: an ‘unworthy’ life. This ‘unworthy’ life is what Agamben describes in *Homo Sacer* as ‘bare life’, the life of the *homo sacer* or the Muselmann in *Remnants of Auschwitz*. It is the life that is not only the product of sovereign power but is also deprived of any legal and political meaning, a life that can be ended without punishment.<sup>400</sup>

Agamben is very critical of this logic of law, which coincides with both the logic of exception and the logic of sovereign power. For the reasons highlighted in sections 3 and 4 of the previous chapter, and which are further elaborated in what follows, Agamben thinks there is an urgent need to overcome the logic of the sovereign exception in order to define and relate to life differently. Hence, throughout his works, he repeatedly makes a claim for a new ethics or a new relation to life outside and beyond the confines of law.<sup>401</sup> Put alongside his *pars destruens*, this claim seems to indicate that Agamben’s work should be understood as a rupture with the entire history of Western thought. From this perspective, we can say, as Colebrook and

<sup>398</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 26.

<sup>399</sup> Agamben, *Where Are We Now?*, 80.

<sup>400</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 8; *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 41–47.

<sup>401</sup> See Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 21 and 69; *The Coming Community*, 13–14; *Use of Bodies*, 22; *Homo Sacer*, 187–88; and *The Highest Poverty*, xiii. Mills also puts forward this idea. See Mills, *Biopolitics*, 51.

Maxwell argue, that Agamben's claim for a new ethics is 'futural'.<sup>402</sup> Not only does this claim situate the present within a broad and deep history of sovereignty (which, according to Agamben, is characterised by the rule of law), but it also, and more specifically, seeks to transcend that logic of sovereignty.<sup>403</sup> What, thus, defines Agamben's construal of ethics? How does his ethics relate to law? Might there be an ethics that does not constitute itself in relation to law and that does not, consequently, expose or subordinate life to the law?

Agamben develops his discourse on ethics in the *Remnants of Auschwitz*.<sup>404</sup> However, his seminal elaborations on ethics, to which I will equally refer, go back to his earlier publications, such as *The Coming Community* and *Means without End*. In relation to these works, the *Remnants of Auschwitz* could be regarded as the maturation of his reflections on ethics based on Auschwitz. Agamben is interested in Auschwitz because he thinks it brings to the fore the problem of the relation between sovereign power, law and life. He uses Auschwitz as a ground both to criticize the current constitutions of biopolitics and, more specifically, to postulate a new account of ethics or of the relation between power and life.<sup>405</sup> In this sense, we can say that Agamben's ethical project is a meditation and a response to the biopolitical subjection of life. I pointed out in the first chapter that, in *Homo Sacer* and *State of Exception*, Agamben considers how, in his opinion, life is violently captured, controlled and dominated by sovereign power through law in the exception, and how, under the guise of the camps, biopolitics disintegrates into a thanatopolitics.<sup>406</sup> In the *Remnants of Auschwitz*, he endeavours to sketch, by postulating a new ethics, how to go out of the bounds of biopolitics and law. As he claims, he wants to erect 'some signposts allowing future cartographers of the new ethical territory to orient themselves'.<sup>407</sup> He begins this enterprise by invalidating what he considers to be the colonisation of ethics by law.

## 2.2 Ethics Colonised by Law

Agamben starts his discourse on ethics with a heated criticism of the relationship of ethics and law. More precisely, he builds his ethics on the refusal of law.<sup>408</sup> He argues

<sup>402</sup> See also Colebrook and Maxwell, *Agamben*, 91.

<sup>403</sup> Colebrook and Maxwell, *Agamben*, 91.

<sup>404</sup> Mills has also documented this point. See Mills, *Biopolitics*, 51–52.

<sup>405</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 11–12.

<sup>406</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 122–23.

<sup>407</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 13.

<sup>408</sup> Mills also maintains the same idea. She argues that Agamben premises his account of ethics on the rejection of all juridical notions that have defined ethics. See Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, 97–98 and *Biopolitics*, 51. See equally Parsley, who explains that 'Agamben eschews the determination of a discrete entity called "law"—rejecting, also, the classical presumption that law (howsoever derived) could structure an ethical "good life".' Parsley, 'Law', 199.

that ethical discourse in the entire tradition of Western thought is characterized by a fundamental problem: the implicit yet very significant conflation of ethical and juridical languages. ‘One of the most common mistakes’ of our age, he argues, ‘is the tacit confusion of ethical categories and juridical categories’.<sup>409</sup> He claims that the language of ethics is essentially ‘contaminated’ by law—especially when concepts such as responsibility and guilt, which have an essentially juridical origin and connotation, are used to deliberate on ethical matters.<sup>410</sup> Agamben’s point is that law has colonised ethics. He makes the same claim in *Means without End*. In this book, Agamben is all the more radical. He speaks of a total confusion of the relationship between law and ethics. He argues that ethics is not only contaminated, but, moreover, that ethics alongside religion has suffered from an unprecedented destruction. In his words,

there is no surer index of the irreparable ruination of any ethical experience than the confusion between ethical-religious categories and juridical concepts. Wherever morality is being discussed today, people immediately have legal categories on their lips, and wherever laws are being made and trials are being conducted, it is ethical concepts instead that are being brandished like the lictor’s ax.<sup>411</sup>

Two points in this citation call for attention. First, in Agamben’s opinion, ethical and juridical languages are undifferentiated. They interpenetrate each other so much that it is difficult to demarcate them. In his view, the language of law is used to make ethical formulations and vice versa. This means that there is no pure ethical language; the categories of ethics are those of law. This is why Agamben speaks of an ‘irreparable ruination’. For him, in fact, ethics has been completely subjugated by and subordinated to law. The second point is a point of contention. It concerns Agamben’s indiscriminate and imprecise use of the concepts of morality and ethics. Should they be understood as referring to the same reality? Agamben remains silent on the question.

In Agamben’s view, we are witnessing a complete rule of law on all aspects of human existence, including religion and theology.<sup>412</sup> In *Means without End*, Agamben substantiates this claim by analysing how the principle of Christian ethics, which is love, has been taken over by law. He contends that the Christian ethics of love was the principle that created unity among people and informed individual behaviour in society. However, with the ongoing supremacy of law, Christian ethics, Agamben

<sup>409</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 18.

<sup>410</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 18.

<sup>411</sup> Agamben, *Means without End*, 129.

<sup>412</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 18; *Means without End*, 129–33.

continues, has reached a 'definitive end'.<sup>413</sup> Marijsse explains: '[F]or Agamben the supremacy of the rule of law in the domain of ethics has radically eclipsed the power of, for example, the Christian doctrine of love. The rule of law actively seeks to represent and to maintain a divided body of humanity across different nationalities, territories, and languages.'<sup>414</sup> So far as Agamben is concerned, this domination of law comes to the fore in Auschwitz, which he sees as a paradigm of the state of exception and, therefore, of society controlled and dominated by law.<sup>415</sup>

To show concretely how law has taken ethics into its grip, Agamben analyses two notions in particular: responsibility and duty. For him, these notions are paradigmatic of the confusion between juridical and ethical concepts.<sup>416</sup> With respect to responsibility, he states that 'the concept of responsibility is also irremediably contaminated by law. Anyone who has tried to make use of it outside the juridical sphere knows this'.<sup>417</sup> The adverb 'irremediably' is striking in this passage. Agamben uses it to demonstrate the profound level of influence that the law exercises over ethical concepts and life in general.<sup>418</sup> To substantiate his point, Agamben shortly afterwards evokes the etymology of the concept of responsibility and its function in Ancient Roman law. He writes as follows: '[T]he Latin verb *spondeo*, which is the origin of our term "responsibility," means 'to become the guarantor of something for someone (or for oneself) with respect to someone'.<sup>419</sup> What Agamben means in the above passage—and this is important to revealing how law has colonised ethics—is the fact that, for him, responsibility in Ancient Rome invests someone with a legal charge or obligation that he or she must satisfy. Understood from this perspective, responsibility entails obedience to the law, for Agamben. The failure to fulfil this obligation may result in legal prosecutions. Accordingly, Agamben concludes that 'the gesture of assuming responsibility is therefore genuinely juridical and not ethical'.<sup>420</sup> Shortly after this, he adds, 'as such, responsibility is closely intertwined with the concept of *culpa* that, in a broad sense, indicates the imputability of damage'.<sup>421</sup> By tracing the meaning of *responsibility* back to its juridical genesis, Agamben points to the fact that the language of ethics in this context is not different from that of law. In fact, ethics borrows all its conceptual elements from law.

<sup>413</sup> Agamben, *Means without End*, 132.

<sup>414</sup> Marijsse, 'Agamben's Happy Life', 141.

<sup>415</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 49.

<sup>416</sup> He also examines the juridical significance of notions such as guilt, culpability and the like. See Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 20–25.

<sup>417</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 20.

<sup>418</sup> See Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 19.

<sup>419</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 21.

<sup>420</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 22.

<sup>421</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 22.

Concerning the notion of duty upon which he elaborates in *Opus Dei*, Agamben emphasizes that duty is one of the key notions that characterize modern ethics, especially Kantian ethics.<sup>422</sup> Kant tied ethics to law by making duty the principle of ethics, Agamben critically argues.<sup>423</sup> ‘The essential connection between duty and law’, he states, ‘is constantly repeated by Kant: “the concept of duty stands in immediate relation to law”’.<sup>424</sup> For Agamben, duty is a concept that simply means application of and obedience to law. From his point of view, duty is essentially a legal rather than ethical concept. To fulfil a duty, for him, is to act with respect for law or in conformity with the law.<sup>425</sup> As Mills has already observed, what Agamben wants to point out is that to conceive ethics in the legal framework can only be to reduce it to a mere ‘manifestation of law or norm’.<sup>426</sup> Agamben, however, does not see ethics from this perspective. For him, ethics must be a domain that is free from the dominion of norms. Therefore, he asserts that the task that confronts philosophy is to think ‘an ethics and politics entirely liberated from the concepts of duty and will’, given that they are law-related concepts.<sup>427</sup> The appearance of this statement is very strategic and thus, weighty. It intervenes in the conclusion of Agamben’s book, *Opus Dei*, where he summarizes and recalls the most prominent outcomes and theses of his investigations. At this juncture, we might wonder why ethics should abandon and depart from law. Or as Mills asks, ‘what is wrong with the law, such that contamination by it renders an ethical discourse obsolete or at least problematic?’<sup>428</sup>

### 2.3 Law: A Machine of Bare Life and Punishment

In the *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Agamben discusses the figure of the *Muselmann*. According to Agamben, the sovereign takes hold of life, controls it and subjects it to its legal mechanisms through law in the exception. Additionally, Agamben argues that, through the rule of law, the sovereign produces ‘half-living beings’,<sup>429</sup> ‘living dead’,<sup>430</sup> or beings ‘between life and death’<sup>431</sup> in whom—or perhaps in *which*, since they are not to be seen as real human beings in Agamben’s view but rather as living-dead corpses—‘the human and inhuman’<sup>432</sup> coincide. Law produces a life that is dehumanized. Excluded from society by law, and yet taken under the shackles of the same law, it is a life deprived of

<sup>422</sup> Agamben, *Opus Dei*, 90–107.

<sup>423</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 28.

<sup>424</sup> Agamben, *Opus Dei*, 113.

<sup>425</sup> See Agamben, *Opus Dei*, 90 and 107–09.

<sup>426</sup> Mills, *Biopolitics*, 52.

<sup>427</sup> Agamben, *Opus Dei*, 129.

<sup>428</sup> Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, 98.

<sup>429</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 51.

<sup>430</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 44.

<sup>431</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 55.

<sup>432</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 55.

any human value and reduced to the mere fact of biological existence that can, therefore, be eliminated with impunity.<sup>433</sup> It goes without saying that, for Agamben, any ethics that is conceived in relation to, and under the influence of, such an understanding of law cannot but create a life that is unworthy of being lived, that is, a life that is totally exposed to the mercy of law.<sup>434</sup> Because of this, the law extends its power to life as a whole, according to Agamben. This is what he defines in *Homo Sacer* as the juridification of life or, in his terms, ‘the politicization of life’.<sup>435</sup>

Since the law applies to life as a whole, the happy life—or the biopolitical happiness in this case, to be precise—corresponds to the type of life that is captured by law and exposed to sovereign power and government. However, in Agamben’s view, such an account of law and the happy life do not guarantee freedom of living. It prevents life from fully living out its potentiality, as to live simply corresponds to enacting the commands of the law and being predetermined by—and even reduced to—the model of life imposed by the law. The type of life the law produces is bare life. This is exactly what Agamben says when he writes as follows: ‘[L]aw that becomes indistinguishable from life in real state of exception is confronted by life that, in a symmetrical but inverse gesture, is entirely transformed into law’.<sup>436</sup> In other words, life becomes a mere replication of the form of life that the law dictates.<sup>437</sup> From this perspective, law is, for Agamben, ‘a masterful discourse, one which dominates, colonizes, and commits countless acts of violence in the very act and fact of its presence’.<sup>438</sup>

As it is understood and practiced in relation to sovereign power and the exception, Agamben also thinks the law is an instrument of punishment and trial. This idea is apparent in the critique of law which he develops, for instance, in *Karman*, a book in which Agamben undertakes a genealogical account of the most profound moral and ethical intuitions of the West. In this context, he argues that the main function of law is punishment and issuing sanctions, both of which are related to trial and therefore to jurisdiction.<sup>439</sup> Agamben explains this by convoking the juridical meaning that commands the understanding of the notion of guilt that, according to him, articulates and surrounds ethical decisions. He argues that guilt, which plays a crucial role in contemporary ethics, is originally a juridical concept that is directly linked to punishment and vice versa. Repeating Schmitt’s words, Agamben writes

<sup>433</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 138–39; *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 48–51.

<sup>434</sup> Agamben, *Where are We Now*, 80.

<sup>435</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 157.

<sup>436</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 55.

<sup>437</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 86.

<sup>438</sup> Fraser, *Law after Auschwitz*, 53.

<sup>439</sup> Agamben, *Karman*, 8–13.

that ‘there is no punishment without guilt’.<sup>440</sup> Punishment in this context implies one’s exclusion from the city and loss of political right, as Agamben’s discussion of the figure of the *homo sacer* illustrates.<sup>441</sup>

And in the *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Agamben argues that law’s primary aim is to condemn, to limit or circumscribe life and pronounce judgment.<sup>442</sup> ‘Law’, he states, ‘is solely directed toward judgment, independent of truth and justice’.<sup>443</sup> Note that Agamben specifies that, in his view, law is concerned neither with truth nor with justice. Instead, law is primarily concerned with seizing and imposing a ban on life such that it becomes that upon which the sovereign exercises his power. Since law for him always implies bare life and punishment, Agamben thinks that law and related concepts, including responsibility and guilt, cannot constitute good foundations for ethics. Therefore, he postulates a non-juridical account of ethics. As Mills explains, Agamben submits that ethics must rather be founded on ‘a terrain before judgement, in which the conditions of judgement are suspended’.<sup>444</sup> Before addressing the essential features of Agamben’s ethics, I briefly note that his conception of law and related concepts seems problematic for at least one reason.

Agamben’s construal of law—and its related concepts—is essentialist. It views the law from only one perspective, necessarily ascribing to it only one meaning.<sup>445</sup> As he demonstrates in *Homo Sacer*, the law for him consists in maintaining a violent relation to life.<sup>446</sup> And this meaning cannot be changed or adapted according to factual conditions. In *Biopolitics*, Mills also criticizes Agamben from this perspective. She argues that Agamben’s account of law ‘displays both a kind of conceptual fundamentalism—this is what the term originally meant, and therefore, what it must always mean—and an unwillingness to entertain more positive, if more fractured and complex, relations between ethics and law’.<sup>447</sup> If this reading is plausible, we can say that there is a sort of incoherence concerning conceptual analysis in Agamben’s works taken as a whole. Especially in *The Kingdom and the Glory*, Agamben advocates for a diachronic displacement of concepts and their meanings. As we have seen above,

<sup>440</sup> Agamben, *Karman*, 9–10.

<sup>441</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 8–12.

<sup>442</sup> See Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 18–21. Mills also testifies to this interpretation; see Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, 97.

<sup>443</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 18.

<sup>444</sup> Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, 87–88.

<sup>445</sup> In a YouTube video in which he introduces Agamben’s book, *State of Exception*, Van Dyk also defends a similar opinion. See Van Dyk, ‘Intro to Giorgio Agamben’. Available at: Intro to Giorgio Agamben’s “State of Exception” | Part 3 - YouTube.

<sup>446</sup> See also Mills, *Biopolitics*, 54. She holds a similar position.

<sup>447</sup> Mills, *Biopolitics*, 54.

it is quite surprising that his account of law seems to contradict the thesis he gives in *The Kingdom and the Glory* regarding the evolution and adaptation of concepts.

One may think that Agamben sees the law as such a special concept or phenomenon that it escapes the general logic of the displacement of concepts which he defends in *The Kingdom and the Glory*. Nonetheless, we must say that Agamben's approach to the law seeks to draw attention to, and warn against, the disintegration of law. In doing that, his account of law questions the consequences of a (bio)political system and society that tend to put excessive emphasis on law as the only element that constitutes and defines life in society. Such society, in Agamben's view, creates docile bodies and produces a life that is devoid of any value—bare life.<sup>448</sup> As Fraser notes, Agamben's reading of law encourages us to think of social life in 'a modified ethical' and political framework in which law does not have the last say on life.<sup>449</sup>

#### 2.4 Ethics beyond, and without, Law

Upon arguing for the isolation of ethics from law, Agamben casts ethics onto a new terrain. In *Opus Dei*, he argues that ethics must be free from duty. As we have seen, duty ties ethics to the supremacy of law, according to Agamben.<sup>450</sup> He contends that both being and praxis, that is, 'what one is and what one does',<sup>451</sup> coincide with each other through the paradigm of duty and enter into indistinction. Consequently, being, from his viewpoint, dissolves into acting such that 'what is real'—which in this context should be understood as referring to life, or the happy life in particular—is reduced to what is effective and manageable (or governable).<sup>452</sup> The problem Agamben sees in conceiving ethics from the perspective of duty is that such a conception reduces life to a rigid accomplishment of the law, expressed under the disguise of duty. In *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Agamben criticizes this account of ethics. He argues that Auschwitz 'marks the end and the ruin of every ethics of dignity and conformity to a norm'.<sup>453</sup> In other words, Auschwitz, for him, shows how the ethics of duty, that is, ethics under the influence of law, captures life, exposes it and puts it in direct relation to the law. Life becomes the primary element that the law confronts and upon which it exercises its power. In this way, life is characterized as the direct outcome of the law that, in the end, creates docile and living-dead bodies—or bare life.<sup>454</sup>

<sup>448</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 170–71. De la Durantaye also documents this interpretation. See De la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, 254–55.

<sup>449</sup> See Fraser, *Law after Auschwitz*, 61.

<sup>450</sup> Agamben, *Opus Dei*, 109–11.

<sup>451</sup> Mills, *Biopolitics*, 52.

<sup>452</sup> Agamben, *Opus Dei*, xiii.

<sup>453</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 69.

<sup>454</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 47–51.

For this reason, Agamben claims that the new Western ethics must be articulated to define life beyond—and outside—the confines of legal regulation and the dominion of sovereign power.<sup>455</sup> Therefore, he advocates for an ethics ‘beyond good and evil’ and responsibility and guilt, which from his perspective are provinces of law.<sup>456</sup> ‘Ethics’, he writes, ‘is the sphere that recognizes neither guilt nor responsibility; it is, as Spinoza knew, the doctrine of the happy life. To assume guilt and responsibility—which can, at times, be necessary—is to leave the territory of ethics and enter that of law’.<sup>457</sup> This passage is crucial so far as Agamben’s account of ethics is concerned. It summarizes his ethical project in at least two ways.

First, Agamben dissociates ethics from responsibility, as the latter is a province of law that defines life as the fulfilment of duties. Consequently, he distances himself from previous conceptions of ethics—such as those of Levinas and Jonas, which revolve around the notion of responsibility.<sup>458</sup> For him, such ethics cannot give a proper account of human life and such events as occurred at Auschwitz.<sup>459</sup> In Agamben’s view, ethics considered from this perspective merely expresses and perpetuates the supremacy of law over human life in the exception: ‘Auschwitz is precisely the place in which the state of exception coincides perfectly with the rule and the extreme situation becomes the paradigm of daily life’.<sup>460</sup> Moreover, he argues that ethics built around notions of responsibility and guilt is symptomatic of the biopolitical reign over life.<sup>461</sup> Conceived within this framework, an ethics of responsibility, according to him, inscribes life directly into the mechanisms of biopolitics and law in order to manage it in a society that, in his conception, has become a permanent state of exception<sup>462</sup>—as is indicated by his analyses of the paradigms of *homo sacer* in *Homo Sacer* and the *Muselmann* in the *Remnant of Auschwitz*.<sup>463</sup>

Second, Agamben links ethics directly to happiness. As noted in the previous chapter,<sup>464</sup> we must emphasise that *happiness* in Agamben refers to a life lived outside the bounds of law and sovereign power. It is a life that escapes the sovereign ban and over which the latter has no control. Agamben’s claim for an ethics of happiness provides the basis for a relation to life that does not subordinate or reduce it to external forces, be they political

<sup>455</sup> Agamben, *Means without End*, 113–14. Mills also puts forward a similar idea. See Mills, *Biopolitics*, 52.

<sup>456</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 21.

<sup>457</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 24. See also Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, 97–98.

<sup>458</sup> See Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 22.

<sup>459</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 22–23.

<sup>460</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 49.

<sup>461</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 22.

<sup>462</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 181; *State of Exception*, 1–31; *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 49.

<sup>463</sup> See for instance, Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 126–27; *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 41–62.

<sup>464</sup> See Chapter 1, Section 3.3.

or religious. Such forces, Agamben thinks, prevent life from deploying its potential because they integrate life into the calculations of power.<sup>465</sup> One of the implications we can draw from Agamben's account of ethics is that life in society must not be thought from the perspective of punishment and/or reward validated by law. It is not the law, understood in the Agambenian sense discussed above,<sup>466</sup> that must dictate how life is to be regulated and must punish whatever disobeys. Rather, life must be thought from within the framework provided by how each individual lives and realises his or her potentiality. I expand on this last point in the following section.<sup>467</sup>

As we have just noted, Agamben argues for an ethics free from law in *Opus Dei*. In the *Remnants of Auschwitz*, however, he puts forwards a rather curious and enigmatic account of ethics: an ethics based on the notion of 'non-responsibility' or a 'zone of irresponsibility'.<sup>468</sup> He specifies that this notion does not imply impunity. He argues that it refers to a type of responsibility that is qualitatively 'greater' than the legal responsibility we are used to. Nonetheless, Agamben does not convincingly explain what this non-responsibility consists in and in what sense it is greater than the legal responsibility he criticises. He states only that this new foundation of ethics—the irresponsibility—is a responsibility that cannot be assumed.<sup>469</sup> But in this case, the question is as follows: What does this 'irresponsibility' consist of? What is it all about? If one considers the context from which Agamben speaks of this new conception of responsibility, one might infer that it refers to a responsibility that cannot be established and defined by law. In fact, it is a responsibility beyond law, which is to say, a responsibility that suspends the categories of law that have hitherto presided over ethical problems.<sup>470</sup> But, as Mills pointed out, Agamben's notion of irresponsibility as the ground and 'core idea' of the new ethics lacks conceptual clarification. In fact, it is very difficult to understand.<sup>471</sup> It is not clear how turning responsibility into 'non-responsibility' or 'irresponsibility' would effectively liberate ethics from law. It is, in other words, inconceivable how this kind of responsibility relates to law or if it is itself free of contamination from law.<sup>472</sup> Nevertheless, the new ethics Agamben strives to introduce is an attempt to redefine our relation to life. It is an ethics that would consider life without presuppositions and that does not put life at the mercy of the law such that the latter excludes something from it, as in bare life.

<sup>465</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 128.

<sup>466</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 1.1 and 1.2.

<sup>467</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 3.

<sup>468</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 21. See also De la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, 255.

<sup>469</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 21.

<sup>470</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 21.

<sup>471</sup> Mills, *Biopolitics*, 52.

<sup>472</sup> For more details, see Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, 98–99.

As discussed in the following section, Agamben also uses this conception of ethics to cast a new understanding of politics.

### 3. Ethics and Politics

Agamben's criticism of the predominance of law culminates in the elaboration of a new type of relationship between ethics and politics: Ethics and politics in Agamben are intertwined; they are not to be regarded as two separate domains. In this section, I explain how these two domains overlap in his works. It will become clear that Agamben construes them not only as possible ways to overcome the dynamics of biopolitics but also as possible ways to constitute a new relation to life. Before examining this latter point in detail, I must specify that Agamben's account of politics breaks from biopolitics. As we have already seen, biopolitics, according to Agamben, is dominated by the logic of sovereignty and government.<sup>473</sup> In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben defines his own account of politics as 'a completely new politics—that is, a politics no longer founded on the *exceptio* of bare life'.<sup>474</sup> Biopolitics, on the basis of the exception, captures life, divides it into *zōē* and *bios*, and then, as a result of this very seizure and separation, it bans *zōē* and deprives it of any political meaning.<sup>475</sup> On the other hand, the 'new politics' Agamben puts forward would heal the fracture between *bios* and *zōē* by creating a new 'form-of-life'.<sup>476</sup>

In *The Coming Community*, Agamben refers to this new politics as 'the coming politics'.<sup>477</sup> He clarifies that it is a new form of politics because it does not rest on the opposition between 'the control of the State' and 'the non-State (humanity)' that constitutes biopolitics.<sup>478</sup> Agamben's point is that biopolitics operates following a presuppositional logic. This is the logic according to which a phenomenon, such as life or power, in the case of Agamben, is 'split into two parts, the former of these presupposed as a foundation for the latter yet at the same time excluded from it'.<sup>479</sup> In other words, biopolitics presupposes, and functions on the basis of, the opposition between the sovereign power symbolised in Agamben's quote by 'the State', and life, understood as the 'non-State'.<sup>480</sup> In this sense, biopolitics, for him, is essentially a violent struggle in which sovereign power always and already constitutes itself in relation to life, which it wants

<sup>473</sup> See Chapter 1, Section 5 and Chapter 2, Section 1 above.

<sup>474</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 11.

<sup>475</sup> See Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 263.

<sup>476</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 10–11.

<sup>477</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 85.

<sup>478</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 85.

<sup>479</sup> Prozorov, 'Living à la mode', 145.

<sup>480</sup> See also Edkins, 'Whatever Politics', 82.

to dominate.<sup>481</sup> On the contrary, the new politics must found itself on the dissolution of that opposition. It must abandon the presuppositional logic that has hitherto defined the Western political tradition for a different and new logic articulated around the notion of ‘form-of-life’ or, what Agamben calls in both *The Coming Community* and *Means without End*, ‘whatever singularities’.<sup>482</sup>

Agamben’s claim that ethics and politics intersect might seem rather startling. Nonetheless, this is precisely the point that needs to be emphasized. It indicates that, in his conception, politics, as both discipline and phenomenon, *mutatis mutandis*, cannot be entirely separated from other disciplines and phenomena such as ethics,<sup>483</sup> religion and theology,<sup>484</sup> economics and language.<sup>485</sup> In fact, defining this unity ‘is one of the guiding ideas of Agamben’s philosophy’.<sup>486</sup> However, as De la Durantaye remarks, ‘this does not mean that politics is anything and everything one might choose to bring under its heading; but it does mean that, for Agamben, these are aspects of our lives that are informed by political conceptions and rich in political consequences we are inclined to neglect’.<sup>487</sup>

The underlying nexus between ethics and politics is first expressed through Agamben’s notion of community, which he describes as both a political and an ethical entity. Through his idea of community, Agamben seeks to elaborate on how politics should relate to life both individually and collectively. Second, the connection between ethics and politics is premised on the fact that Agamben ascribes the same goal to both. Their common goal is to achieve happiness for both the individual and the community. The happiness at issue is realised upon the ashes of the presuppositional dynamics of biopolitics, which comes through destitution.

### 3.1 The Community between Ethics and Politics

Ethics, as concerns Agamben, has a political significance. For him, it refers both to an individual way of relating to life and to living outside sovereign power and law. Ethics is also articulated as an attempt to think the possibility of constituting a political community. In this context, individuals and their relations to life should be seen in the general framework of the community. Thus, it could be said that Agamben’s reflection

<sup>481</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 263 and 265.

<sup>482</sup> See Agamben, *Means without End*, 86 and *The Coming Community*, 85–86.

<sup>483</sup> See Agamben, *The Highest Poverty* and *Opus Dei*.

<sup>484</sup> See especially Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*.

<sup>485</sup> See Agamben, *Means without End*, ix.

<sup>486</sup> De la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, 13. However, de la Durantaye does not elaborate on what sustains the underlying connection between ethics and politics.

<sup>487</sup> De la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, 13.

upon ethics is equally a reflection about the community.<sup>488</sup> A plausible way to highlight the nexus between ethics and politics, seen from the perspective of community, is certainly to analyse Agamben's appropriation of Paul's ethical and political project: the establishment of 'a messianic institution—or rather, a messianic community that wants to present itself as an institution'.<sup>489</sup> The reason for this choice is twofold. First, Agamben's elaborations on community depend greatly on Pauline insights.<sup>490</sup> *The Time That Remains* is an exegesis of Paul's letters to the Romans and other recipients, especially the Corinthians. In this context, Agamben introduces his own conception of community. The new political community he advocates for is built on the Pauline discourse regarding the 'messianic community'.<sup>491</sup> Second, Paul's apostleship is not only a religious but also, and perhaps more importantly, a political action.<sup>492</sup> For these reasons, it is important to make sense of Agamben's reading of Paul if we are to address the question of the nexus between ethics and politics in Agamben.

In *The Time That Remains*, Agamben shows that Paul developed his account of community as an alternative to the Jewish and Greco-Roman communities. According to Agamben, Paul did not want merely to institute a novel manner of constituting oneself as a subject, that is, of living and relating to life individually and collectively, which in this case means ethics. In the same vein, he also wanted to form a political community characterised by a new relation to law opposed to existing Jewish and Greco-Roman conceptions.<sup>493</sup> For Agamben, this means that Paul was indeed both a religious and a political figure who wanted to establish and redefine the relationship between life and power both inside and outside the Church.<sup>494</sup> According to Agamben, one particular feature characterises the Pauline community: It suspends the actual ethical and political conditions. In fact, it enacts a change of attitude towards those conditions and makes individuals experience them as though they are not. Agamben insists that Pauline community does not merely put into question those actual political and ethical conditions; it also 'revokes' them.<sup>495</sup> However, the revocation of which Agamben speaks does not imply the destruction of the existing 'factual condition'<sup>496</sup> and established norms. According to Agamben, this is what Paul means, writing for instance in I Corinthians 7:30—"those who mourn as not mourning"—by *hōs mē*, which can be translated 'as not'.

<sup>488</sup> See also De la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, 161.

<sup>489</sup> Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 1.

<sup>490</sup> Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 22 and 95–103.

<sup>491</sup> Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 2.

<sup>492</sup> For more details, see Cimino, 'Europe and Paul of Tarsus', 301–02.

<sup>493</sup> Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 1–2 and 22–23.

<sup>494</sup> See Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 19.

<sup>495</sup> Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 23.

<sup>496</sup> Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 23.

Agamben explains that, for Paul, the *hōs mē* entails subtraction from current social and legal conditions.<sup>497</sup> And enacting the *hōs mē* means suspending the Jewish law that introduces a division among humans in society: Jews against non-Jews, the circumcised against the uncircumcised.<sup>498</sup> Agamben takes up this Pauline idea to advance a conception of politics that, as we will see, will break the dynamics of biopolitics. Like Paul, Agamben also aims to found a new political community. He introduces the idea of such a community in *The Coming Community*. One of the fundamental theses he develops therein is that the coming community will be characterised by the refusal to draw lines of separation and division of life. The establishment of such borderlines is proper to the presuppositional dynamics of biopolitics. The biopolitical community is built upon the opposition between various types of life and identities. It demarcates those who belong to the community from those who do not, citizens from non-citizens, those who are included in the city from those who are excluded, outcasts from insiders. In Agamben's terminology, this divisional categorisation corresponds to the split of life between *bios* or 'the qualified life' and *zōē* or 'bare life'.<sup>499</sup>

The coming community for Agamben must, however, deactivate the apparatus of the current factual biopolitical conditions. It must be a community that does not possess or introduce any identity or belonging which one might claim.<sup>500</sup> In other words, according to Agamben, the coming community will consider life and human beings individually or/and collectively as such. Life in this context will be taken as an entity that cannot be divided as it is under the rule of sovereign power and economy.<sup>501</sup> This life appears to be what he calls 'whatever being' in *The Coming Community*<sup>502</sup> and 'form-of-life' in other works, especially in *The Highest Poverty* and *The Use of Bodies*.<sup>503</sup> Through these notions, which form the backbone of his idea of community, Agamben is fundamentally doing two things. First, he is breaking and disrupting the presuppositional logic and language that has defined the Western linguistic and political tradition. In this way, 'whatever being' and 'form-of-life' provide gateways towards a new conception of the individual and societal existence. Second, Agamben is instituting an account of politics that is ethically oriented. This coming politics is one of inclusiveness: i.e., it is one that will not exclude any singularity whatsoever and will, therefore, banish all forms

<sup>497</sup> Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 28.

<sup>498</sup> Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 23.

<sup>499</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1–4.

<sup>500</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 85–86.

<sup>501</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 84–86; *Homo Sacer*, 188 and *The Use of Bodies*, 265. For further elaborations, see Edkins, 'Whatever Politics', 70–91.

<sup>502</sup> See Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 87

<sup>503</sup> See Agamben, *The Highest Poverty* and *The Use of Bodies*.

of social divisions, discriminations and identity politics.<sup>504</sup> Accordingly, human life in society will no more be defined based on a given identity, origin or belonging. Instead, as discussed in the following section, human life will be conceived as the happy life, which will be understood as life that escapes sovereign power and is fundamentally *without* any predefined or predetermined identity.<sup>505</sup>

### 3.2 The Happy Life between Ethics and Politics

The nexus between ethics and politics can also be addressed from the perspective of the happy life, which, in Agamben's view, is the end goal of both individual and communal life. This idea comes forth in *The Highest Poverty*, a book dedicated to the examination of the idea of 'a communal form of life'.<sup>506</sup> In this context, Agamben clearly underlines the politico-ethical significance of community and relates it to happiness. 'The idea of a "common life," he writes, 'seems to have an obvious political meaning'.<sup>507</sup> To explain this political meaning, Agamben evokes Aristotle, who characterizes the *polis* as a gathering of individuals for the purpose of good life: i.e., of 'living well'.<sup>508</sup> By way of this reference to Aristotle, Agamben links ethics<sup>509</sup> with politics and 'living well'. In this sense, the happy life becomes the common ground that brings ethics and politics together. This reading becomes more apparent when one considers the definition of ethics which Agamben provides in *The Use of Bodies*. In this book, he describes ethics as an attempt both to contrast with and to break from the logic of sovereign power and, perhaps more importantly, as an effort to offer a different notion of life. He defines this life as the happy life, that is, as a life upon which sovereign power has neither hold nor control and from which it is impossible to exclude something like bare life.<sup>510</sup>

We find the same line of argument in *Means without End*—this time in relation to politics. He argues that politics must be directed towards 'the full enjoyment of life'.<sup>511</sup> The junction at which he makes this claim is important: It is in the last part of the book, where he critically discusses recent events in the West, including the Gulf War<sup>512</sup> and the Fall of the Soviet Union.<sup>513</sup> Within this context, he introduces his ideas about the need to think of a new politics. And, drawing on Walter Benjamin,

<sup>504</sup> See Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 84–86.

<sup>505</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 86.

<sup>506</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, xi and xiii.

<sup>507</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 11.

<sup>508</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 11.

<sup>509</sup> The term *ethics* is used and understood here in the sense we have already seen as referring to the individual and communal or collective attitude and relation to life. See Chapter 2, Section 1 above.

<sup>510</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 22 and 206–10.

<sup>511</sup> Agamben, *Means without End*, 113.

<sup>512</sup> Agamben, *Means without End*, 102–06.

<sup>513</sup> Agamben, *Means without End*, 109–17.

Agamben submits that politics should be ‘erected on the idea of happiness’.<sup>514</sup> A few lines afterwards, he adds that the happy life at issue breaks from ‘naked life’, which is the domain and product of sovereignty. In his words,

“The happy life” on which political philosophy should be founded thus cannot be either the naked life that sovereignty posits as a presupposition so as to turn into its own subject or the impenetrable extraneity of science and of modern biopolitics that everybody today tries in vain to sacralize.<sup>515</sup>

Two important points must be emphasised in the passage above. First, as we have seen, Agamben defines politics directly in relation to happiness. In fact, for him, making the happy life possible in society is the essential task and goal of politics. Interestingly, Agamben makes the same claim at the beginning of *Homo Sacer*. Based on Aristotle, he argues that politics is geared towards the good life or happy life. The repetition of this claim suggests that, for Agamben, politics is not concerned merely with the general organization of societal life. Second—given that Agamben defines ethics as ‘the doctrine of the happy life’ by linking politics to happiness in the *Remnants of Auschwitz*, as noted in the previous section—he also indirectly, but closely, links politics to ethics. If this interpretation is plausible, it can be argued that, for Agamben, both politics and ethics form zones of interdependence and relationship in which one cannot be properly understood apart from the other. Politics reveals its full significance only when it is considered in relation to ethics and vice versa. Thus, besides the notion of community, the ambiguous connection of ethics and politics in Agamben is consequent to the fact that the happy life is situated at their crossroads. Happiness thus has a double face. It does not concern the individual alone but also the community in which the individual lives and realises life.

Agamben does not *per se* invent this double expression of happiness. It originates from, and is already present in, the sources that constitute the framework for and the basis of his elaborations—namely, Aristotle and W. Benjamin. From Aristotle, Agamben draws the idea that the happy life is the goal of politics.<sup>516</sup> From Benjamin he draws the notion that ethics is the domain of happiness<sup>517</sup> and, hence, that politics is united with ethics under the umbrella of happiness. However, the specificity of Agamben’s approach is that he carefully situates this living well outside the grasp of

<sup>514</sup> Agamben, *Means without End*, 113.

<sup>515</sup> Agamben, *Means without End*, 113.

<sup>516</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 2.

<sup>517</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 24.

sovereign power and economy/government.<sup>518</sup> In *The Highest Poverty*, Agamben uses the Franciscan Order as a paradigm of a happy life organised beyond sovereignty. To this end, he emphasises two points. First, the entire history of monasticism in general and the Franciscan Order in particular is constituted as a *fuga mundi* (flight from the world), forming a new way of living that neither situates life nor puts it on the level of law.<sup>519</sup> On the contrary, this new way of living puts life in relation to itself. Second, Agamben emphasises that ethics has a political meaning. Ethics, for him, is an effort to establish not merely a new type of individual life but also a political community, understood as the gathering of individuals for the sake of the good life.<sup>520</sup> With regard to both points, Agamben's thesis can be summarized as follows. First, there has been an unprecedented shift in the constitution and history of monasticism in the West. This paradigm is relevant here because, according to Agamben, it has greatly influenced the entire tradition of Western political, ethical and juridical conceptuality.<sup>521</sup> In fact, Agamben refers to this shift as a 'transformation' that 'collides with law as much as with ethics and politics'.<sup>522</sup> Second, Agamben observes that the move in question went from anachoretic life to cenobitic life, that is, from solitary or individual living to 'living in common [*commune viventes*]'.<sup>523</sup>

Now, the question is this: What is the role of ethics and politics in this context? It must be averred that Agamben himself is not as clear as one would expect about the question at issue. Apart from contending that ethics and politics collide in the Franciscan way of life, Agamben seems silent on what ethics and politics should mean in that context.<sup>524</sup> Nevertheless, it can be argued that, within the context of his project of the coming politics, ethics and politics are envisaged as possible means to thinking of life as a phenomenon that must not always be exposed to sovereign power and government in exceptional situations. To this end, ethics and politics, from Agamben's point of view, enact a new conception of life. Life must be cast on a terrain that is free from the dominion of sovereign power and government and all their mechanisms. In this way, ethics and politics can make possible individual and communal happiness.<sup>525</sup>

<sup>518</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 11; *The Highest Poverty*, 11.

<sup>519</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, xiii.

<sup>520</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 9.

<sup>521</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 4.

<sup>522</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 4.

<sup>523</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 12.

<sup>524</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 4–15.

<sup>525</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 11.

### 3.3 Destitution between Ethics and Politics

As we saw in Chapter 1, Agamben's thought develops as a critique of Western biopolitics. For him, the entire history of biopolitics, at least in the West, constitutes itself as the government of life and as a violent action of sovereign power over life. Near the end of *The Use of Bodies*, Agamben concludes that it is impossible to develop a proper conception of life so long as we remain enclosed in this structure of biopolitics.<sup>526</sup> For this reason, he suggests that we need today to abandon or depose the structure of biopolitics and imagine a politics of emancipation that would adequately address the aporia of our time.<sup>527</sup>

Agamben associates politics and ethics by casting them onto a different territory. For him, ethics and politics must break from biopolitics and go beyond its logic: sovereignty and government.<sup>528</sup> In *Means without End*, he makes it quite clear that the politics of the coming world must be a 'nonstatal and nonjuridical politics', and that the relationship between politics and life must 'be entirely thought' anew.<sup>529</sup> However, in this context, he does not explicitly elaborate on how politics and ethics will break from biopolitics. He limits himself to repeatedly maintaining that politics—and so also ethics—must abandon the conceptuality of sovereign power and government, or at least consider them from a wholly new perspective.<sup>530</sup> Agamben makes the same claim in *Homo Sacer*. And he adds that the new politics must re-construct 'the link between *zōē* and *bios*' and that 'the beautiful day of life will be given citizenship'.<sup>531</sup> The new politics must provide an understanding of life unlike that which defines biopolitics. This new understanding should not only liberate life from the grip of sovereign power and economy but also, and especially, propose a new way of living. What Agamben actually means in this context is that politics and ethics are to be theorised beyond the contemporary violent and dominating biopolitical hold on and abandonment of life. As Mills remarks, 'what is required', for Agamben, is 'to provide a 'unitary centre' for a coming politics', that is, 'a way of thinking the concept of life

<sup>526</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 263; see also *Homo Sacer*, 188.

<sup>527</sup> See Agamben, *Means without End*, 108–13.

<sup>528</sup> See, for instance, Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 11.

<sup>529</sup> Agamben, *Means without End*, 111.

<sup>530</sup> See Agamben, *Means without End*, 11–12. He writes: '[S]overeignty is the idea of an undecidable nexus between violence and right, between the living and language—a nexus that necessarily takes the paradoxical form of a decision regarding the state of exception (Schmitt) or *ban* (Nancy) in which the law (language) relates to the living by withdrawing from it, by a-bandoning it to its own violence and its own unrelatedness. Sacred life—the life that is presupposed and abandoned by the law in the state of exception—is the mute carrier of sovereignty, the real *sovereign subject*'.

<sup>531</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 10–11.

that no longer operates within the terrain of *bios* and *zōē*.<sup>532</sup> Hence, he envisages a politics of escape or emancipation from the mechanisms of biopolitics.

Agamben extensively and explicitly discusses this means of exit in both *The Time That Remains* and *The Use of Bodies*. He also considers it very briefly in his article, 'From the State of Control to a Praxis of Destituent Power'. The same idea of the politics of withdrawal is equally at play in his other works, including *The Highest Poverty*, in which he analyses the Franciscan monastic way of living. He refers to this politics using concepts such as 'destituent potential',<sup>533</sup> 'subtraction',<sup>534</sup> and 'destituent power'.<sup>535</sup> Agamben conceives of destituent potential as a form of power that is meant to break with and go outside the circular dynamic of biopolitics which, according to him, rests on violence: the violence of law on life.<sup>536</sup> To put it differently, the specificity of the politics of escape, from Agamben's perspective, is that it does not rely on the dialectic and violent logic of exclusion and inclusion of life in the exception that defines biopolitics. From this point of view, destitution is to be understood as the solution, which Agamben puts forward against the current 'aporias' with which the mechanisms and conceptual framework of biopolitics are confronted.<sup>537</sup>

As Cimino has already pointed out, Agamben's 'ideas of destituent power and of a politics of escape or withdrawal are directly linked to the concept of deactivation (*désœuvrement, inoperosità*)', which is central in Agamben's book on Paul: *The Time That Remains*.<sup>538</sup> Agamben himself also ties destituent potential to his notion of 'inoperativity', which plays a key role in *The Use of Bodies*.<sup>539</sup> The common denominator among all these notions is conveyed by what they express: the action of deposing the actual biopolitical dialectics of life and introducing a new relation to life. 'What is in question' in this politics, Agamben says, is 'the capacity to deactivate and render inoperative—a power, a function, a human operation—without simply destroying it, but by liberating the potentials that have remained inactive in it in order to allow a different use of them'.<sup>540</sup> In other words, the politics of withdrawal, in Agamben's view, puts factual legal constitutions, status and identities on hold, not in a bid to create new ones, but to experience them otherwise. Concretely, one does not need to

<sup>532</sup> Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, 117.

<sup>533</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 263–79.

<sup>534</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 115–16.

<sup>535</sup> Agamben, 'From the State of Control to a Praxis of Destituent Power'.

<sup>536</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 263. Cimino also testifies to this reading in his article, 'Europe and Paul of Tarsus', 300.

<sup>537</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 263–64.

<sup>538</sup> Cimino, 'Europe and Paul of Tarsus', 301.

<sup>539</sup> See especially Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 273.

<sup>540</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 273.

change one's juridical and social status. For example, a slave does not cease being a slave. But remaining a slave, one lives in a *new way*, that is, as not a slave. Instead of identifying oneself with one's social status, deactivation calls one to consider oneself not reduced to it or corresponding with it.<sup>541</sup>

A question arises regarding how relevant destituent potential is when it comes to the inseparability of ethics and politics in Agamben. Destitution is a good example when it comes to the explication of the relation between ethics and politics. It has both a political and an ethical significance. Politically, the destituent power enacts a change of attitude towards constituted legal norms. This attitudinal alteration is, according to Agamben, experienced as a form of a 'radical subtraction of life from the sphere of law'.<sup>542</sup> Put differently, the politics of withdrawal enacts a novel relation to the constituted juridical order. The actual jurisdictions are not *per se* destroyed, but they are deactivated, that is, suspended—as is the status of law in the exception. In any case, current laws are experienced differently. These laws are experienced as not existing in the sense that they have no more hold on life. Life is detached from them and liberated from their influence. This is to say that life constitutes itself independently and differently from the dictates of the constituted order. This movement of subtraction becomes particularly evident if we consider Agamben's reading of Franciscan Monasticism in *The Highest Poverty*. His take on this point can substantially be reconstructed as follows. While many monastic orders in the thirteenth century constituted themselves in opposition to the existing juridical authority of the Church, presenting themselves as the '*real Church*', the Franciscan Order avoided any conflict with the Church's legal authority. Instead, the Franciscans renounced any conformity to the law. Their movement sought to neutralise the importance of law with respect to life.<sup>543</sup>

What is decisive in Agamben's appropriation of the Franciscans is that, according to Agamben, the Franciscan movement expresses a mode of life that seeks to distance itself from the constituted legal order and to cast life outside it. For him, the Franciscans premised not a violent revolution within the Church—which would correspond to and repeat the logic of sovereignty—but rather a novel political attitude towards life. The attitude in question is the autonomy of life with regard to law. Agamben thinks that the Franciscan friars, by subtracting themselves from the established juridical norms of the Church, introduced a style of life that confined itself neither to the application of laws nor to the institution of alternatives to the laws

<sup>541</sup> See Agamben, *The Times That Remains*, 23–25.

<sup>542</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 116.

<sup>543</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 109–22.

that were in force in the Church.<sup>544</sup> On the contrary, they put forward an ‘unreserved claim of a life outside the law’.<sup>545</sup> Accordingly, they demonstrate that it is not the law that must shape life. Instead, life must be guided by the fact and the dynamics of living itself. Agamben expresses this idea along these lines: ‘Franciscanism, more radically than any other contemporary religious movements and more than any other monastic order, can be defined as the invention of a “form of life,” that is, a life that remains inseparable from its form’.<sup>546</sup> Franciscans, for Agamben, can be read as a destitution of the then-established (or constituted) political power in order to found a new relation to life; a relation that is not defined by laws, but by life itself.<sup>547</sup> From this perspective, the destituent power or potential, as regards Agamben, could be construed as a form of power that liberates life from the sovereign ban and casts it on a terrain free from the law.

If Agamben’s reading of the Franciscans portrays the political significance of destitution, his interpretation of Paul’s apostleship, alongside its political character, points out the ethical arm of destitution. As many scholars have already documented, Agamben’s exegesis of Paul isolates a specific formula, *katargein*, and its associated corollary, the *hōs mē*, which in Paul, according to Agamben, defines the messianic time as a destitution. Agamben elaborates upon these Pauline notions in *The Time That Remains* and *The Use of Bodies*.<sup>548</sup> He argues that Paul uses these concepts to address the relation of the Messiah—and of the new community, which he enacts—to the law.<sup>549</sup> *Katargein* in Paul means to ‘deactivate’ something, Agamben continues, which in this context is the law. Agamben uses different formulae to talk about this. In *The Use of Bodies*, for instance, he states that Paul’s *katargein* means to “render inoperative” (*argos*). Agamben uses this term to say that that any power and authority should be rendered ‘*aergon* and ineffective’.<sup>550</sup> What Agamben means here is that the Pauline *katargein* implies the interruption, or at least the suspension, of the application and efficacy of the law in order to liberate life from its dominion. Consequently, the Pauline deactivation, or the Agambenian interpretation of the Pauline destitution, does not entail destruction of the preestablished societal order. Instead, in line

<sup>544</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 115–16.

<sup>545</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 116.

<sup>546</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 121.

<sup>547</sup> Prozorov also testifies to this interpretation. See Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 143.

<sup>548</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 273; *The Time That Remains*, 23–27 and 95–99. See also Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 143; Cimino, ‘Europe and Paul of Tarsus’, 298–302; Balibar, ‘Inoperosità’, 23–24.

<sup>549</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 273. See also Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 142–43.

<sup>550</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 273; *The Time That Remains*, 95–96.

with the politics of *hōs mē*, *katargein* only empties the factual conditions of their applicability by putting them on hold.<sup>551</sup>

Agamben's reading of the Pauline destitution of law, both as *katargein* and *hōs mē*, is relevant here because it puts forward the idea of a new ethos: that is, an innovative and proper way of relating to one's life in society beyond the logic of sovereignty. The politics of destituent power enacts an *attitudinal* change towards both the constituted juridical conditions and ethical and historical ones. In fact, the significance of the politics at issue lies in the fact that it undermines factual social conditions by revoking them—that is, by taking out their actuality and restoring them to potentiality.<sup>552</sup> In Agamben's own words, 'living in the form of the "as not" means rendering destitute all juridical and social ownership, without this deposition founding a new identity. A form-of-life is, in this sense, that which ceaselessly deposes the social conditions in which it finds itself to live, without negating them, but simply by using them'.<sup>553</sup> This is to say that the *hōs mē*, according to Agamben, enacts a new relation to life or a new way of living. It opens factual conditions to a different use. And this opening of the social conditions to a new use takes place in the notion of the form-of-life. As the subsequent chapter elaborates, the form-of-life is Agamben's most important suggestion for a concrete way to escape biopolitics.

As we can see, the destituent potential does not merely constitute one of the elements that links politics to ethics so far as Agamben is concerned; it equally introduces a new way of constituting oneself as a subject. The latter process is characterised by subtraction from positive law, by already established identities, and, particularly, by the suspension of the politics of fragmentation of life into *zōē* and *bios*.<sup>554</sup> Indeed, this is one of the most innovative features of Agamben's work, which, among other things, proposes an ethics that conceives of life in a way that is different from that of sovereignty. This ethics casts life and defines subjectivity in society outside the realm of sovereign power and the dominion of juridical norms. Agamben's reading of the Franciscan paradigm, as we have seen, is an evidence of this type of life and subjectivity without relation with sovereignty.<sup>555</sup>

If this interpretation is correct, we could say that Agamben's work manifests, to a great extent, the political and ethical ideal to *live without*, or at least to abandon, traditional

<sup>551</sup> See Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 97–98; *The Use of Bodies*, 273.

<sup>552</sup> Cimino also puts forwards this interpretation. See Cimino, 'Europe and Paul of Tarsus', 302–05.

<sup>553</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 274.

<sup>554</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 204–06.

<sup>555</sup> Prozorov also alludes to this idea. See Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 142–43.

political and ethical categories that have hitherto constituted life in society.<sup>556</sup> For Agamben, these frameworks should, instead, be left to function alone as empty *shells* so that we can construct communities of life on a territory that is not subject to the totalitarian control of, and alienation by, a sovereign power.<sup>557</sup> However, given that the essence of a community directly or indirectly presupposes the existence of some rules and some authority (a sovereign) to supervise their application, the question arises whether it is possible to constitute a community which has no laws or in which people relate to laws in the form of the Pauline *hōs mē*. This question is addressed in Chapter Four, which critically assesses Agamben's theses. Despite the aforesaid doubt, one thing appears certain: As will be seen in the next section, Agamben seeks to redefine the relationship between life, ethics and politics.

#### 4. Ethics and Life

The preceding section clarified and emphasized the connection between ethics and politics in Agamben's works. It argued that the underlying connection at issue is realised through the notions of *community*, which Agamben describes as both a political and an ethical entity, *happiness*, delineated as the goal of individual and communal life, and *destitution* (or *destituent potential*), which he conceives as the primary objective of his account of ethics and 'the coming politics'.<sup>558</sup> The purpose of the present section is to continue to develop Agamben's account of ethics with a particular focus on the happy life. Life is one of the paramount themes that permeates Agamben's works. It is from the point of view of life that he engages with biopolitics and discusses a number of philosophers—including Aristotle, Schmitt and Foucault—to analyse 'how life itself has been continuously defined and redefined by power'.<sup>559</sup> As Thanos Zartaloudis explains, Agamben's work can be understood as 'an attempt to escape from the juridification of life, the attempt to fuse law and life'.<sup>560</sup> In trying to conceptualize life, Agamben puts forward a relatively intricate account of life that constitutes the general framework within which he ties ethics and the happy life together. Consequently, I must very briefly articulate this framework before we can examine the relation between ethics and the happy life.

Agamben uses various concepts to thematize the question of life. In *Homo Sacer* and *The Use of Bodies*, he elaborates on the issue of life around the triad of 'simple natural life',

<sup>556</sup> Lordon, *Vivre Sans*, 65–66.

<sup>557</sup> See also Lordon, *Vivre Sans*, 80–83.

<sup>558</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 85.

<sup>559</sup> Frost, 'Agamben, the Exception and Law', 60.

<sup>560</sup> Zartaloudis, *Giorgio Agamben*, 4.

‘qualified life’ and ‘bare life’.<sup>561</sup> In both contexts, his account is premised on Aristotle’s conception of life. According to Agamben, Aristotle introduces a conceptually and politically dualistic definition of life that is built around the following oppositions: ‘zōē’ versus ‘bios’, ‘natural life’ versus ‘qualified life’ and ‘living’ versus ‘living well’.<sup>562</sup> The first part of this opposition, Agamben argues, refers to life understood as a natural datum common to all living beings: humans, animals and even plants. The second part is related to political life: a life framed, organised and lived in a manner that is defined by sovereignty and is proper to the political community.<sup>563</sup> To this dualistic articulation of life, Agamben adds a third category of life: namely ‘bare life’. The latter can be understood as the type of life that is the outcome of the sovereign action: a life exposed to the violence of law.<sup>564</sup> As the product of sovereign power, bare life is the type of life that is situated in a zone of indistinction between zōē and bios. In Agamben’s view, bare life simultaneously constitutes the condition and the primary locus for political action. As he writes, ‘not simple natural life, but life exposed to death (bare life or sacred life) is the originary political element’.<sup>565</sup> What is at stake here for Agamben is that sovereign power, in his view, constitutes itself in relation to bare life that, in the end, is itself exposed to the thanatological violence of that power.<sup>566</sup> It could be said that sovereign power and bare life are, for Agamben, co-existent in the sense that they condition each other. Sovereign power produces bare life and bare life constitutes sovereign power.<sup>567</sup>

There is also a fourth notion of life in Agamben. It is ‘the happy life’ or what he later calls ‘form-of-life’.<sup>568</sup> This category comes to the fore especially in *The Highest Poverty*<sup>569</sup> and *The Use of Bodies*.<sup>570</sup> Nevertheless, as we will see, this fourth notion is already present in earlier works, such as *Means without End*<sup>571</sup> and *Remnants of Auschwitz*.<sup>572</sup> While the fragmentation of life which defines Western biopolitics is proper to sovereign power, according to Agamben, the happy life, in his view, is

<sup>561</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1–12; *The Use of Bodies*, 196–98.

<sup>562</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1–3; *The Use of Bodies*, 196–97.

<sup>563</sup> See Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 196 and 207; *Homo Sacer*, 1–3. See also Cimino, ‘Agamben’s Political Messianism’, 111; Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 121.

<sup>564</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 6; 88–90.

<sup>565</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 88.

<sup>566</sup> See Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 202–04; *Homo Sacer*, 6–7. See also Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, 109.

<sup>567</sup> Mills and Cimino have also documented this interpretation in their various works. See Mills, ‘Agamben’s Messianic Politics’, 42–43; Cimino, ‘Agamben’s Political Messianism’, 111–12.

<sup>568</sup> See also Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 121.

<sup>569</sup> See Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 94–97. For the notion of form-of-life see *The Use of Bodies*, xxi, 191 and 206–19.

<sup>570</sup> For the notion of form-of-life, see Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 7, 219 and 235.

<sup>571</sup> For the notion of the happy life, see Agamben, *Means without End*, 113–14.

<sup>572</sup> See Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 24.

proper to ethics. We have already seen that he argues for an account of ethics that is liberated from the influence of legal terms such as *responsibility* and *guilt*.<sup>573</sup> His ethics seeks to understand and offer a conception of life beyond the ‘presuppositional’ logic of biopolitics<sup>574</sup> and all the calculations of sovereign power. In *Remnants of Auschwitz*, we find a definition of ethics in relation to the happy life.<sup>575</sup> He makes the same claim in *Potentialities* when he discusses the notion of happiness in Walter Benjamin. In this context, Agamben declares that Benjamin used the word *ethics* ‘in the sense it had when it made its appearance in the Greek philosophical schools as a “doctrine of happiness.”’<sup>576</sup> However, in these contexts, Agamben does not explicate the meaning of happiness/the happy life. In *Remnants of Auschwitz*, he only mentions ethics in relation to happiness in the general framework of his criticism of law.

The crucial point is that, whether he follows either the Greeks or Spinoza or Benjamin, Agamben closely links life—the happy life—to ethics. While bare life is the condition of the possibility of sovereignty and vice versa, ethics in Agamben must be construed as the domain and condition of the possibility of the happy life. But now the question arises as to what the happy life (or happiness) means and how ethics makes such a thing possible. As noted in the previous chapter, happiness for Agamben does not primarily consist in accomplishing or fulfilling existential goals and tasks.<sup>577</sup> As Mills remarked, ‘we can be sure, though, that it does not refer to any kind of psychological or emotive state since, for one, Agamben tends to reject recourse to psychological substance in his theory of the subject’.<sup>578</sup> The happy life for Agamben means living one’s own potentiality outside the bounds of sovereign power and government.<sup>579</sup>

In *Means without End*, Agamben clearly specifies the aforesaid thesis. He argues that ‘the ‘happy life’ should be an absolutely profane ‘sufficient life’ and ‘a life over which sovereignty and right no longer have any hold’.<sup>580</sup> A few observations can be made about this Agambenian statement. First, the happy life, for Agamben, is neither *bios* nor *zōē*. Instead, it is a life that reconciles and unites both *zōē* and *bios* and is lived outside the sovereign ban. This is why, in both *Means without End* and *The Use of Bodies*, Agamben says that the happy life is a life from which nothing like bare life can be

<sup>573</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 1.

<sup>574</sup> This is the logic that creates separation, division and opposition and presents a dualistic account of a given phenomenon. For more details, see Bird, *Containing Community*, 112–13.

<sup>575</sup> See Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 24.

<sup>576</sup> Agamben, *Potentialities*, 138.

<sup>577</sup> See Chapter 1, Section 3.3.

<sup>578</sup> Mills, ‘Happiness/Happy Life’, 88.

<sup>579</sup> See, for instance, Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 208; *Means without End*, 113–14; and *The Highest Poverty*, 97. See also Mills, ‘Happiness/Happy Life’, 88.

<sup>580</sup> Agamben, *Means without End*, 113–14.

separated.<sup>581</sup> In this sense, the happy life could be understood as a notion which Agamben introduces as an alternative to bare life. It is a strategic gesture and a means of exiting from the logic of biopolitics in order to constitute life differently. In this way, the happy life can be neither captured by law in the exception nor divided between *bios* and *zōē* such that some parts, such as *bios*, are integrated into politics and others, such as *zōē*, are excluded from politics. As Mills explains, ‘the inauguration of happy life’ overthrows the power of law and describes life as a ‘life lived in the experience of its unity, its own potentiality of being-thus’.<sup>582</sup>

Secondly, given that Agamben, as we have seen, ties ethics to politics and links ethics and life, it could be argued that for him, political life is no longer defined based on the opposition between *bios* (‘the qualified life’) and *zōē* (the sheer life), as it is in the context of biopolitics.<sup>583</sup> Rather, political life is defined as the ethical life, that is to say, a life of the subjectivation and realization of the self either individually or collectively.<sup>584</sup> This Agambenian construal of ethics parallels that of Foucault, who also connects ethics to individual life and, specifically, to taking care of the self.<sup>585</sup> The reference to Foucault is relevant in this context for at least one reason: He is one of Agamben’s main interlocutors and sources of inspiration.<sup>586</sup> Thus, comparing their accounts of ethics can help us understand Foucault’s influence on Agamben and how the latter departs from Foucault. In his preface to Deleuze and Guattari’s book, *Anti-Oedipus*, Foucault says that it is ‘a book of ethics’. In that context, he defines ethics as ‘the art of living’ aimed ‘to counter’ all forms of external forces and power.<sup>587</sup> He writes as follows:

This art of living carries with it a certain number of essential principles that are, among others, free political action from all unitary and totalizing paranoia, withdraw allegiance from the old categories of the Negative (law, limit, castration, lack, lacuna), which Western thought has so long held sacred as a form of power and an access to reality. Prefer what is positive and multiple, difference over uniformity, flows over unities, mobile arrangements over systems.<sup>588</sup>

<sup>581</sup> Agamben, *Means without End*, 114; *The Use of Bodies*, 207.

<sup>582</sup> Mills, ‘Agamben’s Messianic Politics’, 49.

<sup>583</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1–4.

<sup>584</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 34.

<sup>585</sup> See Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 101–04.

<sup>586</sup> See, for instance, Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 7–9; *Homo Sacer*, 3–5.

<sup>587</sup> Foucault, ‘Preface’, xiii–xiv.

<sup>588</sup> Foucault, ‘Preface’, xiii.

In other words, ethics, for Foucault, is the practice through which individuals emancipate themselves from both the historical and the power conditions that subject their lives. Ethics implies distancing oneself from the tradition that has defined and commanded human action, thereby forming and developing oneself as the subject responsible for one's life. As Carlo Crosato explains, Foucault characterises ethics as 'a process of self-formation through which one moulds oneself as an ethical subject by delimiting a particular part of the self upon which the moral practice will rebound, defining one's relation to the precepts that one will follow'.<sup>589</sup> It is therefore unsurprising that, in *The Use of Bodies*, Agamben himself dwells on Foucault's account of ethics understood as a relation to oneself.<sup>590</sup> This may suggest that Agamben premises his own account of ethics, delineated as a relation of life to itself, on Foucault's ideas. In the wake of Foucault, Agamben equally conceives ethics as an experience in which a subject constitutes and relates itself indissolubly to its life.<sup>591</sup> Nonetheless as the quote from Crosato suggests and as Agamben himself testifies, ethics in Foucault's account may maintain some relation to power on the practical level.<sup>592</sup> For instance, Agamben writes as follows:

The ontological aporia is found in Foucault, as one could have foreseen, on the level of practice, in the theory of power relations and of the governance of human beings that is actualized in it. Power relations, unlike states of domination, necessarily entail a free subject, which it is a matter of "conducting" and governing and which, as free, stubbornly resists power. And yet, precisely insofar as the subject "freely" conducts and governs itself, it will inevitably enter into power relations, which consist in conducting the conduct of others (or allowing one's own to be conducted by others). The one who, by "conducting" his life, has been constituted as subject of his own actions, will thus be "conducted" by other subjects or will seek to conduct others: subjectivation into a certain form of life is, to the same extent, subjection to a power relation.<sup>593</sup>

In contrast to Foucault's perspective, ethics, for Agamben, implies a complete break-up from power relations. In his words, ethics is a zone 'entirely subtracted from strategic relationships, of an Ungovernable that is situated beyond states of domination and power relations'.<sup>594</sup> In other words, for Agamben, ethics is a sphere free of power

<sup>589</sup> Crosato, 'Telling the Truth, or Not', 122–23.

<sup>590</sup> See Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 95–104.

<sup>591</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 104.

<sup>592</sup> Crosato, 'Telling the Truth, or Not', 122–23; Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 102 and 106–07.

<sup>593</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 106.

<sup>594</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 108.

relations, a sphere in which life escapes any kind of domination and subjection. The relation to power belongs, according to him, to the logic of sovereignty that captures life. For Agamben, ethics puts life in relation to itself and so opens it to new possibilities, for he understands ethics as a purposeless and taskless domain.<sup>595</sup>

We find a similar definition of ethics in relation to life, beyond definite social (and sovereign and governmental) conventions, in *Language and Death*. In this book, Agamben reflects on the essence and function of human language and its relationship with our being in the world. He argues that humans do not have a determinate language that they use to relate with the world. Because of this lack, they strive to create a determinate language with which to name all the things in the world and relate with the world. It could be argued that, in Agamben's opinion, the experience of language shows that human existence is essentially a capacity for self-realisation, and that human beings constitute themselves by enacting their potentiality. In this context, Agamben writes that, 'ethos is social praxis itself, human speech itself, which have become transparent to themselves'.<sup>596</sup> What Agamben actually means is that ethics is the locus where humanity—life—expresses itself in relation to itself. In other words, the link between language and ethics, as regards Agamben, is that language is what takes human beings back to themselves and, in so doing, makes them discover that they are deprived of any specific essence.<sup>597</sup> In this way, ethics, in Agamben's view, is not, as Crosato explains, 'a matter of taking into account the conditions that produce and influence our thought and action in the direction of transgressing the pragmatic order which regulates what can be said and what can be done'.<sup>598</sup> Rather, ethics implies one's relation to oneself and the way of realising and experiencing the self out of the signatures of biopolitics.

A concrete example of the relation between ethics and the happy life enacted outside the 'apparatus'<sup>599</sup>—that is, the calculations and mechanisms— of biopolitics is certainly again the Franciscan Order, upon which Agamben elaborates in both *The Highest Poverty* and, briefly, in *Creation and Anarchy*. In *The Highest Poverty*, Agamben argues that, by refusing to conform their lives to law, Franciscans escaped the Church's political organisation of the time. Consequently, they introduced the possibility of conceiving human existence and community outside the confine of sovereign power and government.<sup>600</sup> 'The *abdicatio iuris*, the idea of a community

<sup>595</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 43.

<sup>596</sup> Agamben, *Language and Death*, 106.

<sup>597</sup> Agamben, *Language and Death*, 96.

<sup>598</sup> Crosato, 'Telling the Truth, or Not', 127.

<sup>599</sup> Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus?*, 11.

<sup>600</sup> Mills, *Biopolitics*, 50.

that lives beyond the law', Agamben writes in *Creation and Anarchy*, 'is the Franciscan legacy that modernity is unable even to think'.<sup>601</sup> Agamben's point is that Franciscans set an example of the possibility of the happy life. Theoretically, this characterization of life parallels, to some extent, a gesture which Agamben performs in *The Coming Community*. Though he does not speak of the happy life in that context, he nonetheless defines life in relation to ethics, which he describes as a domain that knows neither any duty nor any tasks which humans must accomplish. This is to say that ethics is the sphere whereby the human being—or life—is not reduced to a mere enactment of specific given tasks that will both condition and 'govern his behaviour or thought'.<sup>602</sup>

Simply put, an authentic ethical discourse for Agamben is one that considers the human being, first and foremost, as a potential being: a being whose existence/life is open to an endless horizon of possibilities.<sup>603</sup> Since ethics, for him, implies the unfolding of potentiality, the happy life in this context must be understood as 'an openness to what does not yet have proper form'.<sup>604</sup> By claiming that ethics is a *task-free zone*, Agamben seems to make a serious claim about human life. For him, life is essentially a *becoming*, an open-ended horizon.<sup>605</sup> From this perspective, we can assert that Agamben indirectly criticizes the overemphasis contemporary politics and society put on action, duty and productivity as characteristics of life. This conception, according to him, rests on the claim that humanity has some definitive goals or characteristics that it must by all means accomplish.<sup>606</sup> To argue against this trend, Agamben proposes an ethics that emphasises the potential in every human being and in every existential moment. In this sense, the happy life, for Agamben, is a life that has no positive and determined content. On the contrary, it is always pure potentiality.

As he indicates in *The Highest Poverty*, what characterizes—or should characterize—life is not *the doing* but *the living*, that is, the relation to life itself. Thus, Agamben opposes the account of life that insists on what humans 'must do' regarding the existential and factual account of life. The latter conceives existence as the fact of living rather than as the fact of achieving tasks and conforming life to some legal guarantees.<sup>607</sup> The former narrative of life, according to Agamben, is proper to a biopolitics that not only separates life into biological and political life but also, by means of that very separation, integrates life into the calculations of political power

<sup>601</sup> Agamben, *Creation and Anarchy*, 30.

<sup>602</sup> See Maxwell, 'Ethics', 63.

<sup>603</sup> See also Maxwell, 'Ethics', 63.

<sup>604</sup> Colebrook and Maxwell, *Agamben*, 93.

<sup>605</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 44.

<sup>606</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 63–64.

<sup>607</sup> See Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 97.

and governs it.<sup>608</sup> The Agambenian account, on the contrary, corresponds to his ethical conception of life. Through this account, Agamben strives to offer a unitary conception of life. Thus, taking up this trend in *The Use of Bodies*, he argues that the happy life (or perhaps, the ethical life) is neither *zōē* nor *bios*. Happiness is a life in which both natural life and political life are indistinctively united and from which it is impossible to separate *bios* from *zōē*.<sup>609</sup> In Maxwell's words, Agamben's aim is to 'create a community [of life] that would not be rooted in [the] exclusionary violence' proper to sovereign biopolitics.<sup>610</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I outlined the main articulations of Agamben's account of ethics. Toward this end, I clarified how Agamben conceives the relationships between ethics and law, ethics and politics and ethics and life. In the main, I argued that Agamben's construal of ethics is to be understood as a reaction against the dominating and defeating dynamics of biopolitics and especially the influence of law over life as such. At this point, let us try to express as theses the most important provisional conclusions that have emerged in the course of our investigation.

**Thesis 1:** For Agamben, the law is essentially characterised as an instrument of sovereign power. It is the means by which the sovereign captures life into politics in the state of exception that has become, according to Agamben, the most prominent mode of governmentality. In this way, the sovereign governs all aspects of life and is able to produce bare life.

**Thesis 2:** Based on his critically negative approach to the law, Agamben advocates for a non-normative ethics. He describes it as the way in which one constitutes oneself as a subject and maintains a relation to life, understood as a pure potentiality, irrespective of law. It goes without saying that Agamben's ethics is an attempt to liberate life in general from the dominion of law and from any account that describes life as a mere accomplishment of some prescribed tasks. In short, ethics for him is the sphere whereby life faces its own potentiality of being.

**Thesis 3:** Agamben provides an account of ethics that is inseparable from his new understanding of politics. The common denominator of their indistinction is the fact that they are simultaneously oriented towards the constitution of a community of individuals.

<sup>608</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 203; *Homo Sacer*, 5–7.

<sup>609</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 219–20.

<sup>610</sup> Maxwell, 'Ethics', 63.

Agamben also understands ethics and politics as possible means through which the happy life can be achieved after all the logic and mechanisms of biopolitics are deposed.

**Thesis 4:** Ethics and politics, understood in the Agambenian sense as the new way of conceiving life, are means of escaping the ban which sovereign power imposes on life. In this manner, Agamben puts forward an account of life that does not depend on sovereign power and that is liberated from any relation with the law. He redefines life as essentially a happy life, as a life that is united with itself and is understood and actualised outside the hold of sovereignty.

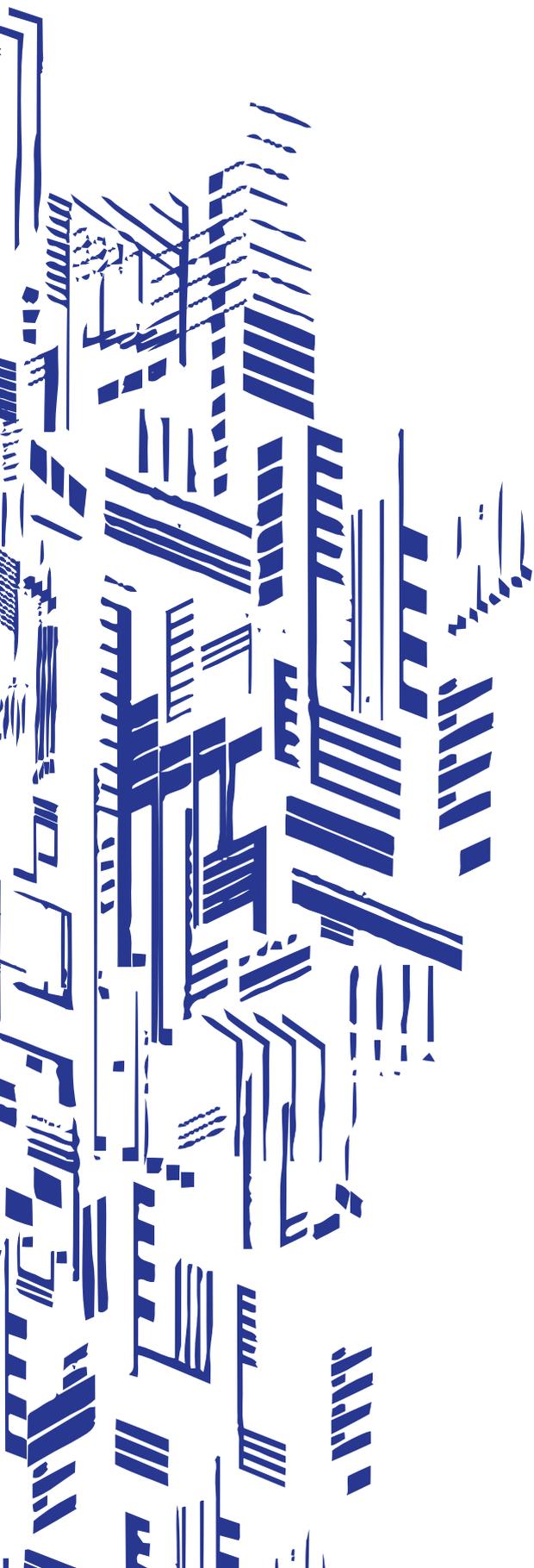
The first and second theses call into question the predominance of law over all aspects of human existence and, thereby, every attempt to organise life and submit it to the dominion of law. The crucial point for Agamben is to envisage the possibility of thinking and organising life outside the reach of sovereign power and law. The fourth thesis implies that Agamben's account of ethics and life, understood as 'the happy life', shifts from the biopolitical capture of life and the division of the latter into two separate and apparently opposed categories: *bios* and *zōē*. His account supplies a reconciled definition of life that, in the end, is immanent to itself. Put simply, life, within the context of Agamben's ethics, is in relation to itself and does not depend upon any external force to realise itself. As a matter of fact, life is in 'the perfection of its own power and of its own communicability' of being as such.<sup>611</sup> This means that life does not have a specific qualification or determination that it must only fulfil. Therefore, ethical life, as regards Agamben, is one that negates all possible predicates and every juridical and societal guarantee. Instead, life is always already open to its potentiality: It is not reduced to any particular condition, but it is potentiality.<sup>612</sup> With this, 'the problems posed by the state of exception and sovereignty's capture of life are resolved by the inauguration of the happy life'.<sup>613</sup> As mentioned above, the notion of happy life is directly linked to that of form-of-life, upon which Agamben elaborates extensively in *The Highest Poverty* and *The Use of Bodies*, and which he presents as the ultimate solution to the aporia of biopolitics.<sup>614</sup> But a question arises regarding how, according to Agamben, the form-of-life makes happiness possible. In other words, how does form-of-life concretely liberate life from the seizure of biopolitics? This question leads us into the next chapter, which tries to answer it.

<sup>611</sup> Agamben, *Means without End*, 115; *The Coming Community*, 93.

<sup>612</sup> See Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 92–93.

<sup>613</sup> Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, 78.

<sup>614</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 188.



## **CHAPTER III**

### *FORM-OF-LIFE: THE NEW POLITICO-ETHICAL LIFE*

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## 1. Introduction

The previous chapter pointed out that, in reaction to the law-oriented conception of biopolitics, Agamben has advanced a non-normative account of politics and ethics. He challenges all the capturing and dominating mechanisms of biopolitics because, according to him, biopolitics emphasizes the power of both sovereignty and economy over human life. In defining ethics and politics as comprising the sphere of non-normativity, that is, as the realm of one's relation to oneself, Agamben's chief objective is to set up the foundations for the possibility of thinking and casting human existence beyond the dictates and grasp of sovereign power and economy. In other words, Agamben offers a new conception of life that is no longer understood in direct relation to sovereignty, economy and all the mechanisms of power related to them. This account of life is crystallized in the notion of form-of-life. One may ask the following: What is the specificity of form-of-life, and what role does it play in Agamben's construal of biopolitics? As explained later, form-of-life is the key concept Agamben introduces in the debate on biopolitics to account for his conception of the happy life—that is, the life upon which sovereign power and economy have neither influence nor control. In this way, the form-of-life is the concrete application of his account of ethics articulated beyond juridical terms.

This chapter addresses the meaning and significance of the notion of form-of-life in Agamben's thought in relation to his understanding of economy, ethics and happiness. The crucial task here is to analyse the specific role the notion of form-of-life plays within this intricate Agambenian conceptual framework. For this reason, this chapter is divided into three parts, the interconnection of which reveal that form-of-life is ultimately the strategic concept which Agamben proposes as a solution to the problem of sovereignty and economy. The first part provides a detailed conceptual delineation of the notion of form-of-life. This is done by critically distinguishing it from competing notions against which Agamben's form-of-life is articulated. Unless this clarification is made, one runs the risk of misunderstanding the particularity and function of form-of-life in Agamben's account of biopolitics. In the second section, form-of-life is discussed in relation to destitution, a topic introduced in Chapter Two. The essential task here is to point out that form-of-life is the concrete implementation of Agamben's philosophical and political project, which must be understood as an intellectual effort to extricate life from the dialectics of sovereignty and economy. The last part of this chapter concentrates on examination of Agamben's theory of use in relation to form-of-life. In this context, what is at stake is to show that form-of-life institutes a relation to life and to the world that is enacted in use. Use in this context is conceived as a free and non-economic relation to the self and to the world.

## 2. What Is *Form-of-Life*?

The notion of form-of-life is unquestionably one of the most significant and intricate contributions Agamben has made to the ongoing debate on biopolitics. However complicated and hard to understand it may be, the concept of form-of-life is central to his philosophical project, as it connects both the *pars destruens* and *pars construens* of Agamben's critical engagement with Western biopolitics.<sup>615</sup> In this section, I explain and discuss the meaning and significance of the notion at issue in connection with *oikonomia* and happiness as found in Agamben. One way to go about this is to trace the idea of the form-of-life throughout his works. This implies working diachronically and chronologically through the mentions of the term, which first appears in *Means without End*, and proceeding through *Homo Sacer* up to *The Highest Poverty* and *The Use of Bodies*. However, this has already been to a large extent achieved.<sup>616</sup> Therefore, I instead organise this section systematically by juxtaposing two different conceptions of form-of-life that emerge from Agamben's elaborations: one relating to the distinction between *zōē* and *bios*, the other concerning the relation between life and the law. This approach is beneficial for at least two reasons. On the one hand, it shows that Agamben's notion of the form-of-life is multivocal. On the other hand, it will help us pay special attention to the shift of meanings in Agamben's discourse on the form-of-life. In this sense, the relationship or distinction between these two ways of conceptualizing form-of-life will be highlighted. It will become clear whether there are inconsistencies in Agamben's use of the term *form-of-life* or if it appears differently from different perspectives.

First, I must clarify that, in his elaboration of form-of-life, Agamben differentiates between three notions: namely, 'form' and 'life' considered apart,<sup>617</sup> 'form of life'<sup>618</sup> and 'form-of-life'.<sup>619</sup> It is crucial to correctly understand this differentiation if we are to grasp the particularity and intelligibility of the notion of form-of-life in his thought. The appearance of the terms 'form' and 'life' in the same context throughout Agamben's *Homo Sacer* series is quantitatively insignificant.<sup>620</sup> Nevertheless, its meaning cannot be qualitatively underestimated. Agamben addresses this problem

<sup>615</sup> I discussed this link in the general introduction.

<sup>616</sup> See Mills, *Biopolitics*, 49–51 and *The Philosophy of Agamben*, 77–79; Edkins, 'Whatever Politics', 77–82; DeCaroli, 'What Is a Form-of-Life?', 207–28; and Primera, *The Political Ontology of Giorgio Agamben*, 138–42.

<sup>617</sup> See Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 237; *The Highest Poverty*, 60–62.

<sup>618</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1–3, 109, 175 and 186–88; *The Use of Bodies*, 240–44

<sup>619</sup> See for instance, Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 188; *The Use of Bodies*, xiii, xv, 62, 91 and 207ff.

<sup>620</sup> Agamben employs this concept very few times in his *Homo Sacer* series. See for instance, Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 237; *The Highest Poverty*, 60–62.

in the fourth chapter of the first part of *Homo Sacer*.<sup>621</sup> In particular, he elaborates on the relation between 'life' and 'form' from the perspective of law.<sup>622</sup> In this context, he seems to suggest that the combination of the terms 'form' and 'life' expresses how sovereign power relates to life through the law in the exception. The decisive point Agamben makes in that chapter is that the law is the form which sovereign power imposes upon life in the city. To account for this relation, Agamben describes the law as '*being in force without significance*'.<sup>623</sup> For him, this concept indicates a situation in which the law is indistinguishable from life. Consequently, life becomes the mere application of the law. In this sense, Agamben describes law as what shapes human life. For him, thus, law affirms its most powerful influence by being applied to all aspects of human existence in a way that is completely unnoticeable.<sup>624</sup> From this perspective, the syntagma 'form' and 'life', in Agamben, means the indistinction between law and life that is proper to the state of exception.<sup>625</sup> He understands the latter as a political moment in which the 'law coincides with life'.<sup>626</sup> This is to say that human life is captured and abandoned to law—that is, it is completely exposed to the power of the sovereign.<sup>627</sup> In this condition, the law is for Agamben essentially a prescriptive and normative force that the sovereign power uses to act on life and shape it into a particular form of life.

Regarding the notion of form of life, two distinctive remarks must be made. First, in *Homo Sacer*, the term refers to *bios*, 'the qualified life', that is, the political life.<sup>628</sup> It differs from *zōē* in that the latter pertains to all living beings without exception. *Bios*, on the contrary, is proper to human beings as they form a political community. The connection between form of life and *bios* is explained by the fact that, for Agamben, *bios* betokens 'the form or way of living proper to an individual or a group'.<sup>629</sup> What is special about this life, according to him, is that it is separated and distinct from its *zōē* (natural life), which is confined to the site of the *oikos* and thereby reduced to reproduction and natural subsistence. Besides being proper to humans in the city, form of life (*bios*), on the contrary, is geared towards the good life (or the happy

<sup>621</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 49–62.

<sup>622</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 52.

<sup>623</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 51.

<sup>624</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 53.

<sup>625</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 53 and 57.

<sup>626</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 55.

<sup>627</sup> Agamben draws the notion of the 'abandonment' of life to the law from Jean-Luc Nancy, who, according to him, defines abandonment as the act of remitting or entrusting a reality (life, in this case) to the sovereign power. See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 58.

<sup>628</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1 and 109; *The Use of Bodies*, 196.

<sup>629</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1; *The Use of Bodies*, xx.

life).<sup>630</sup> As we have already seen, the happy life in this context is to be understood as the product of sovereign power. It is the life that it is modelled, so to speak, by legal norms and social conventions that manifest the logic of sovereign power. But, Agamben finds this conception of form of life questionable. In his view, it constitutes life in direct relation with sovereign power through the law. Thus, both form and life in the sense noted above and form of life understood from the perspective of *bios* denote the influence sovereign power exercises on the life of individuals in general. They express the seizure of life by sovereign power. As Agamben puts it, ‘everywhere on earth men live today in the ban of a law’.<sup>631</sup>

Second, in Agamben’s account, form of life refers to an existential praxis. Agamben draws this meaning from Wittgenstein’s notion of *Lebensform*, that is, form of life. Agamben dedicates the seventh chapter of the last part of *The Use of Bodies* to the examination of Wittgenstein’s notion as an important component of the analysis of his own technical notion of form-of-life.<sup>632</sup> Scholars agree that the term *form of life* is essential to understanding Wittgenstein’s later philosophy—especially his theory of language.<sup>633</sup> He put forward *Lebensform* as a strategic and technical means to explain the nature of language, or what he called the *Sprachspiel* (language game). Both Agamben and Tonner suggest that Wittgenstein used the term *Lebensform* to demonstrate that language is not primarily about the observation and application of rules. Rather, it is first and foremost an activity (*praxis*), whose meaning is contextual depending on the ‘non-linguistic activities and practices’ proper to a specific community, ‘since it is within this context that any given language is used, and any given language will be interwoven with such activities and practices’.<sup>634</sup>

<sup>630</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1–2; Cimino, ‘Agamben’s Aristotelian Biopolitics’, 185.

<sup>631</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 51.

<sup>632</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 240–44. The intellectual affinities between Agamben and Wittgenstein regarding the notion of form-of-life have already been studied, as has Wittgenstein’s influence on Agamben’s conception of form-of-life. Regarding the affinity between the two authors, Saidel, for example, argues in ‘Form(s)-of-Life’ that the notion of ‘form-of-life is for both a crucial notion for thinking ethics and life in-common. Addressing the human existence in its constitutive relation to language, this notion deconstructs traditional dichotomies like *bios* and *zōē*, the cultural and the biological, enabling both authors to think of a life which cannot be separated from its forms, recognizing the commonality of *logos* as the specific trait of human existence’. See Saidel, ‘Form(s)-of-Life’, 163–86. And concerning the influence of Wittgenstein on Agamben’s construal of ‘form-of-life’, Di Gesu says that ‘the influence of Wittgenstein is particularly evident in two major themes of Agamben’s thought: on the one hand, the idea of *Irreparable*, with which the Italian philosopher ends one of his most famous writings, that is, *The Coming Community*. On the other, the fundamental concept of his entire political proposal, the very cornerstone which sustains his building: *form-of-life*’. See Di Gesu, ‘Agamben’s Use of Wittgenstein’, 907–29.

<sup>633</sup> See, for example, Tonner, ‘Wittgenstein on Forms of Life’, 14; Saidel, ‘Form(s)-of-Life’, 165.

<sup>634</sup> Tonner, ‘Wittgenstein on Forms of Life’, 14; Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 240–41.

The point that interests us is that Wittgenstein, as Saidel explains, conceived of form of life as a free activity that goes beyond specific determinations.<sup>635</sup> *Form of life* denotes the various concepts, cultural and practical values that individuals share and on the basis of which they communicate and organize their living together.<sup>636</sup> Thus conceived, the *Lebensform* deactivates language from formal rules and brings it back, as Saidel argues, ‘from the metaphysical realm of logic to its everyday use’.<sup>637</sup> The notion of use in this context is significant. Agamben states that it is meant to stress the idea that language, for Wittgenstein, is not to be understood from the perspective of ‘rules’ but ‘from that of use’.<sup>638</sup> This is to say that language is a practice that breaks all formal determinations. Agamben takes up this Wittgensteinian notion of ‘form of life’ and applies it to his own political and ethical theory. For Agamben, *form of life* designates a life that is inseparable from its form and is lived beyond the law. To emphasise the unity between life and its form, which he wants to defend, Agamben introduces hyphens to form the term, *form-of-life*. Thus, he moves from a general form of life to a specific form-of-life, which he understands as a ‘counter figure’ to that of bare life.<sup>639</sup>

With form-of-life, Agamben aims to criticise and overcome the dichotomy between *zōē* and *bios*—and correlatively between nature and culture, *physis* and *nomos*<sup>640</sup>—that emanates from the exposure of life to sovereign and economic power. In so doing, he puts forward a non-judicial and non-economic account of life, as the opposite—the juridical and economic conception of life—is proper to sovereign power and economy. The juridical and economic account of life emphasises conforming one’s life to prescribed legal norms, productivity in accomplishing given duties and tasks, and consumption. On the contrary, the form-of-life, from Agamben’s point of view, presents life in general and the happy life in particular as being self-immanent and intrinsically inoperative, that is, without any specific vocation. For him, life cannot be defined solely through the law and thus be reduced to a specific essence or work.<sup>641</sup> As a matter of fact, just like language in Wittgenstein, Agamben understands life as a phenomenon that transcends all legislations and any type of work to which it could be confined. This means that life as such is characterized by an intrinsic capacity to escape any sort of formal attempt to capture it into one single modality. As Section 2.1 explains below, Agamben thus challenges any legalist and capitalist account of life that seems to look at life only from the perspective of law enforcement and work.

<sup>635</sup> Saidel, ‘Form(s)-of-Life’, 165.

<sup>636</sup> Tonner, ‘Wittgenstein on Forms of Life’, 15.

<sup>637</sup> Saidel, ‘Form(s)-of-Life’, 165.

<sup>638</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 243.

<sup>639</sup> I borrow this term from Ferrarese, ‘The Use of Bodies’, 126–27.

<sup>640</sup> Van der Heiden, ‘Exile, Use and Form-of-Life’, 3.

<sup>641</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 43–44. See also, Prozorov, ‘Living à la mode’, 147.

Though the notion of form-of-life, in various and distinct formulations, permeates the entire *oeuvre* of Agamben, starting from *Means without End* to the conclusion of his *Homo Sacer*'s series,<sup>642</sup> its most elaborate explication is not given until the 2013 publication of *The Highest Poverty* (originally published in 2011 in Italian as *Altissima povertà: Regole monastiche e forma di vita*) and the 2015 publication of *The Use of Bodies* (first published in 2014 in Italian as *Luso di corpi*). Thus, my elaborations in what follows draw mainly on these key texts. References to other texts are made insofar as they are relevant to the discussion. If form of life exposes life to sovereign power, what is innovative about form-of-life concerning the relation between life and sovereign and economic power?

### 2.1. Form-of-life, a Self-Immanent and Non-Relational Life

In *Vivre Sans? Institutions, police, travail, argent*, Frédéric Lordon explains that Agamben inadequately defines the concepts he employs; they are found at work in his books with some already presupposed meanings. These meanings come to light when the notions involved are put into mutual or differential relations with one another.<sup>643</sup> The latter is particularly true for the notion of form-of-life; it can only be properly understood when it is examined in relation to the notion of bare life, that specific form of life produced by sovereign and economic power. In the final paragraph of *Homo Sacer*, Agamben states that the

biopolitical body that is bare life must itself be transformed into the site for the constitution and installation of a form of life that is wholly exhausted in bare life and a *bios* that is only its own *zōē*.<sup>644</sup>

Furthermore, he gives the name *form-of-life* to that new site and presents it as an outstanding paradigm shift. He writes as follows:

If we give the name form-of-life to the this being that is only its own bare existence and to this life that, being its own form, remains inseparable from it, we will witness the emergence of a field of

<sup>642</sup> See Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 120–21; Van der Heiden, 'Exile, Use and Form-of-Life', 3; Edkins, 'Whatever Politics', 72–77.

<sup>643</sup> See Lordon, *Vivre Sans*, 65–66.

<sup>644</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 188. For more instances where Agamben examines the relation between form-of-life and bare life, see also Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 218–19. In that context, he clearly sets out form-of-life as an alternative to form of life, understood, as noted above, as *bios* and bare life.

research beyond the terrain defined by the intersection of politics and philosophy, medico-biological sciences and jurisprudence.<sup>645</sup>

The point is that Agamben introduces the notion of form-of-life as a 'counter-figure' to that of bare life.<sup>646</sup> For him, the coming politics should be founded on form-of-life rather than on bare life.<sup>647</sup> He construes form-of-life as a life that simultaneously bridges and effaces the gap between *zōē* and *bios* by removing life from the realm and total control of sovereign and economic power.<sup>648</sup> So, if bare life is the life that is produced and obtained after life has been captured into the sovereign ban, the form-of-life, Agamben argues, is a life that is indistinguishable and cannot be divided from itself. This thesis is clearly expressed in *The Use of Bodies*, as follows:

With the term *form-of-life*, by contrast, we understand a life that can never be separated from its form, a life in which it is never possible to isolate and keep distinct something like a bare life.<sup>649</sup>

Put simply, form-of-life is a concept that Agamben uses to think a different notion of life. With it, he postulates a life that, in its essence and in its living, is united and reconciled with itself, such that it cannot be categorised into various identities and parts: e.g., rational versus vegetative life,<sup>650</sup> human versus non-human life,<sup>651</sup> political versus non-political life.<sup>652</sup> In this way, no single part of human life would exclusively become a particular object for either social or political actions. For Agamben, this separation of life into many distinct parts is constitutive of the sovereign decisions regarding what is human and what is not, and who is a citizen and who is not. It is so in the sense that the sovereign creates and establishes frontiers within the one life of the human being.<sup>653</sup> On the contrary, the form-of-life allows no shared identities, as it banishes consciousness as well as the possibility of belonging to this or that specific group.<sup>654</sup> Form-of-life, so far as Agamben is concerned, breaks and revokes

<sup>645</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 188.

<sup>646</sup> See also Prozorov, 'Mind Your Manners', 236. He equally thinks that Agamben introduces the form-of-life as a solution the problem of bare life that constitutes sovereign power, Ferrarese, 'The Use of Bodies', 126–27.

<sup>647</sup> Agamben, *Means without End*, 3; *The Use of Bodies*, 206. See also Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, 77–78; Edkins, 'Whatever Politics', 72–74.

<sup>648</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 219.

<sup>649</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 207.

<sup>650</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 129.

<sup>651</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 181 and 183.

<sup>652</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1–4.

<sup>653</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 203–04.

<sup>654</sup> For further details, see Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, 129–31.

the separation and distinction in life between *bios* and *zōē*. In so doing, it presents life as a phenomenon that is lived ‘in the experience of its own unity’.<sup>655</sup>

In this sense, the hyphenation of the term *form-of-life*, which undoubtedly betrays Heidegger’s influence on Agamben, is very significant.<sup>656</sup> It underscores the intimacy or, as Prozorov says, ‘the integrity of this figure, in which life and its form are inseparable’.<sup>657</sup> But then, what does the term *form* mean in this context? And how does it relate to life as such? Agamben himself seems somewhat unclear about the nature, the content and the extension of the term in question.<sup>658</sup> However, close inspection of the context of its appearances suggests two things. To see this, first consider what Agamben says in *The Use of Bodies*: ‘[A] life that cannot be separated from its form is a life for which, in its mode of life, its very living is at stake, and in its living, what is at stake is first of all its mode of life’.<sup>659</sup>

In this quotation, Agamben clearly associates the term *form* with the term *mode*. *Form*, therefore, means the various modalities or ways of being that are proper to life itself: those modalities through which life is most intimately and authentically made manifest. As Agamben himself puts it later in *The Use of Bodies*, the term *mode* refers to the manner of being of life as a phenomenon that is deprived of this or that particular property.<sup>660</sup> In contrast to the bare life that is modelled to the modes—or better still to the dispositifs and conventional institutions set in place by sovereign and economic power—*form-of-life*, in the sense we have just seen, is a manner in which life reveals itself in the experience of its unity outside any type of power. Agamben expresses this idea as follows: ‘[W]hat can a mode of life be that has for its object only life, which our political tradition has always already separated into bare life? Certainly, it will mean living it as something inseparable, causing *bios* and *zōē* to coincide at every point’.<sup>661</sup>

Another question is this: What precisely and concretely are those modalities (or modes) of life? We are encouraged to ask this question by the second meaning the term *form* conveys in Agamben’s thinking. The term *form* seems also to be a reference

<sup>655</sup> I borrow this expression from Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, 77.

<sup>656</sup> For more details concerning the Heideggerian influence on Agamben’s construal of form-of-life, see Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 188; *The Use of Bodies*, 174–86; Hunter, ‘Giorgio Agamben’s *Form-of-Life*’, 136–40; and Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 122.

<sup>657</sup> Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 121.

<sup>658</sup> Prozorov also thinks the same thing. He explains that ‘the concept of form-of-life remains one of the more elliptic and elusive concepts in Agamben’s work’. See Prozorov, ‘Mind Your Manners’, 236. See also Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, 107–08.

<sup>659</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 207.

<sup>660</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 224–26.

<sup>661</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 225.

to *potentiality*, which is another important category he employs in his elaboration on the form-of-life.<sup>662</sup> In this sense, the term *form* indicates the inner capacity life has to transcend any political and social fixation. Thus, as Mills rightly argues, Agamben's analysis of the form-of-life is connected to the issues of potentiality and its preservation.<sup>663</sup> Considered from this perspective, the form-of-life indicates at least two things. First, it points to the impossibility of defining and reducing life to one single determination, whether political or social. Second, it constitutes life as a process of becoming, or as Agamben himself writes, as 'a manner of rising forth, not a being that has this or that property or quality'.<sup>664</sup>

It is from this perspective that what Agamben writes in *The Use of Bodies* becomes intelligible. Reflecting on the meaning of the concept, form-of-life, he asks, 'what does this expression mean?' He then immediately responds: '[I]t defines a life—human life—in which the single ways, acts and processes of living are never simple *facts* but always and above all *possibilities* [*possibilità*] of life, always and above all potential [*potenza*]'.<sup>665</sup> In this passage, Agamben opposes whatever constitutes life—its modes, acts and processes—to facts. In this context, the word '*facts*' seems to refer to what is positively and conclusively fixed as such. In other words, facts, as regards Agamben, are political and social conditions which have been prescribed and defined by sovereign power through the law. Thus understood, facts exclude every possibility of being otherwise than they have been socially and politically designed to be. On the contrary, *modes*, *acts* and *processes* refer to potentiality and so constitute life as that which escapes all fixations and prescriptions in order to be open to itself.<sup>666</sup>

The crucial point Agamben makes here is that life is not a relational entity. In other words, life is not intrinsically constituted and understood in relation to any external and transcendent power—namely, sovereign power and its apparatuses of laws. Life is rather a reality that cannot, in whatsoever way, be irrevocably qualified or determined. In this sense, the form-of-life is a life that gives priority to its 'being thus', that is, to its own living rather than to the observance of any external norms.<sup>667</sup> Therefore, what is at stake in the form-of-life, in Agamben's view, is the unfolding and deployment of the potentiality of life itself.<sup>668</sup> Life is about living rather than

<sup>662</sup> On Agamben's discussion of potentiality, see Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 39–48; Frost, 'Destituent Power and the Problem of the Lives to Come', 213–14.

<sup>663</sup> Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, 108. See also Agamben himself, *The Use of Bodies*, 207–08.

<sup>664</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 224.

<sup>665</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 207; *L'uso dei corpi*, 264.

<sup>666</sup> See Agamben, *Means without End*, 3; *The Use of Bodies*, 208.

<sup>667</sup> Agamben, *Means without End*, 8.

<sup>668</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 174 and 186.

doing, about being rather than about acting. While the latter subordinates and subjugates life to legislations, the former opens life to itself and to its potentiality of being thus. This is why I stated above that form-of-life is a life that is immanently in relation to itself.<sup>669</sup> It is united so closely to itself that its modalities of living are neither exhausted nor extinguished. It is, Agamben contends in *The Use of Bodies*, that in which it is always possible to become this or that, to succeed or to fail.<sup>670</sup> From this viewpoint, one could say that the *being* and the *becoming* of the human being—as it is the life of the human being that is at issue in Agamben—are inseparable.<sup>671</sup> This is what Agamben, in *The Use of Bodies*, calls the ‘event of anthropogenesis’.<sup>672</sup> He characterizes it as a perpetual and continuous activity. The fact is that human existence, in his conception, is always an ongoing process that opens life to a multitude of possibilities.

At this juncture, let us consider the relation between form-of-life, the happy life and economy. First, as Mills has already pointed out, Agamben indistinctively associates form-of-life with the happy life. *Form-of-life* is another term he uses to talk about his own conception of the happy life.<sup>673</sup> Developing Mills’ suggestion, we can affirm that, for Agamben, the happy life in this sense becomes a life that transcends and heals the division between *zōē* and *bios* by liberating life from the field of sovereignty and reconciling it with itself.<sup>674</sup> In *The Use of Bodies*, Agamben himself makes clear that the idea of the happy life is connected to the form-of-life; both together make one single whole that must stand as the life of the coming politics: ‘a political life, which is to say, one oriented toward the idea of happiness and cohering in a form-of-life, is thinkable only starting from emancipation from this scission’, that is, the division between *zōē* and *bios*.<sup>675</sup> To put it differently, the happy life or form-of-life is, as Mills notes, a life that maintains a reciprocal tension between *bios* and *zōē* and results in an absolute relation to itself.<sup>676</sup>

Regarding economy, form-of-life institutes a different logic. Economy, a pole and paradigm of biopolitics,<sup>677</sup> manages life in all its details and thereby captures and exposes life to the control of its *pair*, the sovereign power. Form-of-life, on the other

<sup>669</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 3.

<sup>670</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 208 and *Means Without End*, 3–4.

<sup>671</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 208.

<sup>672</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 208.

<sup>673</sup> Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, 77; *Biopolitics*, 49–50.

<sup>674</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 219, 208 and 278.

<sup>675</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 210.

<sup>676</sup> Mills, *Biopolitics*, 50.

<sup>677</sup> See Chapter I, Section 5.

hand, disengages life from any relation to any transcendent power by putting it into relation and into unity with itself.<sup>678</sup> While economy and sovereignty insist on specific vocations, conferring identities and defining production, consumption and the accomplishment of tasks and duties as the essential characteristics of life, form-of-life emphasises the living of life itself irrespective of all economic and political commitments. As is discussed in the subsection below, this Agambenian construal of the form-of-life comes to light especially in *The Highest Poverty*. In that context, Agamben introduces the idea of the form-of-life from the perspective of the relationship between life and the law. He does so by analysing the Franciscan Order as a paradigm that sets forth the possibility of human existence realised outside the framework of *oikonomia* and the law.

For this reason, it could be argued that happiness, for Agamben, is not this or that specific form of life (way of living, or the *bios*). It is not the type of life that is governed (in the sense of *oikonomia*) and shaped by the economic and sovereign rules of biopolitics. It is not a life that emphasises economic growth, possession of wealth and consumption. Instead, it is a life of self-contentment, a life in which all types of life—namely, natural (*zōē*), political or qualified (*bios*), social, and cultural—are indistinctively united; it is a life taken holistically. This means that form-of-life challenges the idea of both the separability of life and the control that sovereign power may impose on it. Clearly, form-of-life provides a vision of life in which life goes beyond the dictates of sovereign power and is lived with reference to itself. Consequently, *bios* is meaningful only insofar as it is not differentiated from *zōē* and vice versa or, as Agamben himself hints in *Homo Sacer*, the happy life is ‘a *bios* that is only its own *zōē*’.<sup>679</sup> Thus understood, the form-of-life suggests the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of dividing and confining life into a single given mode, of economizing (that is, of governing) it and opposing its various particular aspects with one another.

One critical point can be made against Agamben’s construal of the form-of-life. It concerns the self-referentiality of life. Agamben’s conception of life—as the being of life in relation with itself—seems very abstract. This abstractness is made evident in the combination of the two abstract concepts, form and life, which he uses to define the form-of-life or the happy life.<sup>680</sup> Concretely speaking, it seems unintelligible what the inseparability of life from its form would mean in practical terms. This is

<sup>678</sup> Mills has also documented this point. See Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, 134.

<sup>679</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 188. Also, *The Use of Bodies*, 129.

<sup>680</sup> We have already explained that form-of-life is another notion Agamben uses as a synonym of the happy life. See, for example, General Introduction, sections 1 and 2.3 and Chapter 2, Section 3.

partly because both terms, *form* and *life*, are polysemous in Agamben: They refer to many other realities at the same time. For instance, in the sense we have just seen, *form* simultaneously means ‘potentiality’, ‘mode’ or ‘modalities’. In the same vein, the notion of life covers a whole constellation of meanings, ranging from natural life to political life, bare life and form-of-life, the connection of which at times defies explanation. Thus, one may ask what the conditions for achieving the inseparability of life could concretely be. And to which type of life will life be united, and how? From Agamben’s perspective, this inseparability is achievable through the enactment of the *hōs mē*.<sup>681</sup> But how would a life that is originally and already captured in the chains of sovereign power be able to liberate itself?

Though it might be contested, Agamben’s characterization of the form-of-life is a critical intellectual and philosophical effort that seeks to challenge any attempt of sovereign and economic power to possess and dominate life through the law. As an anthropogenetic event *par excellence*, the form-of-life points to the fact that life must be understood as a pure potentiality. As Agamben writes,

the form of human living is never prescribed by a specific biological vocation nor assigned by any necessity whatsoever, but even though it is customary, repeated, and socially obligatory, it always preserves its character as a real possibility.<sup>682</sup>

In other words, life is always a becoming that escapes all prescribed rules, any given assignments and any fixations. It is neither limited by nor caught up in any specific task.<sup>683</sup> As noted earlier, Agamben already hints at this idea in *The Coming Community*, where he characterises human existence as a purposeless and inoperative experience. All of this underscores the idea that, for him, life is not primarily about achieving things; it is rather about living. It is not about *acting* but instead about *being*. In this context, rather than being confined to economic and material increase, happiness consists in living life as such.<sup>684</sup>

A similar argument is made by Ferrarese in her analysis of the relevance of Agamben’s idea of the form-of-life in connection to capitalism.<sup>685</sup> She argues that, with the form-of-life, Agamben puts forward a ‘non-capitalist’ account of life. She claims that capitalism, for Agamben, dissects things and evaluates them by means of

<sup>681</sup> For more details on this point, see Chapter 3, Section 3.3 above.

<sup>682</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 207–08.

<sup>683</sup> See Prozorov, ‘Living à la mode’, 174–75.

<sup>684</sup> See Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 43–45.

<sup>685</sup> Ferrarese, ‘The Use of Bodies’, 126–36.

‘the distinction it institutes between use value and exchange value’.<sup>686</sup> In so doing, capitalism institutes a specific relation to material things and life in general: a relation of property and use that may lead to the destruction of what is possessed. I provide further details regarding the relation between form-of-life and use in Section 3 below. For the moment, it can be said that, within capitalist and economic frameworks, life as such is considered a commodity to be managed, exploited and used up to its possible extinction. Because capitalism is one of the dispositifs of the current constitution of biopolitics through which sovereignty and economy exploit life, produce bare life, and let life die, Agamben calls on us to envisage the emancipation of life from this biopolitical and capitalist relation to life.<sup>687</sup> This gesture, with which he concludes *Homo Sacer*, is explicitly and extensively elaborated in *The Highest Poverty*. In this book, as hinted at a few lines above, Agamben depicts the form-of-life as a life lived outside the realm of sovereignty and economy—that is, as life lived in a state of nonconformity with the preestablished social order. Form-of-life opens a political and social space in which life is never, Agamben maintains, looked at as something that can be possessed.<sup>688</sup>

## 2.2. Form-of-Life, a Life disentangled from Law

In *The Highest Poverty*, drawing on the Franciscan paradigm, Agamben conceives of the form-of-life as a life and a practice that is experienced outside the apparatus of sovereignty and economy. His analysis of Franciscanism in this book is to be understood as another step in his archaeological criticism of the estrangement of *zōē* and *bios*, which, as he repeatedly claims, has presided over Western culture. Note that, in the context of *The Highest Poverty*, the Franciscans are the only concrete example Agamben provides in his elaboration of the relation between life and sovereign power. He argues that the Franciscans introduced the possibility of life set outside juridical norms. To show this, Agamben convokes and investigates a heterogenous collection of texts from the history of Medieval monasticism. For this reason, it is sometimes hard to decipher his personal point, as it is mingled within a constellation of disparate excerpts. The crucial role the Franciscan Order plays in Agamben’s account of the form-of-life—conceived as a life set in tension against the current economic and juridical tradition—has already been extensively discussed.<sup>689</sup> In subsequent lines, the focus is on the practical modalities they put forward to disentangle life from the domain of the sovereign. My analysis is now aimed to determine how, according to Agamben, the Franciscans realised the *fuga iuris* (that is, the exit from law) and thereby reconstructed ‘a form-of-life, that is to say, a life that is linked so closely to its

<sup>686</sup> Ferrarese, ‘The Use of Bodies’, 126.

<sup>687</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 188.

<sup>688</sup> See Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, xiii.

<sup>689</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 3.

form that it proves to be inseparable from it'.<sup>690</sup> As Ferrarese noted, Agamben argues that the Franciscans' exodus from sovereign power (symbolised by the Church) and constitution of the form-of-life were made possible by means of two heterogeneous and yet methodologically coordinated logics: namely, the indistinction between rule and life and the abdication of all rights—as is explained below.<sup>691</sup>

### 2.2.1. *The Indistinction between Rule and Life*

According to Agamben, Franciscans created an indistinction between rule and life. He asserts that there are generally five distinct ways of understanding rules in the literature on monastic rules, but he unequivocally rejects all of them. The first is to understand them as 'juridical works'.<sup>692</sup> However, Agamben claims that this is incorrect inasmuch as the rule, for Franciscans, is not imposed or 'applied to life, but [life] produces it and at the same time is produced in it'.<sup>693</sup> The second option treats rules as 'historical narratives'.<sup>694</sup> Agamben also excludes this conception. He says that rules within the context of Franciscans are not essentially about the description of the factual and historical life of the community, though they may contain some historical facts.<sup>695</sup> Third, rules may be understood as 'hagiographies'; but Agamben discards this understanding as well. He thinks that Franciscan rules are not primarily concerned with the lives of the saints. The fourth is that rules are ethical principles. The fifth is that they are 'ecclesiastical literature'. However, Agamben also jettisons these possibilities.<sup>696</sup> For him, Franciscan's rules are '*conversatio*', that is, a 'conduct' or a 'way of life'.<sup>697</sup> Thus, for Agamben, the only way to conceive of rules within the Franciscan framework is to think of them as an emanation of the dynamics of life itself, as Franciscans try not to follow rules but to follow and reproduce the life of Christ. In this sense, it could be said that rules are a kind of *in-between*, or what Agamben calls 'the third thing' that unites life and its form.<sup>698</sup> Rules are not norms in the proper sense of the term. This is evident in the fact that Franciscans, as Agamben reports, did not conform their lives to the Church's positive laws. Instead, they modelled their lives after the Gospel. The latter reproduced the form of the life of Jesus Christ, which Franciscans took as the *exemplum*. Rather than follow the Church's positive and official regulations about monastic life, Franciscans imitated Christ's life, which emphasised poverty.<sup>699</sup>

<sup>690</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, xi.

<sup>691</sup> See also, Ferrarese, 'The Use of Bodies', 134.

<sup>692</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 4.

<sup>693</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 61 and 69.

<sup>694</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 4.

<sup>695</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 4.

<sup>696</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 4.

<sup>697</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 104.

<sup>698</sup> See Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 60–61.

<sup>699</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 93–96.

Given that they are not imposed from the exterior by any transcendent authority, the rules at work in the Franciscan *forma vitae*, Agamben argues, emerge from life; in fact, they are generated by the lives the monks live. For him, rules and life constitute each other indistinctively. In his words, ‘the rule enters in this way into a zone of undecidability with respect to life’.<sup>700</sup> What seems to be at stake here is a reversal of paradigms. In the context of biopolitics, articulated within the framework of economy, it is sovereign power that produces life (that is, bare life). On the contrary, in the context of the form-of-life (or the happy life), it is life itself that produces a rule and vice versa. Thus, life is liberated from the hold of sovereign power and exposed to its own potential of living. Agamben expresses this idea as follows:

The traditional juridical idea of the observance of a precept is here reversed. Not only is it the case that the Friar Minor does not obey the rule, but live it—with an even more extreme reversal, it is life that is to be applied to the norm and not the norm to life...so that one shifts from the level of practice and acting to that of form of life and living.<sup>701</sup>

In other words, the Franciscan *forma vivendi* introduces an attitudinal transformation towards existence. This change of attitude, as Prozorov says, implies ‘adopting a different perspective on something entirely familiar and banal—quite simply, our habits, hobbies, tastes, manners, quirks, etc.’<sup>702</sup> Emphasis is, henceforth, put on life or living itself rather than on obeying some prescribed ideological and social conventions established by sovereign power. In this way, the form-of-life constitutes happiness as a life that transcends the dialectic between life and law, thereby uniting life with itself.<sup>703</sup> The happy life is no longer conceived of as an enforcement of the law and economic goals. Rather, it is the living of life itself and the experimentation of one’s own potentiality. In this sense, the reference of life is no longer the sovereign power but life itself. The question now is this: What does the Franciscan mode of life add to Agamben’s account of economy and happiness?

Agamben finds the Franciscans’ *forma vivendi* (that is, form of living)<sup>704</sup> and *forma vitae* (that is, form-of-life)<sup>705</sup> instructive. For him, the Franciscan model put forward a new way of thinking the relation between life and law. The Franciscans demonstrated that life is neither informed nor shaped by the law and that it is possible to live a life

<sup>700</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 26.

<sup>701</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 61.

<sup>702</sup> Prozorov, ‘Mind Your Manners’, 241.

<sup>703</sup> See Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 105.

<sup>704</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 94.

<sup>705</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 94.

that is not based on the law. On the contrary, in developing itself, life generates its own dynamics of living and its own rules. In this manner, form-of-life breaks and transcends the classical opposition of rule and life. Form-of-life points to the fact that rule and life are not two distinct entities that exclude each other but rather enter into an indistinguishable relation. For this reason, Agamben argues that the form-of-life calls into question the ‘concepts of observance, and application, of transgression and fulfilment’ that define the apparatus of law at work within the framework of sovereign power.<sup>706</sup> This is to say that Agamben postulates the possibility of human existence beyond and outside the grasp of law, in which life is in relation with itself in the mode of inoperativity, that is, in a mode deprived of any specific and predefined qualification.<sup>707</sup> So far as I can see, this is what he understands as the meaning of happy life: As has already been said, it is a life upon which sovereign power has no influence whatsoever, inasmuch as the life in question escapes the presuppositional logic that defines sovereignty.<sup>708</sup> Agamben argues that, under the realm of sovereign power, the happy life is thought of as centred around the strict and, at times, blind observance and accomplishment of specific political ideologies and economic goals. On the contrary, renouncing any conformity to external rules, the happy life, in Agamben’s own conception, follows its own living or existential dynamics.<sup>709</sup>

Agamben’s attempt to consider both the interpenetration of rule and life and the life lived outside the mastery of sovereign power is extremely thought-provoking. It challenges the prominence of law, understood, as has been pointed out, as an instrument sovereign power uses to control and govern all the aspects of human existence in society. As a crucial category in Agamben’s thinking, form-of-life participates in an intellectual and political movement, so to speak, that aims to challenge the excessive domination and control that sovereign power exercises on individual and private life. What seems at issue in this movement is an effort to affirm that human life is not primarily to be thought of as a product or by-product of sovereign power. Life is not all about what a sovereign power decides. In fact, life is more than any legal prescription and economic goals defined by biopolitics *à la* sovereign power. In the current political and societal context—which is dominated

<sup>706</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 54.

<sup>707</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, xi, 110–16 and 140.

<sup>708</sup> The logic of presupposition is the logic that consists in subdividing and separating a phenomenon, an entity or a reality, such as life into natural life as opposed to political life, and then poses the former part as the foundation of the latter. For more details, see Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 62–4 and 156; Bird, *Containing Community*, 123.

<sup>709</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 61 and 110. Prozorov also has a similar thesis. He describes Agamben’s form-of-life as a ‘life that does not have a form that it must attain by sacrificing living itself,’ as ‘it always already is a form that it takes up by living’. Prozorov, ‘*Living à la mode*’, 147.

by sovereign power that, through the law, governs all aspects of social and individual lives—one of the implications of Agamben's philosophy, if it is pushed to the extreme, is that human life in general and the happy life in particular must always be conceived of beyond the determinations of laws. This was exactly, in Agamben's view, the movement that the Franciscans attempted to put forward in their effort to live outside the Roman Church's laws.

### 2.2.2. *The Renunciation of Rights*

Franciscans, according to Agamben, abjured all rights to property. To analyse their relation to ownership, as he does in his elaboration on the dialectic of rule and life, Agamben discusses many texts from Hugh of Digne, Ockham and Bonaventure.<sup>710</sup> The decisive point Agamben puts forward in this context is that the Franciscans 'put into practice a type of renunciation of property that was both individual and collective, and which puts them out of the reach of the law understood as a regime of appropriation'.<sup>711</sup> They gave up all their rights: the right to possession, the right to heritage, the right to have any rights, etc.<sup>712</sup> The question that comes to mind is this: Why must Franciscans abdicate all rights? In their understanding, Agamben argues, right to ownership inscribes life into the purview of the positive law from which they sought to distance themselves.<sup>713</sup> Instead, they espoused *usus pauper* (in Italian, *l'uso povero*),<sup>714</sup> which means 'poor use'.<sup>715</sup> In Agamben's view, *usus pauper* was practiced through '*de facto use*'.<sup>716</sup> I expand further on the notion of use and its relation to form-of-life in Section 3, below. For the moment, it suffices to affirm that the Franciscans' the *de facto* use implies a mere use of material goods—without, however, claiming right over them—based on necessity.<sup>717</sup> The goods and things in the world in general were used only to respond to specific and basic natural needs, such as hunger, shelter, clothing, heat and cold.<sup>718</sup>

The point Agamben makes here is that right to property exposes life and puts it into direct contact with sovereign power. As a result, it could be said that rights subordinate *life* to sovereign and economic power. Through rights, sovereign power claims property over life, considering it as something that is manageable. Thus, in

<sup>710</sup> See Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 109–22.

<sup>711</sup> See Ferrarese, 'The Use of Bodies', 134.

<sup>712</sup> See Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 110.

<sup>713</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 111.

<sup>714</sup> Agamben, *Altissima povertà*, 121.

<sup>715</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 127.

<sup>716</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 110.

<sup>717</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 110–13. See also Ferrarese, 'The Use of Bodies', 134.

<sup>718</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 110. See also DeCaroli, 'What Is a Form-of-Life?' 215–16.

Agamben's view, as far as I can understand it, rights institute a relation of power in which that which is owned, namely life, is ruled.<sup>719</sup> On the contrary, the abdication of right and the *de facto* use, in Agamben's opinion, liberate life as such from the dynamics of the power relation.<sup>720</sup> Once liberated from the relation with power, the only thing that relates life to the external world is simple use. One of the implications of Agamben's interpretation of the Franciscans' renunciation of rights is the obliteration of the distance between *bios* and *zōē* that is central to the constitution of sovereign power. Since it is no longer defined and governed in relation to any right, life is lived in relation with itself. We could, therefore, say that *bios* is indistinctively restored as well as reconciled with its *zōē*. The idea is that life is not invested by power but exists in the manner and experience of its own being-thus.<sup>721</sup> This thesis becomes clearer when considering *The Highest Poverty*, in which Agamben comments on the 'assimilation of the Franciscan form of life to an animal life', as found in both Bonagratia and Richard of Conington, who are two important figures of Franciscanism.<sup>722</sup> Agamben argues that Bonagratia and Richard of Conington have shown that, in the Franciscans' way of life, both *zōē* and *bios* merged together inseparably. In Agamben's words, 'if on the one hand animals are humanized and become "brothers," conversely, the brothers are equated with animals from the point of view of the law'.<sup>723</sup> In this way, life is united with itself in order to live its potentiality.

Now is perhaps a good time to ask whether the Franciscan model, according to Agamben, actually succeeds in realising the exodus of life from sovereign power and law. The response is simply and straightforwardly negative. In *The Highest Poverty*, Agamben makes clear that the Franciscan vow to own nothing and to use things only in case of necessity has collapsed. Despite its intent to set forth the possibility of human existence outside the determinations of sovereign power, the *theoria* and *praxis* of the vow of poverty continued to maintain life in relation to the law, whose power the Franciscans wanted to neutralise.<sup>724</sup> As far as I can understand, Franciscans, from Agamben's point of view, were a paradigm of juridical paradox. Like the paradox that defines sovereignty—'the sovereign is, at the same time, outside and inside the juridical order'<sup>725</sup>—they simultaneously stand outside the law in normal circumstances and maintain a relation to it in case of necessity. In other words, under the normal

<sup>719</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 123.

<sup>720</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 110.

<sup>721</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 64.

<sup>722</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 111.

<sup>723</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 111.

<sup>724</sup> For more details on this discussion, see Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 110–16; DeCaroli, 'What Is a Form-of-Life?', 216; and Vatter, 'Law and Life beyond Incorporation', 239–42.

<sup>725</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 15.

factual conditions established by sovereign power to which law applies, the Franciscans are excluded from law: They have no right to own things. However, when necessity, such as hunger and the need for shelter, arises, they ‘recover’, as Agamben says, ‘a relationship with the law’.<sup>726</sup> They regain the right to use things. For this reason, the Franciscans, for him, have failed to break the nexus between use and right to property, and also, therefore, the relation between sovereign power, law and life. Instead, they remain caught up within the circularity of, and the logic at work within, sovereignty and economy. In fact, they are, in Agamben’s view, a concrete paradigm of the state of exception, in that they relate to the law in a form of exclusive inclusion. Though living outside the purview of law, Franciscans come in contact with the law as soon as there is a necessity that grants them again the right to use goods.<sup>727</sup>

Considering this paradox, Agamben concludes *The Highest Poverty* by thinking beyond the Franciscans’ jurisprudence in order to invent an adequate notion of use that would better express his idea of the form-of-life. Already in this context, and later in *The Use of Bodies*, he conceives of this use as self-constitutive in terms of the Pauline *hōs mē*.<sup>728</sup> This is to say, he conceives of it as a use in which life relates to itself rather than to the law. In conclusion, one could say that Agamben conceives of form-of-life as an alternative to the capture and exhaustion of life into the domain of sovereign power and economy. It means both a life that breaks and exits the control of sovereign power, and a life that is lived in the experience of its own unity. These two accounts are to be regarded as two different and yet complementary ways of conceiving the same reality: namely, the form-of-life. In both ways, it is formulated as an attempt to neutralize and render inoperative all the positive contents of life established by sovereign power.

### 3. Form-of-Life and Destitution

Agamben often associates the notion of form-of-life with other key concepts that are essential to understanding his gloss on the notion. One of those is *destitution*. Accordingly, this section focuses on clarifying and examining the relation between form-of-life and destitution within the framework of Agamben’s account of *oikonomia* and happiness. I will show that the concept of form-of-life crystallises and accomplishes his philosophical project, that is, destitution, understood as the deactivation of all the dynamics of the sovereign and governmental (*oikonomia*)

<sup>726</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 115.

<sup>727</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 114–15.

<sup>728</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 139–43.

machine of biopolitics. This will be achieved by exploring and discussing the meaning of key notions such as “potentiality” and “inoperativity”, which are crucial to Agamben’s account of destitution and form-of-life. Unless one clearly understands the connection between these notions, one runs the risk of completely misunderstanding the destituent nature of form-of-life. It is in fact through the recovery and redefinition of potentiality and inoperativity that form-of-life is, in Agamben’s view, constitutively destituent.<sup>729</sup>

In his monograph, *Vivre Sans? Institutions, police, travail, argent*, F. Lordon explains that destitution is the ‘terminus’ of Agamben’s critical political theory.<sup>730</sup> If destitution is the *telos* of Agamben’s thought, what is its starting point? On closer inspection of his *Homo Sacer* series, it could be maintained that, at the beginning of his philosophy, there appears the idea of separation or division of life and, consequently, its politicization through the exception.<sup>731</sup> This observation indicates that, at the inception of his thought, Agamben identifies what can be termed ‘an ontological crisis’—that is, a problem in the constitution and understanding of life—which his philosophy aims to address and to solve.<sup>732</sup> In this sense, his philosophy can be considered an antidote to the violent separation mechanisms of biopolitics *à la* sovereign and economic (or managerial) power, so that life gains back its original significance, that is, its being in an immediate relation and unity with itself.<sup>733</sup> Agamben started the project of criticizing the tradition of Western biopolitics in *Homo Sacer*.<sup>734</sup> And he concludes the project in question with the idea of destituent power in *The Use of Bodies*. Thus, it can be said that destitution is the extension and application, in the political order, of Agamben’s refutation of not only the conceptualities but also the institutional practices of Western biopolitics.<sup>735</sup>

The nature of destituent power and the vital role it plays within Agamben’s political thought have already been discussed.<sup>736</sup> Nonetheless, we must recall that he conceives of destitution as a form of power that is contrary to sovereign power. Whereas the latter, according to him, is constitutive by nature, in the sense that it captures life

<sup>729</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 247 and 273.

<sup>730</sup> See Lordon, *Vivre Sans*, 64.

<sup>731</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 263–65; ‘What Is a Destituent Power’, 65–66. See also, Lordon, *Vivre Sans*, 64–66; Prozorov, ‘Mind Your Manners’, 237. This point was extensively discussed above in chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>732</sup> See Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 272.

<sup>733</sup> See Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, 77.

<sup>734</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1–29; ‘What Is a Destituent Power’, 66.

<sup>735</sup> Agamben, ‘What Is a Destituent Power’, 70. Lordon also documents this reading. See Lordon, *Vivre Sans*, 98.

<sup>736</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 2.3.

into its dispositifs, destitution is a form of power that aims to disengage life as such from all the social and political vocations and identities which sovereign power imposes upon it.<sup>737</sup> In this way, it can be said that destituent power challenges and seeks to break the logic and strategies of sovereignty and economy by rendering them ineffective. Contrary to the dispositifs of biopolitics, in which life, acting as the foundation of the political, is fragmented into the natural life (that is, into *zōē*), qualified life (that is, *bios*) and bare life, destituent power provides a new understanding of the essence and place of life in politics. Put differently, destitution undoes all the factual conditions and segmentation of life that define sovereignty and economy, thereby constituting life as pure potentiality.<sup>738</sup> A further question which is yet to be answered is this: How, according to Agamben, is destitution concretely achieved? In other words, through what operation do we move from the capturing dispositifs of sovereignty to destituent power?

A study by Whittall Arthur Craig demonstrates that Agamben's seminal attempt to think destitution begins already in *Homo Sacer*.<sup>739</sup> Craig submits that Agamben introduces therein a reflection on 'the political action' that could stop and alter the logic of sovereign biopolitics. Agamben, according to Craig, carries out this discussion from the perspective of the dialectic between constituting power and constituted power.<sup>740</sup> Craig continues by arguing that, in this context, Agamben characterizes constituting power as a force that creates and institutes a new legal and political order. Using W. Benjamin's terminology, Agamben conceives of constituted power, on the other hand, as the power that 'preserves' and maintains the created legal order.<sup>741</sup> I am sympathetic towards Craig's thesis that Agamben's primary attempt to think destitution can be traced back to *Homo Sacer*. However, I think that it is through the notion of potentiality, rather than through that of constituting power that Agamben, in the context of *Homo Sacer*, initiates his reflection on the destituent

<sup>737</sup> See Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 207–13; 263–79; Prozorov, 'Mind Your Manners', 236.

<sup>738</sup> See Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 207–13 and 263–79.

<sup>739</sup> Craig, *Labour and Life*, 115–16.

<sup>740</sup> Craig, *Labour and Life*, 116; Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 39–48.

<sup>741</sup> Craig, *Labour and Life*, 116; Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 39–41.

potential.<sup>742</sup> As we will see in the following lines, potentiality in Agamben's conception is the key notion that expresses his coming politics, that is, the attempt to envisage human existence beyond all formal determinations.

Agamben deals explicitly with the concept of potentiality in two main texts. In *Potentialities*, he dedicates two chapters to the concept (Chapter 11, 'On Potentiality', and Chapter 15, 'Bartleby, or On Contingency'). And in *Homo Sacer*, he deals with it in Chapter Three: 'Potentiality and Law'.<sup>743</sup> In both contexts, his theory of potentiality is articulated in a close relation with the notion of impotentiality. As noted by Kevin Attell—upon whose article our elaboration on Agamben's theory of potentiality largely draws—both potentiality and impotentiality, 'are so intimately connected in Agamben's thought that they can be said to be the same thing. Indeed, the first point that must be made about potentiality is its constitutive co-belonging—and ultimate identity—with impotentiality'.<sup>744</sup> Agamben traces this link back to Aristotle's distinction 'between *dynamis* and *energeia*', that is, to potentiality and act.<sup>745</sup> In fact, Aristotle's analysis of these notions provides Agamben with a theoretical framework he uses to formulate his own theory of potentiality. What seems crucial for him is the search for a way to affirm the autonomy of potentiality *vis-à-vis* actuality. Thus, like Aristotle, who affirmed 'the autonomous existence of potentiality' against the Megarians,<sup>746</sup> Agamben argues that potentiality is always potentiality 'to (*be* or *do*) or not to (*be* or *do*)'.<sup>747</sup> In *Potentialities*, Agamben calls the potentiality to be or to do the 'generic potentiality'. He claims that it refers to one's inner and natural capacity to do something, such as a child's potentiality to learn. The actualisation of this potentiality necessitates an alteration in one's being. A child, for example, must go through the process of learning in order to actualise the capacity to learn.<sup>748</sup> The second potentiality is what, in *Homo Sacer*, Agamben calls 'pure potentiality', that is, the potentiality *not to be* or *not to do*.<sup>749</sup> He contends that it denotes

<sup>742</sup> In fact, for Agamben, 'constituting power' together with 'constituted power' only repeats and perpetuates the logic of sovereign power. He even affirms that sovereign power is the foundation that underpins the passage from constituting power to constituted power. This point is clear in Chapter 3 of *Homo Sacer*, 'Potentiality and Law', 39–48, where Agamben himself dismisses constituting power and presents it as a paradigm of sovereignty. For more details, see Cimino, 'Europe and Paul of Tarsus', 298–99. In this paper, Cimino discusses Agamben's interview published in the German newspaper, *Die Zeit*, in which the latter 'analyses the current political situation and outlines his own proposal for overcoming Europe's crisis'. In this context, Cimino clearly explains that Agamben rejects the relationship between constituting power and constituted power.

<sup>743</sup> Agamben, *Potentialities*, 177–84 and 243–71; *Homo Sacer*, 39–48.

<sup>744</sup> Attell, 'Potentiality/Impotentiality', 159–60.

<sup>745</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 44.

<sup>746</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 44–45.

<sup>747</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 45.

<sup>748</sup> Agamben, *Potentialities*, 179.

<sup>749</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 21 and 46–47.

an ability one has. It is a having like a poet's ability to compose poems or a singer's ability to sing. Such persons can decide to actualize or not actualize their abilities.<sup>750</sup> It is this second feature of potentiality that is more significant to Agamben.<sup>751</sup> He calls it 'im-potentiality' (*impotenza* in Italian).<sup>752</sup> Rather than meaning 'inability', 'impossibility' or even 'passivity' as opposed to 'potentiality', as most scholars have interpreted it,<sup>753</sup> Agamben describes impotentiality as an integral part of the nature of potentiality. In fact, he characterises it as the best way potentiality resists, and persists beyond, the passing over to actuality as its unique way of realisation. In other words, potentiality fully realises itself by suspending its passage to actuality.<sup>754</sup> In his words, 'this potentiality maintains itself in relation to actuality in the form of its suspension; it is *capable* of the act in not realizing it, it is sovereignly capable of its own im-potentiality'.<sup>755</sup>

What does it mean that potentiality relates to actuality in the mode of its suspension? It means that, with or without actualisation, potentiality continues to exist in the form of impotentiality, that is, in relation to itself. In fact, it could be said that potentiality, from Agamben's viewpoint, persists beyond actualization. Being in the mode of impotentiality, potentiality maintains its independence to actuality. Thus, it can be concluded that, as far as Agamben is concerned, impotentiality, as the other side of potentiality, demonstrates that potentiality is never fully captured in its passing over onto actuality.<sup>756</sup> It rather escapes any attempt to reduce it to the latter. Agamben justifies this thesis by asserting that potentiality depends for its existence neither on actuality nor on external conditions.<sup>757</sup> While it can be actualized, potentiality, for him, cannot be confined to actuality. In fact, potentiality constitutes itself as a form of privation of actuality. It is, as he states, 'that through which Being founds itself *sovereignly*, which is to say, without anything preceding or determining it other than its own ability not to be'.<sup>758</sup>

Understood from the perspective, we can argue that Agamben here seems to cast potentiality as the ontological foundation for the political action that, in his view, calls sovereign decision to question. Potentiality should, therefore, be interpreted

<sup>750</sup> Agamben, *Potentialities*, 179–80.

<sup>751</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 45.

<sup>752</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 45.

<sup>753</sup> See Attell, 'Potentiality/Impotentiality', 160.

<sup>754</sup> See Attell, 'Potentiality, Actuality, Constituent Power', 40.

<sup>755</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 45.

<sup>756</sup> See also Attell, 'Potentiality, Actuality, Constituent Power', 41–43.

<sup>757</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 45.

<sup>758</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 46.

as the emancipatory potential, which Agamben puts forward in the context of *Homo Sacer* as an experimental strategy to think politics beyond the framework of sovereign biopolitics. What Agamben seems to be after is a description of life as purely potential. Life, for him, exceeds all formal forms and realizations. What life is and/or must be is, as Agamben himself says in *The Coming Community*, 'the simple fact of its own existence as possibility or potentiality'.<sup>759</sup> That life is pure potentiality, according to him, means that human beings have no proper and pre-defined vocation, no proper work or essence that constitutes their being humans.<sup>760</sup> Concretely, Agamben opens here what might be termed a *default anthropology*: the description and definition of the human being as lacking any specific essence and, therefore, as open to any possibilities. The only essence a human being is and has, so to speak, is that he or she is and has nothing pre-determined or defined. As a result, individuals must create themselves in the process of living. This is to say, the being human of the human being is an endless process; it is a continuous becoming.

Agamben returns to this idea in the final chapter of *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 'Archive and Testimony', when he reflects on the meaning of modal categories, such as possibility and impossibility, necessity and contingency.<sup>761</sup> What interests us here is not so much his genealogical digression of these concepts but rather his ontological argument. He argues that these categories are not merely logical and epistemological concepts. They do not merely shape and govern, as in Kant, our relation to propositions and knowledge. They are 'weapons used' in the battlefield of subjectivity.<sup>762</sup> They are, in other words, ontological categories that are used in defining the human being. According to Agamben, they point to the fact that the human being is not a determinate being. Instead, the human being is a process that is not confronted with a particular task (or vocation) that must be fulfilled. It is in line with this that Agamben says that the human being is 'a field of forces always already traversed by the incandescent and historically determined currents of potentiality and impotentiality, of being able to not be and not being able not to be'.<sup>763</sup> Simply put, for Agamben, the human being is fundamentally to be conceived as a being that is always in perpetual search of realization and constitution. No particular vocation or identity definitively constitutes and defines a human being.

Agamben crystallizes his account of the way out of sovereignty in *The Use of Bodies*. His politics of withdrawal in that context is constructed around a conceptual trilogy:

<sup>759</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 43.

<sup>760</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 43–44.

<sup>761</sup> See Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 145–148.

<sup>762</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 147.

<sup>763</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 147–48.

namely, destitution, inoperativity and form-of-life. In other words, *The Use of Bodies* elaborates on destituent potential by bringing inoperativity and form-of-life into play—two further important concepts that are conceptually related to and understood as extensions of potentiality in Agamben’s thought. Let us try to examine the knot between these notions. In the epilogue to *The Use of Bodies*, Agamben asserts that destituent potential can be thought of as a politics of inoperativity.<sup>764</sup> ‘Here’, he writes, ‘the proximity between destituent potential and what in the course of our research we have designated by the term “inoperativity” appears clearly’.<sup>765</sup> In this passage, Agamben clearly states that destituent power is closely related to inoperativity. In fact, the latter is understood as an integral part of the former. From his viewpoint, what matters in both cases is their ability to depose the apparatuses of the sovereign and governmental machine of biopolitics—that is, all the power relations, controls, functions and even human efforts—that grab, as Prozorov affirms, ‘our preference not to be or do something, which is the condition of any possible experience of freedom’.<sup>766</sup> As is delineated in the subsequent lines, destituent potential, inoperativity and form-of-life must be seen, *mutatis mutandis*, as comprising Agamben’s solution to the problem of sovereign power. They break sovereign power and the related circularity between constituting power and constituted power, as well as all the fixed and separated aspects of life, by enacting and making possible the reintegration of life and the release of the new potential of life.

De la Durantaye and Prozorov have noted that inoperativity is one of the most ‘enigmatic’ and ‘misunderstood’ concepts in Agamben’s corpus. Among the reasons for their judgment is the difficulty encountered in properly translating the term in question from the Italian *inoperosità*.<sup>767</sup> It is translated, they argue, either as ‘inoperativeness’<sup>768</sup> or as ‘inactivity’<sup>769</sup> and ‘inoperability’.<sup>770</sup> According to them, *inoperativity* is often thought of as synonymous to *inertia*, *passivity* and even *idleness*.<sup>771</sup> Nevertheless, so far as Agamben’s thought is concerned, *inoperativity* denotes the lack of any pre-determined and prescribed work or task that would constitute the essence of the human being. Based on De la Durantaye’s and Prozorov’s insights, we can say that, for Agamben, the human being is without either any fixed essence or work. Rather than

<sup>764</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 272–73.

<sup>765</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 273.

<sup>766</sup> Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 58.

<sup>767</sup> De la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, 18; Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 33.

<sup>768</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 62; Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 33; and De la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, 7 and 18.

<sup>769</sup> Agamben, *State of Exception*, 64; Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 33.

<sup>770</sup> Agamben, *Means without End*, 141–42; Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 33.

<sup>771</sup> For more details, see De la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, 7.

being determined or having a predefined essence and work, the human is primarily a process of becoming. Humans acquire their essences by living life as an experience of pure potentiality.<sup>772</sup> Agamben also expresses this idea in *Means without End* when he states that ‘the essential inoperability [*inoperosità*]’ is the ‘being-without-work of human communities’.<sup>773</sup> The point he makes here is that, for him, human beings are not primarily defined by work. Instead, they are inoperative, which is to say, they are deprived of any specific and fixed task to accomplish, which consequently means that their existence is a pure potentiality to be or not to be. Inoperativity can, therefore, be thought of as a refusal to confine life to a particular essence and work.

We can argue that Agamben questions the instrumental and capitalist conception of human existence by bringing destitution and inoperativity together conceptually. Consequently, the politics of inoperativity challenges the current constitution of politics and society. From the latter perspective, life is defined by law and work. To work in this sense is to achieve a task, to realise a goal and to actualize what has been prescribed. It is quite intriguing to observe that our human existence has become increasingly punctuated by an excessive frenzy for work, productivity and money-making. We hardly seem to have *leisure* time enough just to *be-there* and contemplate our lives as such. Prozorov is thus right in stating that Agamben uses the term *inoperativity* to indicate the absence of utility and to conceive of life as ‘a form of praxis that is devoid of any telos or task, does not realise any essence and does not correspond to any nature’.<sup>774</sup> That the human being is inoperative—workless—means that what constitutes the human, for Agamben, is first and foremost the relation to the self.<sup>775</sup> This latter idea has an important ethical consequence for Agamben. As a matter of fact, it reconfigures our understanding of ethics and happiness. Ethics and

<sup>772</sup> See Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 1–3.

<sup>773</sup> Agamben, *Means without End*, 141.

<sup>774</sup> Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 33.

<sup>775</sup> In this sense, I think that, given its emphasis on being (or existing) for the sake of being itself, rather than for the sake of any specific goals, Agamben’s politics of inoperativity can be read in light of Jean Paul Sartre as a form of an existentialism. In *Existentialism is Humanism*, Sartre also defends an account of human existence that challenges the idea that human life has a specific and pre-defined essence that it must fulfil. In contrast, he thinks that human beings are nothing other than what they decide and make themselves to be, on account of their thrownness in the world. For instance, he argues that ‘existence precedes essence’ means that ‘man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and only afterwards defines himself’. See Sartre, *Existentialism is Humanism*, 42. For Sartre, as for Agamben, what really matters in human life is for the human being to exist in accord with his or her potentiality. The human being comes into existence in the world without any specific vocation, essence or purpose. What he or she becomes is as an outcome of his or her potentiality to be or not to be. Agamben seems to allude to this very point when, reflecting on the meaning of use of the self in *The Use of Bodies*, he argues that one uses oneself first before gaining any substantiality. See Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 54–56.

happiness, rather than implying conformity to laws and social conventions, as we saw in Chapter Two, now implies the relation to and use of the self.<sup>776</sup> The ethico-political life, therefore, denotes a life that is detached from all positive fixations determined by sovereign power.

In *The Kingdom and the Glory*, Agamben restates this point when he elaborates upon the archaeology of glory. In that context, he asserts that inoperativity means cessation of all activities and all forms of work that define the machine of *oikonomia* and sovereignty.<sup>777</sup> In this inoperativity, what matters is the life we live. The life we live is not primarily the one that is shaped by power and confined to work. The life we live is rather our potentiality to live and to act. It is from this perspective that Agamben describes inoperativity—alongside destitution and form-of-life—as a praxis that deactivates the logic and works of sovereign power.<sup>778</sup> In this sense, we can say that Agamben uses the term *inoperativity* as a specific political ethical praxis or way of being that removes human life from the hold and mechanisms of the exclusion and inclusion that are at work within biopolitics, as conceived from the perspective of sovereignty and government. As he writes, inoperativity aims to ‘deactivate in the present all the juridical conditions and all the social behaviors of the members of the messianic community’.<sup>779</sup> To put it differently, inoperativity is the philosophical strategy Agamben puts forward in his attempt to withdraw human existence as such from sovereign power.

This, I think, is where inoperativity reveals its closeness, or better still, its proximity to destitution. What is at issue in both cases, as Agamben himself puts it, is the effort to deactivate, to render inoperative and empty all the living and legal factual conditions defined by sovereign and governmental machines of biopolitics. The politics of inoperativity does this by liberating the potentialities inherent in life and exposing them to different use.<sup>780</sup> What this means is that the current factual conditions that constitute biopolitics—that is, the logic of exclusive inclusion, the division of life, work, and the profit-oriented account of life, etc.—are no longer regarded as what determines life in society. On the contrary, human existence is fundamentally understood and described as a deployment and exploration of the potentiality to be or to do. And it is this being without specific work that is the condition of possibility of human engagement to work, not the other way round. In other words, human beings work because they lack any particular essence and

<sup>776</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 247.

<sup>777</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 251.

<sup>778</sup> See Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 250–52.

<sup>779</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 248.

<sup>780</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 273.

work; work is therefore an outcome of the human being's inoperativity.<sup>781</sup> In working, human beings realise themselves and become specific beings. It is not work that characterises human beings but rather their being without work. It is based on this idea that Agamben presents inoperativity as the foundation and paradigm of his conception of the coming politics.<sup>782</sup>

It is apposite at this point to introduce the other concept mentioned at the beginning of our discussion which is tightly connected to destitution and inoperativity: namely, form-of-life. For Agamben, form-of-life is what concretely deactivates and renders inoperative the apparatuses of biopolitics. For him, form-of-life *ipso facto* entails the deposition of all forms of the constituted and positive political, social and even religious determinations in which life is grabbed.<sup>783</sup> Consequently, in form-of-life, all aspects of life are removed from the domain of sovereign and economic power. In other words, human existence is no more thought of in direct relation with sovereignty and economy, but in relation with life itself. The verb *remove* must be emphasised here. It translates the intrinsic connection between form-of-life, inoperativity and destituent potential because, as Van der Heiden shows, *inoperativity* also expresses the idea of removal from office.<sup>784</sup>

With respect to our argument, the word *office* should be understood in this context as an allusion to all the mechanisms and dispositifs of biopolitics that apprehend life, dominate it and shape it unilaterally into *bios* and bare life, or into a life that is constituted in immediate relation to sovereign power and economy, and upon which the latter fully exercises control.<sup>785</sup> In *Agamben and Politics*, Prozorov captures this idea in a manner that very much expresses our argument. He explains that the apparatuses of sovereign and governmental biopolitics must be deactivated because they seize 'our potentiality for inoperativity and mobilise our existence for their positive projects of government'.<sup>786</sup> Conceived within this framework, form-of-life—with all its related notions, including destitution, destituent power (or potential) and inoperativity—is not to be understood only as the climax of Agamben's political thought. In addition, it is the '*method*' that he uses in a bid both to liberate life from

<sup>781</sup> See Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 245–46.

<sup>782</sup> See Agamben, *Means without End*, 141–42; *The Coming Community*, 93.

<sup>783</sup> Agamben, Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 277. He said the same thing in his article, 'What Is a Destituent Power', 72.

<sup>784</sup> Van der Heiden, 'Exile, Use and Form-of-Life', 5.

<sup>785</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 181.

<sup>786</sup> Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 58.

the power of the sovereign and economy, and to open it to a different use.<sup>787</sup> From this perspective, we may claim that living in the form-of-life is realising a *fuga mundi*—that is, going away from or fleeing from the world of biopolitics. This is precisely what I tried to demonstrate above through my analysis of the Franciscan Order. I argued that the Franciscan mode of life is, for Agamben, a paradigm of a life that escapes sovereignty and lives in the experience of its own being as such.<sup>788</sup>

Contrary to the sovereign power that constitutes itself by dividing life and isolating bare life, which it takes hold of and on which it founds its activities,<sup>789</sup> form-of-life constitutes itself by reconciling all the multiple aspects of life, including *zōē* and *bios*, with itself. As Agamben himself submits:

In this sense, form-of-life is the revocation of all factual vocations, which deposes them and brings them into an internal tension in the same gesture in which it maintains itself and dwell in them. It is not a question of thinking a better or more authentic form of life and factual vocations to revoke them and render inoperative. Inoperativity is not another work that suddenly arrives and works to deactivate and depose them: it coincides completely and constitutively with their destitution, with living a life.<sup>790</sup>

The point to emphasise in this passage is that Agamben specifies that form-of-life does not create a new or ‘better’ form of life. Nor does form-of-life destroy those factual conditions that are defined by and make up biopolitics. Instead, form-of-life only modifies our relation to such conditions by making us experience them in the mode of the Pauline *hōs mē*, which, as discussed above, Agamben uses as a strategic example of destitution.<sup>791</sup> For this reason, in *The Kingdom and Glory* Agamben understands form-of-life and inoperativity in the light of eternal life. He does not understand the latter as an eschatological form of life. Instead, eternal life is the life of what Agamben calls the ‘messianic community’, referring to what suspends every determinate ideology and identity and so coincides with itself.<sup>792</sup>

<sup>787</sup> The term *method* is borrowed from Prozorov. In this context, it is meant to stress the idea that form-of-life, destitution and inoperativity must be understood as constituting the way in which Agamben suggests that we think of life beyond sovereignty. See Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 58.

<sup>788</sup> See Chapter 3, Section 1.2.

<sup>789</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 6, 181.

<sup>790</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 277.

<sup>791</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 2.3 above. See Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 273–75; and *The Times that Remains*, 23–26.

<sup>792</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 248–49. For more elaboration on this particular point, see Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 122–23.

One may, nonetheless, ask, what concrete form will Agamben's politics of destitution will take? What does it mean for our contemporary society, which understands political change in terms of practical revolutionary actions?<sup>793</sup> Agamben himself is conscious that destitution is a difficult project. In 'What Is a Destituent Power?' he writes that 'the destitution of power and of its works is an arduous task'.<sup>794</sup> This might in part explain why his coming politics lacks practical indications regarding how change can be concretely enacted. In his epilogue to *The Use of Bodies*, Agamben argues only that operations of destituent potential must differ fundamentally from those to which we have grown accustomed which characterize sovereign power. But how different will they be? Agamben specifies that destitution must not take the path of concrete political actions such as revolts, revolutions and the constitution of a new political order. In fact, as Cimino comments, for Agamben, 'revolutionary attempts' to effect changes within a given political order remain 'caught up in' and correspond to 'the very circular dynamics of sovereignty that he wants to break out of'.<sup>795</sup>

Because it lacks indications for practical political activism, Agamben's theory of destitution has been widely and vehemently criticized. For example, Primera thinks that Agamben's 'inoperative politics cannot coherently provide a normative blueprint for political action' given that it is anti-prescriptive in nature. Primera also finds that it 'dislocates the point of contact between praxis and theory'.<sup>796</sup> In 'Bare Life or Social Indeterminacy?' Ernesto Laclau advances a similar criticism. He argues that Agamben does not explain in concrete and practical terms how subjects whose lives are taken up into the machine of economic and sovereign biopolitics could emancipate themselves from those mechanisms. Agamben's politics, he continues, does not make room for any possible antagonistic political actions. According to Laclau, human beings, in Agamben's analytical framework, are potentially condemned to be *homines sacri*, living in the camps defined by sovereign power.<sup>797</sup> Thus, Laclau concludes that 'Agamben, who has presented a rather compelling analysis of the way in which an ontology of potentiality should be structured, closes his argument... with a naïve teleologism'.<sup>798</sup> Likewise, William Connolly avers that Agamben's theory is deficient in the sense that it does not offer a concrete proposal to overcome and replace sovereign power. Consequently, the theory leaves us with 'a historical impasse'.<sup>799</sup>

<sup>793</sup> Primera also raises the same question. See Primera, *The Political Ontology of Giorgio Agamben*, 143.

<sup>794</sup> Agamben, 'What Is a Destituent Power?' 72.

<sup>795</sup> See Cimino, 'Europe and Paul of Tarsus', 297–300. See also, Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 266 and 274–75; *Homo Sacer*, 39–48.

<sup>796</sup> Primera, *The Political Ontology of Giorgio Agamben*, 143.

<sup>797</sup> Laclau, 'Bare Life or Social Indeterminacy?' 11–22.

<sup>798</sup> Laclau, 'Bare Life or Social Indeterminacy?' 21.

<sup>799</sup> Connolly, 'The Complexity of Sovereignty', 27.

But, as Prozorov indicates, the rebuttal of Agamben's theory of destitution is generally based on a misunderstanding and displacement of what really matters in his thought.<sup>800</sup> To try to give an adequate sense of Agamben's politics of destituent power, Prozorov suggests that it is important to consider 'the question of what the idea of the end means' in Agamben's thought.<sup>801</sup> Though I am sympathetic to Prozorov's positive reading of Agamben's theory of destitution, I think that understanding what is at stake in Agamben's politics of escape principally requires not his 'idea of the end', but rather consideration of the overarching philosophical objective of Agamben's political thought and how he conceives of political action. The momentous fact in Agamben's work concerns much more an endeavour to articulate a political ontology than a description of any concrete political activity (*praxis*). His crucial aim is to reconsider, from an entirely new perspective, the metaphysics and other conceptual heritage that grounds the political tradition of the West.<sup>802</sup> In other words, Agamben's project consists in abandoning or redefining all the classical concepts—such as sovereignty, government and revolutions—on which Western political philosophy is built. What matters for him, as he says, is changing the site of politics itself.<sup>803</sup>

It could be said that, to some extent, Agamben wants to reinvent political concepts such that politics corresponds with and responds to the current situation of the world. This idea is already apparent in *Homo Sacer*, where, while reflecting on the dialectic between constituting power and constituted power, Agamben submits that the consideration of the nexus between potentiality and actuality within this context necessitates a complete rethinking of the ontological categories of the West.<sup>804</sup> This rethinking, according to him, implies the deactivation of both the ontology and the politics of the West from any figure of relation.<sup>805</sup> He maintains the same point in *The Use of Bodies* when he reflects on the notion of 'use'. In that context, he contends that an understanding of use requires 'entirely rethinking and correcting, starting from habit and use, the Aristotelian doctrine of *dynamis* and *energeia*, of potentiality

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<sup>800</sup> See Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 30.

<sup>801</sup> Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 30.

<sup>802</sup> Abbott also defends this thesis. He maintains that 'if Agamben's thought is, as I have argued, a form of political ontology, then he cannot coherently provide even a general prescription for concrete action (in the way that, for example, someone like Marx clearly can). This is because its primary concern is our metaphysical inheritance—an inheritance that, by its nature, cannot simply be "opposed" (in the way one opposes fascism, the undermining of the welfare state, barbarous immigration policies, or a neo-liberal political party). See Abbott, 'Glory, Spectacle and Inoperativity', 38.

<sup>803</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 263; 'What Is a Destituent Power?' 65.

<sup>804</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 44.

<sup>805</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 47.

and act', upon which our entire Western metaphysical tradition is built.<sup>806</sup> In the next section, I examine this Agambenian redefinition of *use*. He does the same, for instance, with the notion of *oikonomia*.

As we saw in Chapter One, his detailed etymological and conceptual analysis of the Greek term, *oikonomia*, from which our concept of economy draws its meaning, points to the idea that economy does not pertain primarily to finances and the production of material wealth, as is often thought in common parlance. Instead, for him, economy first and foremost means the management or government of the household. Thus, Agamben suggests that economy is semantically related to politics, as politics also concerns government, specifically the government of the city. By thus linking economy to politics and vice versa, he opens us to a new articulation of politics which consists in viewing politics as the management of life in both the city and the household. This is to say that politics is not only limited to the general organisation of the *polis* but also concerns the *oikos* and our private individual lives. His construal of ethics must also be read from this perspective. It is not an overstatement to say that, in *The Use of Bodies*, for instance, Agamben does not consider ethics as an application of external norms. On the contrary, he understands ethics as 'selfhood', that is, as the way in which one constitutes oneself a subject and enters into relation with oneself.<sup>807</sup>

With respect to the meaning of political action, Prozorov helps us to understand and distinguish Agamben's construal of political action from that of the mainstream. Prozorov submits that politics is, generally, conceived in 'activist terms of positive transformation of social reality'.<sup>808</sup> In this sense, we can say that a political theory seems to be meaningful only when it concretely describes the various steps through which a given politically constituted order would be overthrown and replaced by a new one. Within this conception, politics is framed in accord with the logic of constituting power against constituted power. Effective and valid political actions are actions such as revolutions, revolts and even violent upsurges. But Agamben, as indicated earlier, does not conceive of political action from this revolutionary perspective, as revolutions and such merely repeat and perpetuate the logic of sovereignty.<sup>809</sup> On the contrary, Agamben understands political action in terms of subtraction, revocation,<sup>810</sup> destitution<sup>811</sup> and form-of-life. All these are, *mutatis mutandis*, various

<sup>806</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 59.

<sup>807</sup> See Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 247.

<sup>808</sup> Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 178.

<sup>809</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 266–75.

<sup>810</sup> Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 23–27.

<sup>811</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 263–79.

concepts Agamben mobilises to elaborate on his politics of inoperativity or the destituent potential of the current political determinations.

We have already seen that the politics in question is experienced and enacted in the form of the Pauline *hōs mē* and the Franciscans' exit from the realm of sovereign power. It is precisely with reference to this point that Prozorov explains that Agamben's political thought does not prescribe a historical task that must be realised through revolution and reformist practices. Instead, it simply 'requires the *subtraction* of the subjects from the existing apparatuses, whereby they reappropriate their own potentiality for "whatever being."<sup>812</sup> It implies that Agamben's political thought is not a social movement. It is not a historical project that must overturn the current constitutions. Instead, it works out of them and leaves them to function as empty shells. 'Hence, the disappointment of all those critics who, while sympathetic to Agamben's work, end up frustrated when their impatient question "What then?" is answered by a curt "nothing" (or at best an elliptical and enigmatic allusion to happy life)'.<sup>813</sup>

## 4. Form-of-Life and Use

The previous sections have shown that the notion of form-of-life is an important theoretical device which Agamben puts forward in an attempt to detach and define life outside the grasp of sovereign power and management (economy). Thus, as we have seen, form-of-life exposes life as such to a different use. As Valeria Bonacci explains, the notion of 'form-of-life acquires increasing relevance and concreteness in Agamben's thought by getting gradually entangled with the idea of use'.<sup>814</sup> Taking up and developing Bonacci's suggestion, I focus in this section on examining and discussing the meaning of 'use' and its relation to 'form-of-life' in Agamben's thought. The crucial point does not consist in criticizing or evaluating Agamben's theory of use. Instead, I want to throw light on the specificity of his account of use in connection with form-of-life and economy.

I mainly submit that two possible and opposed articulations of use can be found in Agamben's thought. The first, which he criticises and from which he distances himself, is what I term *the modern and capitalist account of use*. The second—Agamben's own conception of use—is what I call *the ontological-ethical theory of use*. As I will explain immediately below, use is understood as *utilization* in the first account. In contrast,

<sup>812</sup> Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 181.

<sup>813</sup> Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 178.

<sup>814</sup> Bonacci, 'Form-of-Life and Use in Homo Sacer', 217.

the second account understands use as a process of *autoaffection* which emphasises the relation to the self and to life itself. This relation, as has already been pointed out, is proper to Agamben's definition and conception of form-of-life and happy life. I shall try to illustrate the sense of these articulations by drawing particularly on the major texts wherein Agamben elaborates on use and form-of-life: namely, *The Time That Remains*, *The Highest Poverty* and *The Use of Bodies*. My textual analyses are not exhaustive, and I refer to other works by Agamben to clarify our considerations.

In the 'Prefatory Note' to *The Use of Bodies*, Agamben declares that the notion of use is essential to understanding his *Homo Sacer* series. Together with other concepts, such as form-of-life, inoperativity and destituent potential, it has, from the beginning, played a significant role in his investigation of the relation between sovereign power, economy and life.<sup>815</sup> Thus, for instance, use is very crucial in *The Highest Poverty*, a book in which Agamben is concerned, among other things, with 'the elaboration of a theory of use—of which Western philosophy lacks even the most elementary principles'.<sup>816</sup> The notion of use also plays a vital role in *The Time That Remains*.<sup>817</sup> Nevertheless, Agamben's most important and detailed explanation of his theory of use appears in *The Use of Bodies*, where he describes use as 'a fundamental political category'.<sup>818</sup> Despite its indispensability, it must be noted that, up to now, the concept of use has not yet received a great deal of attention in the secondary literature on Agamben's thought.<sup>819</sup> The following analysis therefore seems pertinent, as it will illuminate this important aspect of Agamben's thought. I have deliberately chosen not to engage in a diachronic discussion of his theory of use—that is, in an analysis of the various ways in which he defines and understands use throughout his works—as this has already been achieved to a large extent.<sup>820</sup> On the contrary, I concentrate upon a more thematic and systematic treatment of his conception of use by elaborating upon the aforementioned two accounts of use that can be found in Agamben.

#### 4.1. Use as Utilization: The Modern and Capitalist Account

As Jessica Whyte states in her entry in *The Agamben Dictionary*, Agamben first came up against the issue of use in *Stanzas* when discussing the Marxist notions of 'use value'

<sup>815</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, xiii.

<sup>816</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, xiii.

<sup>817</sup> Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 26–29.

<sup>818</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 23.

<sup>819</sup> At the moment of writing this section, I have only come across the following critical analyses that have addressed the notion of use: Bonacci, 'Form-of-Life and Use in Homo Sacer', 217–45; Van der Heiden, 'On Use and Care', 310–27; Van der Heiden, 'Exile, Use and Form-of-Life', 1–18; Prozorov, 'Living à la mode: Form-of-Life and Democratic Biopolitics', 147–49; and Whyte, 'Use', 194–96.

<sup>820</sup> See Whyte, 'Use', 194–96; Van der Heiden, 'On Use and Care', 310–27; and Bonacci, 'Form-of-Life and Use in Homo Sacer', 217–45.

vs. ‘exchange use’.<sup>821</sup> In that context, Whyte argues, Agamben laments the increasing commodification of objects in modern society.<sup>822</sup> In Agamben’s own terms, ‘the transformation of commodity into an *enchanted* object is the sign that the exchange value is already beginning to eclipse the use-value of the commodity’.<sup>823</sup> I wish to make two comments regarding this statement. First, as Whyte notes, Agamben ‘identifies an erosion of the possibility of use’.<sup>824</sup> This erosion comes about because of the overemphasis the modern economy puts on commodity, thereby setting up exchange use over use value. Second, use is understood and articulated from the perspective of utilitarian motives and, therefore, is associated with the appropriation and consumption of objects.<sup>825</sup>

Agamben emphasises this utilitarian conception of use in *The Use of Bodies*. He analyses the etymological and linguistic significance of the Greek verb, *chresthai*, from which, according to him, the term *use* derives its meaning.<sup>826</sup> His primary objective in this context is to rebut the instrumental meaning that the notion of use has taken in modern language. He argues that, in modern understanding, *chresthai* (to use) has been identified with verbs such as *to make use of* or *to utilize*.<sup>827</sup> In this sense, use is understood as the action of a subject upon an object. To use something is to put it at the mercy of its user (the subject). In this context, *use* denotes the idea of utilizing something for a practical purpose. The object being used is considered by the user to be an asset or instrument for a given end. To illustrate his thesis, Agamben discusses and criticises Georges Redard’s inability to give a proper account of *chresthai*.

Agamben argues that—though Redard succeeded in demonstrating in his *Mémoire* that the meaning of the verb *chresthai* is contextual and contingent upon the word that follows it—Redard’s definition ultimately projects onto *chresthai* the modern meaning of the verb *to use*: namely, utilization. Agamben states that

This is so much the case that Redard, in his attempt to identify this meaning, must content himself with a generic and, in the last analysis, tautological definition, because it is limited to displacing the problem onto the French term *utilisation*: *chresthai* would mean *rechercher l’utilisation de quelque chose* (even if one cannot see how “to be caught in a

<sup>821</sup> Whyte, “Use,” 194–96.

<sup>822</sup> Whyte, ‘Use’, 194.

<sup>823</sup> Agamben, *Stanzas*, 38.

<sup>824</sup> Whyte, ‘Use’, 194.

<sup>825</sup> See Agamben, *Stanzas*, 38.

<sup>826</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 24–30.

<sup>827</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 25.

snowstorm” could mean “to seek the utilization of the snow” or in what way “to be unhappy” could be equivalent to “to seek the utilization of misfortune”).<sup>828</sup>

Agamben finds this interpretation of *use* problematic. For him, it divides and separates the subject from the object, the latter of which is caught up and reducible to the power of the former. ‘Here’, he writes, ‘the subject placed outside the process, governs it thenceforth as an agent, and the action must consequently take as its end an external object’.<sup>829</sup> From this perspective, the relation that connects the user to the object used is one of utility and productivity, in which the object can be exploited, dominated and used by the subject *ad libitum*.<sup>830</sup> Thus, the subject, as Descartes once said, sees himself or herself as the master and owner of the world, that is, the object at his or her disposal.<sup>831</sup>

If we transpose Descartes’ understanding of the subject to Agamben’s elaborations on the relation between power and life, we can say that use qualifies a particular relation between the subject (sovereign power in this case) and life (the object). The relation in question is one of power characterized by predation, exploitation and consumption that can lead, in the end, to the extinction of the object being used, even to the reduction of human life to bare life, as Agamben argues in *Homo Sacer*.<sup>832</sup> This understanding of use replicates the logic of division and domination that presides over the apparatus of sovereign power. An elucidation of this power relation (or the subject-object relation), which is implied in the modern theory of use, can be found in *The Use of Bodies*, in which Agamben examines the nature of the relationship that unites the slave to his master.

So far as Agamben is concerned, the Aristotelian theory of slavery (or the dialectic of the master and slave), interpreted from the angle of the slave, is an essential paradigm for the elaboration of the utilitarian theory of use as utilization and possession. According to Agamben, Aristotle considers a slave to be someone whose very being (body and life in general) belongs not to that slave but to a master. The sole relation the slave has with life and body, as a slave, is one of use. The slave is considered an instrument or tool at the service of the master.<sup>833</sup> In this case, the life and body of the slave are utilized

<sup>828</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 25–26.

<sup>829</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 28.

<sup>830</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 26.

<sup>831</sup> Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, 35.

<sup>832</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 8–9.

<sup>833</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 3–23.

by the master ‘to attain the good life’.<sup>834</sup> It is here that Agamben identifies use with *energeia*, that is, the being at work of the slave who is using his or her body to benefit the master.<sup>835</sup> Thus conceived, use means the exercise of sovereign power, which is symbolised by the figure of the master, upon the lives of subjects or populations, which are exemplified in this case by the figure of the slave. In Agamben’s view, this account of use, as Van der Heiden explains, may result in ‘abuse’, especially ‘when the poles of slave and master are reified by a process of juridification, so that some people identify solely as masters and others solely as slaves’.<sup>836</sup> Juridification is, thus, the means through which use is legalised and officially implies power, control, exploitation and subjection of life and its reduction to bare life.<sup>837</sup> As Agamben writes, use ‘expresses an attempt at accommodation and appropriation on the part of the subject’.<sup>838</sup>

However, Agamben thinks that the modern understanding of use is misleading. It does not provide an adequate account of the meaning of the Greek verb, *chresthai*: ‘[I]t is probable that precisely the subject-object relationship—so marked in the modern conception of the utilization of something on the part of someone—emerges as inadequate to grasp the meaning of the Greek verb’.<sup>839</sup> He wants to propose a different account, in which use escapes the utilitarian, or what I may term the economic conception, as stated above. As the following lines show, use, according to Agamben, rather institutes a relation of indeterminacy between a subject and an object.

#### 4.2. Use as *Autoaffection*: The Ontological-Ethical Theory

Agamben’s own theory of use is an antidote to the utilitarian account of use. He puts forward an account of use that facilitates the passage between ontology and ethics. In *The Coming Community*, he mentions that use is a manner, that is, a modality of being.<sup>840</sup> This definition is located within the context of his discussion of the meaning of the notion of ‘manner’ in medieval logic. He argues that *manner* is the term that medieval logicians used to speak of being which ‘refers to being in its rising forth’.<sup>841</sup> In this context, Agamben claims that the manner in which being reveals itself—or rises forth itself, so to speak—is called use.<sup>842</sup> And a few lines later, he associates use with *habitus* and *ethos*, and defines it as ‘free use of the self’.<sup>843</sup> We have already noted

<sup>834</sup> Van der Heiden, ‘On Use and Care’, 313; Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 2–23.

<sup>835</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 13–14.

<sup>836</sup> Van der Heiden, ‘On Use and Care’, 134.

<sup>837</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 6. See also, Van der Heiden, ‘On Use and Care’, 134.

<sup>838</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 26.

<sup>839</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 27.

<sup>840</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 27.

<sup>841</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 27.

<sup>842</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 27.

<sup>843</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 27–28

that *ethos*, for Agamben, denotes the idea of being in relation to or at home with oneself.<sup>844</sup> Likewise, in *The Use of Bodies*, he conceives of *habitus* as ‘the point at which a subjectivity seeks to make itself master of being.’<sup>845</sup> In both cases, the relation with the self is at stake. In this sense, we can argue that, for him, *use* refers to the way (the manner) in which one is in relation with oneself. Thus, use does not consist in acting on something that is external to the self. For instance, when I use my computer to do something, I do not chiefly act on the computer. Instead, I experience and constitute myself as one who is using the computer. So, for Agamben, use does not primarily imply a relation with alterity (the other) but with oneself. This relation with the self is what he describes as ‘the only happiness really possible for humans’.<sup>846</sup> Happiness, for him, does not depend on any external entity, be it material goods or a relation with external (sovereign) power. It is instead the use of the self, that is, how one is in relation to oneself. It is the more striking that, already in *The Coming Community*, Agamben associates use and happiness under the umbrella of being in relation with oneself. In so doing, he detaches the happy life from economic and power motives to anchor it on the use of the self.

The idea of use, understood as relation with the self, is further developed in *The Use of Bodies*. His analysis there is premised on a critical engagement with the meaning of the Greek verb *chresthai* (to use). As has been pointed out, the term *chresthai* has no specific meaning for Agamben but ‘acquires ever different meanings according to the context’ and, moreover, from the ‘term that accompanies it’, which is either in dative or genitive but never in accusative.<sup>847</sup> To support this statement, Agamben enumerates a few meanings that *chresthai* may receive depending on the context.<sup>848</sup> What seems to be at stake for Agamben is the fact that *chresthai*—to use—is a type of verb that is neither active nor passive. On the contrary, it combines both voices and is situated in a zone of indiscernibility between activity and passivity. He argues that *use* resembles what grammarians identify and call ‘middle voice’ verbs. Thus, drawing on Benveniste’s work, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, Agamben states that these verbs qualify a process in which a subject is neither inside nor outside its action but is instead involved in it. As he writes:

From this “middle-voice” perspective, the object of the verb *chresthai* cannot be in the accusative but is always in the dative or genitive. The process does not pass from an active subject toward the object

<sup>844</sup> See Chapter 2, section 1 and 2.3 above.

<sup>845</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 61.

<sup>846</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 28.

<sup>847</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 24.

<sup>848</sup> See Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 24–25.

separated from his action, but involves the subject, to the same degree that this latter is implied in the object and “gives himself” to it.<sup>849</sup>

One remark should be made regarding this passage: Agamben characterizes use as a praxis that is inoperative and acts on the being of the subject himself.<sup>850</sup> For him, ‘to enter into a relation of use with something, I must be affected by it, constitute myself as one who makes use of it’.<sup>851</sup> The point he makes here is that use is defined by reflexivity. It does not produce a particular action or work. One of the implications of this Agambenian conception of use is a paradigm shift in the conception of the ontology of the subject. A subject is no more seen essentially as one who acts upon an object and uses it. The subject is rather one who uses himself or herself and thereby discovering himself or herself as such by and/or when using an object. Said in a slightly different way, a subject is always already a relation with the self. He expresses this idea as follows:

On the one hand, the subject who achieves the action, by the very fact of achieving it, does not act transitively on an object but first of all implies and affects himself in the process; on the other hand, precisely for this reason, the process presupposes a singular topology, in which the subject does not stand over the action but is himself the place of its occurring.<sup>852</sup>

What is crucial in this excerpt is that Agamben defines use as an experience of autoaffection or reversibility. In use, the subject attests to the affectedness he or she receives because he or she is in relation with a determinate object and being.<sup>853</sup> As Van der Heiden explains, use in Agamben is articulated as a process and experience of self-disclosedness.<sup>854</sup> For Agamben, therefore, use is

a complex of being-affected and being-discovered to-and-fro: in use, the user affects what is being used, but, in turn, what is being used affects the user; moreover, the user is aware of this being-affected. Hence, use also constitutes a self-relation for the user, which Agamben refers to as autoaffection.<sup>855</sup>

<sup>849</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 27–28.

<sup>850</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 93.

<sup>851</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 30.

<sup>852</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 28.

<sup>853</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 28–29.

<sup>854</sup> Van der Heiden, ‘On Use and Care’, 315.

<sup>855</sup> Van der Heiden, ‘On Use and Care’, 315.

To illustrate the logic at play in this Agambenian conception of use, it might be useful to consider the somewhat common example of a footballer. In football, the footballer plays a ball. In this case, the object being used is the ball and the user is the footballer. According to the Agambenian understanding of use, in the process of playing the ball, the footballer not only acts on and plays the ball but also, and most significantly, discovers something about his own being. The use of the ball constitutes him as and makes him discover himself to be a footballer, that is, as the one playing ball, whether or not he is playing it in actual fact. Thus, for Agamben, use is an experience of auto-constitution and self-discovery. In use, the subject who uses something discovers himself or herself as a being who uses something: a being who is affected by his or her own praxis of using something. The point of fact is that, in use, the user is not external but internal. He or she takes part in the process of using something. In this sense, we can affirm that use, for Agamben, is the use of the self; in it, it is the being of the user (the subject) which is at stake, and which is in relation with itself.<sup>856</sup>

That use, from Agamben's perspective, is conceived as autoaffection and auto-constitution means that the subject is not constituted as a determined power substance but rather as a process of self-discovery in which he or she contemplates his or her own being while using the world.<sup>857</sup> It is in line with this idea that Agamben later assimilates use to contemplation and inoperativity. He writes as follows:

Contemplation is the paradigm of use. Like use, contemplation does not have a subject, because in it the contemplator is completely lost and dissolved; like use, contemplation does not have an object, because in the work it contemplates only its (own) potential. Life, which contemplates in the work its (own) potential of acting or making, is rendered inoperative in all its works and lives only in the use-of-itself.<sup>858</sup>

Agamben makes two important points in this passage. First, use institutes a special type of relationship between the subject and the object, and between 'being and praxis' and 'substance and action'.<sup>859</sup> In use, according to him, these poles enter a zone of inseparability or indistinction. To put it differently, use breaks and neutralizes the traditional opposition between being and action and subject and object. Rather than a use that divides and separates someone's being and action, we are faced now with a use in which the subject, in using something, is himself or herself the recipient of his

<sup>856</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 29–30.

<sup>857</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 33.

<sup>858</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 63.

<sup>859</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 65.

or her own action. Second, use is not defined by any utilitarian activity. This is to say that use is not directed towards economic purposes found in the production of any specific work and benefit. This connects to the idea just affirmed that, for Agamben, use is an inoperative experience. This means that use, from his viewpoint, deactivates all forms of work and maintains the subject (and life in general) in, as he writes, ‘a relationship of absolute and reciprocal immanence’. As a matter of fact, Agamben’s conception of use points to the fact that life is not unilaterally determined by any type of work or vocation. On the contrary, human existence is fundamentally without work and vocation. Thus, Agamben understands human existence as a deployment of potentiality. So far as Agamben is concerned, use here shows its closeness with inoperativity, a concept that conditions the comprehension of his conception of form-of-life. Two things may explain the connection between use and inoperativity. First, as has been pointed out, Agamben himself describes *inoperativity* as another term for *form-of-life*. Second, Agamben presents both inoperativity and form-of-life as solution to the problem of sovereign power and economy. What they have in common is the fact that they both neutralise, according to him, all the capturing mechanisms of sovereign power. In other words, they render inoperative all sort of fixed vocations defined by sovereignty. In doing so, they characterise the subject as potentiality and as a being who is in self-relation. And in this way, life is finally open to a new and different use: a use in which life is understood as relation, not to power, but to the self and to the world.

The link between use and form-of-life, understood from the perspective of inoperativity, comes forth in both *The Time That Remains* and *The Use of Bodies*.<sup>860</sup> In particular, this nexus shines out when we consider Agamben’s treatment of use based on I Corinthians 7:17-32. In Agamben’s interpretation of this letter, use is articulated as a quality that defines the messianic life and that is read in relation to two other themes crucial to understanding the Pauline gloss: namely, ‘vocation’ (*klēseis*) and the ‘as not’ (*hōs mē*).<sup>861</sup> We have already seen that the messianic life, according to Agamben’s reading of Paul, is the life that is lived and experienced in the form of the *hōs mē*. We have also argued that Agamben construes this Pauline expression as the revocation and deactivation of all current vocations (*klēseis*) and all factual social and political determinations. The latter are experienced as not existing.<sup>862</sup> In other words, for Agamben, use corresponds to the revocation of practical and existential vocations.

<sup>860</sup> See Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 26–29; *The Use of Bodies*, 56–57.

<sup>861</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 56–57, 273–76; *The Time That Remains*, 23–30.

<sup>862</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 2.3 and Chapter 3, Section 2 above.

Note that Agamben's understanding of revocation does not imply the destruction of factual determinations. As he indicates in *The Time That Remains*, 'to revoke' does not denote the destruction of existing social and political statuses/identities; it rather enacts a use of those same determinations in a different mode: that of the *as not*.<sup>863</sup> Thus, to use one's calling as a slave, for instance, does not mean to quit it. Instead, it means to continue living in that very condition *as not* being a slave. This means that the old identity is not substituted by a new one but is only deactivated, that is, it is rendered inoperative.<sup>864</sup> An implication one can draw from this thesis is that the transformation of the world that would lead to happiness is not to be searched for elsewhere than in the current political state of affairs. What really matters is the enactment of an attitudinal change towards those conditions. The attitude of the coming politics and world is one in which sovereign power no longer holds life in its control. In contrast, life will be understood and experienced as a process of *becoming*—that is, as a deployment of pure potentiality.<sup>865</sup>

This is where the notion of use, I think, intricately connects with that of form-of-life, so far as Agamben is concerned.<sup>866</sup> Both use and form-of-life release the potentiality of life to be *as such*: life that is no longer shaped and controlled by sovereign power. Life instead becomes and is understood to be an experience of pure potentiality. In his own words, '*use, as habit, is a form-of-life and not the knowledge or faculty of a subject*'.<sup>867</sup> In this passage, Agamben clearly associates use and form-of-life. Both are explained as 'habit', that is, as a manner of being as opposed to a knowledge proper to a subject. In other words, use and form-of-life are what makes or defines a subject as subject. Furthermore, the connection between use and form-of-life is explained by the fact that Agamben understands both notions as strategic theoretical devices that deactivate and call into question the apparatus of biopolitics, in which life in general and the happy life in particular are defined in relation to law, work and productivity. Form-of-life and use, in his view, point to the fact that life is fundamentally inoperative, which is to say, they point to the contemplation of life as a pure potentiality. In fact, life must be conceived as a reality that transcends any political fixations and determinations.

<sup>863</sup> Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 23–24.

<sup>864</sup> See Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 56.

<sup>865</sup> See also Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 4, 14 and 30. We have already criticized Agamben for being unable to indicate practical conditions and ways that would facilitate such a recognition. See Chapter 3, Section 2 above.

<sup>866</sup> See also Whyte, 'A New Use of the Self', 3. She also briefly mentions the idea that the notion of use in Agamben is to be understood as an attempt to 'think a life of potentiality which could escape the hold of sovereign power'.

<sup>867</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 62.

With use and form-of-life, life is articulated and lived—not in relation to work as defined and fixed by power—but to life itself. This is to say that what constitutes and makes life is no longer sovereign power but the dynamics of existence (life) itself. Agamben expresses quite clearly this nexus between use, form-of-life and inoperativity (or deactivation) in *The Use of Bodies*. He writes as follows: '[U]se is constitutively an inoperative praxis'. A few lines afterwards, he continues: '[U]se is, in this sense, a principle internal to potential, which prevents it from being simply consumed in the act and drives it to turn once more to itself, to make itself a potential of potential'.<sup>868</sup> The repetition of the term *potential* in this passage can be confusing. But, as Prozorov explains, Agamben here contends that use cannot 'be assimilated to any of the familiar categories of activity: labour, poiesis or even praxis'.<sup>869</sup> Since it does not produce a work, use, like form-of-life, exposes life to its own potentiality and constitutes that very life as being in relation to itself beyond all positive determinations formulated by power and the law.<sup>870</sup> In this sense, work or vocation is not conceived as a condition that sovereign power imposes on the human being. In contrast, work or vocation is the condition in which the human being becomes engaged as a consequence of his or her worklessness while he or she exists and uses the things in the world.

Thus conceived, use (with its related notions, form-of-life and the happy life) is, for Agamben, an alternative to domination, control, mastery and possession (or ownership). He develops this account in *The Highest Poverty*. Based on the paradigm of the Franciscan Order, whose significance in Agamben's thought has already been analysed,<sup>871</sup> *The Highest Poverty* presents use as a permission to use things in the world without claiming ownership and power over them, as use, for the Franciscans, implies the abdication of all possible right to property.<sup>872</sup> Thus, *The Highest Poverty* points to the idea that use does not belong to the register of juridical norms. It is instead a separate sphere that dislocates life from the capture and dominance of sovereign power and law.<sup>873</sup> It is an existential practice devoid of juridical consequences, as Agamben states: '[W]hat the Franciscans never tire of confirming ... is the lawfulness of the brothers of making use of goods without having any right to them'.<sup>874</sup> As far as I can understand, it could be said that Agamben's theory of use institutes a new

<sup>868</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 93.

<sup>869</sup> Prozorov, 'Living à la mode: Form-of-life', 147.

<sup>870</sup> See Prozorov, 'Living à la mode: Form-of-life', 147.

<sup>871</sup> See above, Chapter 2, sections 2.2 and 3 and Chapter 3, Section 1.2.

<sup>872</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 123–33.

<sup>873</sup> See also, *Creation and Anarchy*, 29–31, in which use is also opposed to ownership and defined as the practice of poverty that follows from the abdication of rights to own.

<sup>874</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 110.

relationship with the world and with the self: a relationship that is not anchored on possession and domination of the world but rather on simple or ‘common use’ of the world. This means that the human being does not consider the world or his or her body and life as something that he or she owns but only as something he or she is in relation with.<sup>875</sup>

Therefore, the thesis Agamben seems to put forward is that use has little to do with fulfilling some economic and utilitarian purposes. Inversely, use theoretically entails a form-of-life that can be understood precisely as a manner in which one relates to one’s own being.<sup>876</sup> This is to say that, in use, life is constituted in tension with appropriation, consumption and domination over the world.<sup>877</sup> Use thus consecrates the independent and free existence of the world. From this perspective, we can say that all the notions Agamben draws from the Franciscans in his discussion of use—such as *usus pauper*,<sup>878</sup> *de facto* use,<sup>879</sup> simple use and common use<sup>880</sup>—are meant to express and emphasize the idea that the human being cannot claim ownership of life and the world. As Van der Heiden notes, ‘this account of use anticipates’ the idea of the inappropriability of the world, which Agamben develops further in both *The Use of Bodies* and *Creation and Anarchy*.<sup>881</sup> In Chapter Eight of *The Use of Bodies*, for instance, he submits that we cannot appropriate, own, possess or master the world and life in general. They can only be used in case of necessity.<sup>882</sup> Since human beings cannot possess the world, they are only *users* of it. The word *user* in this context must not be understood from the perspective of economy in its modern sense—that is, in the sense of production of wealth and power or appropriation of goods. Instead, *user* here designates one who merely relates with the things in world rather than one who claims rights and power over them. This is to say that human beings are not the owners and masters of the world. On the contrary, they merely take care of the things in the world. Therefore, use is articulated as the impossibility of appropriating the world.

The Agambenian account of use, conceived as the inappropriability of the world, is better expressed in the Pauline *hōs mē* formula from which, as we have seen, Agamben draws his insight. He writes, ‘from this perspective, we can better understand the

<sup>875</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, xiii, 144.

<sup>876</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 25–28.

<sup>877</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, xiii.

<sup>878</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 93.

<sup>879</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 101.

<sup>880</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, xiii and 123.

<sup>881</sup> Van der Heiden, ‘On Use and Care’, 312.

<sup>882</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 80–94; *Creation and Anarchy*, 25–50; and Van der Heiden, ‘On Use and Care’, 312.

sense of the antithesis of the verses 30-31 [of 1 Corinthians 7]: “those who buy as not possessing, and those who use the world as not abusing.”<sup>883</sup> In his reading of Paul in this passage, Agamben, as we have already seen, opposes use to possession and abuse. To abuse the world means, for him, to exercise power, dominion and control over it and then to make of it ‘an object of ownership’.<sup>884</sup> We can say that, through the notions of use and form-of-life, Agamben puts forward a reflection that challenges the current emphasis that modern politics and economy place on the seizure of life through work and legal regulations. He proposes an account of use and life that goes beyond the regime of economy and utility which sees life and the world at large as a commodity. What defines life for him is, therefore, the relation of life with itself through use. What results from this thesis is the shift in the way happiness is understood. In fact, the happy life no longer means conformity to some juridical norms and the production of material wealth. Inversely, the happy life entails both the deployment of one’s potentiality of being and the common use of the world rather than claiming possession over it. From this perspective, we can say that Agamben’s notion of use radicalizes his project of destitution and redefinition of the conceptual and philosophical heritage of the Western political tradition. Use therefore detaches life and the world in general from the control of sovereign power. It thus also breaks the classical dichotomy between being and praxis and subject and object to present life as being in a free relation with itself and with the world.

## 5. Conclusion

This chapter has clarified the sense and significance of the notion of form-of-life in Agamben’s account of biopolitics and its relation to the happy life. Three main conclusions emerge from our investigation.

First, Agamben uses the notion of form-of-life in two distinct ways. On the one hand, form-of-life is introduced as a concept that breaks the distinction between *zōē* and *bios* to present life as an inseparable experience and reality. On the other hand, form-of-life describes a non-normative life, that is, a type of life that is not essentially captured and shaped by law. These two ways of understanding form-of-life are complementary, as they are two different ways of describing one single phenomenon: a human life (existence) that escapes all the invading and controlling mechanisms of sovereignty and economy.

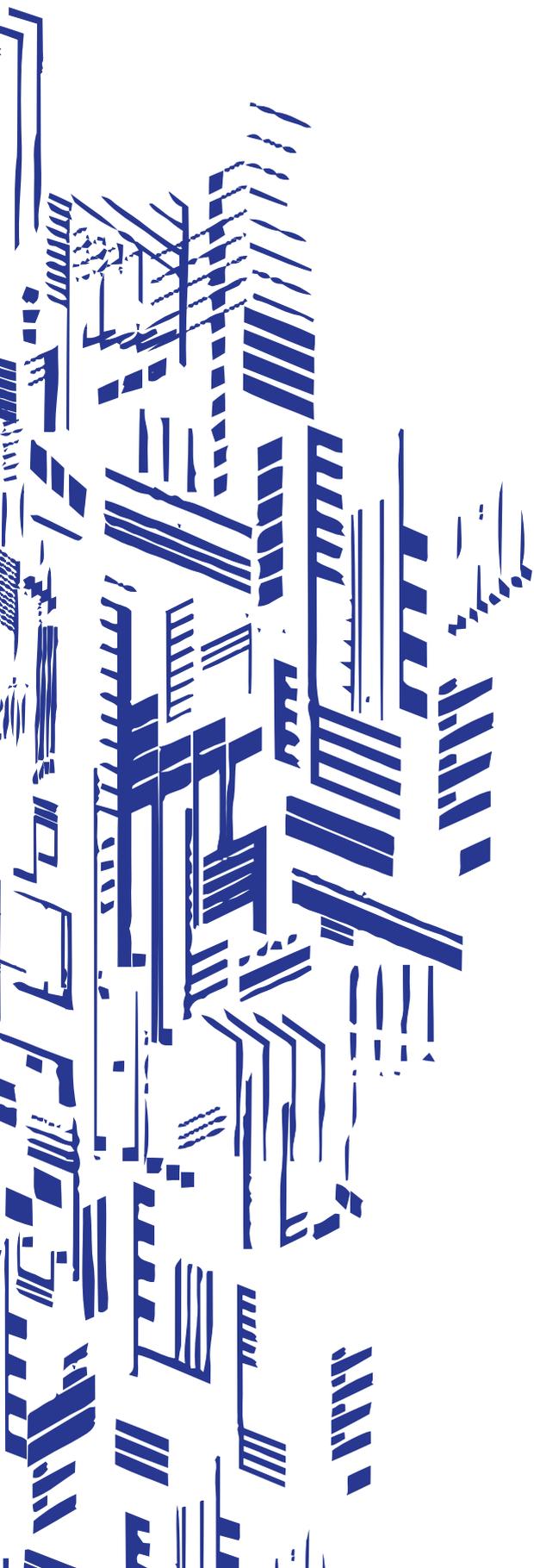
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<sup>883</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 57.

<sup>884</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 57.

The second conclusion is that the notion of form-of-life is theoretically the coronation of Agamben's project of the destitution of the logic at work in sovereignty and economy (biopolitics). Form-of-life detaches life from all political and social fixations and casts it as an experience of pure potentiality. In this way, the happy life is understood in opposition to all social, legal and political conventions. On the contrary, happiness implies the relation to the self and the use of the self.

The third and last conclusion is that form-of-life exposes life to a different and new use. For Agamben, use is a process of autoaffection. It is not a process of exploiting or utilising something for purposeful ends. While the second understanding, according to Agamben, is fundamentally biopolitical—understood in the sense of a relation to capitalist and economic power—the first conception is ethical, in the Agambenian sense, as described above. It emphasizes the relation to the self and describes life as a way of being and experiencing the self rather than as a way of acting or doing.



**CHAPTER IV**  
**HAPPINESS BEYOND CAPITALISM**

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## 1. Introduction

The preceding chapters offer extensive analyses of Agamben's accounts of economy, ethics and happiness and of the role each of these notions plays in his conception of biopolitics. I showed that Agamben construes economy as the pole of biopolitics that pertains to the management of life. He articulates his conceptions of ethics and the happy life in an attempt to envisage life beyond the realm of biopolitics. Freed from the grasp of biopolitics, the happy life is a way of living that is no longer based on the division between *zōē* and *bios*, or biological life and political life. Accordingly, Agamben redefines the happy life as an experience of potentiality.

The aim of this chapter is to assess Agamben's conceptions of economy, happiness and ethics and to examine their implications for what is arguably the most pressing issue of our time when it comes to economy and the happy life: namely, the environmental crisis. Over the past few years, there has been a growing awareness that the environmental crisis poses a great challenge to our time. This challenge has often been articulated and addressed within the framework provided by (bio)political power and regulations, an approach which situates and captures the problem of ecology within the chains of biopolitics and laws. I contend, in contrast, that the environmental crisis can also be approached from a different perspective: that of the nexus between economy and happiness, as formulated by Agamben. But how, from Agamben's perspective, is the environmental crisis relevant to a discussion of economy, happiness and ethics, and vice versa?

My point is that the environmental crisis is linked to the problems of economy, ethics and happiness and all the concepts related to them, such as work and productivity. In fact, the environment—that is, the natural world—offers humans what is necessary for life in general. The environment is the primary source of economic income we require for living in society. For instance, humans utilize the environment for work and to secure material goods. Conceived from this capitalist perspective, economy and happiness imply taking control of and managing the environment and life for the production and consumption, through work, of material wealth. The result is that human activities towards the environment are articulated in terms of the expropriation, domination and exploitation of the natural world. The environment is, therefore, regarded and utilized as a pure means at our disposal for the sake of (happy) life. Consequently, the ethic—that is, the way in which humans define and constitute themselves as subjects—that follows from this modern conception is an ethic of domination and control.

Following the Cartesian ontologico-anthropological principle, it could be argued that humans see themselves as proprietors who have power over the environment, which they must manage, dominate and exploit to be happy.<sup>885</sup> Besides, the environment is the place wherein humans live and wherein both natural and political lives unfold and become objects of the political through sovereign decisions. Thus, the environment can be thought of as the physical and concrete place where the sovereign power creates and institutes a state of exception in which life is captured and governed. As I will demonstrate in what follows, the life that is taken into the exception is not only human life but also life in general, including what Agamben calls *zōē*, that is, nonhuman or natural life. In this sense, the decision the sovereign takes over life also bears on the environment. The environment directly or indirectly becomes an object of sovereign power and management for the sake of happy life in society. Agamben's theory of the happy life will help us see what is in fact at stake in the constellation of economy, happy life and the environmental crisis. Moreover, it will provide an insightful conceptual framework in which to articulate and contribute to the debate and search for a solution to the problem of environmental crisis. Agamben displaces the discourse on economy, happiness and ethics from the dominant trend (which reduces the happy life to a life harmonised with respect to some political and economic conventions) to the constitution of a free relation with life and the world, including the environment.

To address this interplay, this chapter is divided into three sections. The first section, 'On Relevance of Agamben's Ethical Theory', considers whether and to what extent Agamben's conceptions of happiness and economy are persuasive. Toward this end, I rely on recent investigations into happiness and economy. The importance of this section lies in the fact that—based on a critical comparison of Agamben's theses with those of Badiou, Nussbaum and Pope Francis on the same topics—this section emphasizes the strengths and weakness and pros and the cons of Agamben's theory. My aim is to determine whether Agamben's ethico-ontological conception of happiness makes sense when situated in the context of contemporary debates regarding economy, happiness and the environmental crisis. I problematize Agamben's ethical theory in relation to Badiou's, Nussbaum's and Pope Francis' studies because they share with Agamben a critical attitude towards capitalism and its influence on life in general and by extension on environment. Thus, this first section paves the way for the second section, 'Economy, Happiness and the Ecological Crisis'. This part addresses the relationship between happiness and ecology insofar as the crisis of environment of our time also lies at the intersection of economy and ethics.

<sup>885</sup> Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, 35. The emphasis is mine.

The critical point in this context is to consider whether Agamben's take on happiness, ethics and economy can suggest a plausible alternative to the problem of the ecological crisis. I submit that Agamben's ethico-ontological account of happiness compels us to consider the happy life in non-economic terms. In other words, happiness should not be regarded as a characteristic of a life that is and must be managed in biopolitical and capitalistic terms. As I will explain in the last section—'Economy, Happiness and the Ecological Crisis: Agamben *vis-à-vis* Pope Francis'—this is also one of the theses Pope Francis puts forward in *Laudato Si'*.<sup>886</sup> He argues against an account of happiness that emphasises profit and exploitation of the environment as propounded by capitalism. The main objectives Pope Francis assigns to his encyclical, are to reduce human influence on the environment and to break from an economic notion of happiness. Therefore, this last section of this chapter is devoted to a philosophical comparison of Agamben and Pope Francis, specifically via consideration of what Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* has to say about the economy, happiness and the problem of the environmental crisis. One of the major arguments of this section is that, though Agamben and Pope Francis develop their ideas from different perspectives, both reach the same conclusion: namely, that the current economy and conception of the happy life together imperil life. For this reason, they suggest considering economy and happiness differently. But it must already be noted that, unlike Pope Francis, Agamben himself does not elaborate explicitly on the relation between economy, happiness and the ecological crisis. What follows is therefore an elaboration based on my interpretation and development of insights found in Agamben.

## 2. On the Relevance of Agamben's Ethical Theory

In the contemporary debate on biopolitics, Agamben has played a key role in redefining the concepts of happiness, ethics and economy. By providing 'a theological genealogy of economy and government',<sup>887</sup> and by describing happiness as an experience of pure potentiality and a process of anthropogenesis,<sup>888</sup> Agamben brings economy, ethics and happiness onto another terrain. In so doing, he calls the accepted mainstream understanding of these concepts into question. Economy is no longer restricted to financial productivity and prosperity but extends to the management of human life in general. For him, economy is closely linked to the formation of the modern state and, therefore, to the exercise of power in society. Likewise, happiness

<sup>886</sup> See Chapter 4, Section 4.

<sup>887</sup> This is the subtitle of Agamben's book, *The Kingdom and the Glory*.

<sup>888</sup> See Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 43–44; *The Highest Poverty*, 97 and Chapter 3, Section 2.1 above.

is no longer described as a characteristic of a life that conforms to political and economic conventions; it is instead regarded as the process of subjectivation and the experience of life in its own potentiality and liveability. Agamben, therefore, opposes economy and the happy life. In his view, economy subjugates life to sovereign power and reduces it to a sort of blind observation of political and economic regulations. But the question that remains to be addressed is this: Is Agamben's view on happiness and economy convincing or even plausible? To address this question in what follows, I critically confront Agamben's views with contemporary studies that also engage with the problematic of happiness and economy. Here, I focus on both Alain Badiou's take on happiness and Martha Nussbaum's 'capabilities' approach.

In his article, 'Agamben, Badiou and Affirmative Biopolitics', Prozorov observes that Badiou and Agamben have risen to 'international fame at the same time', and they represent 'the next wave in continental philosophy after the predominance of post-structuralism'.<sup>889</sup> Badiou is an important and critical partner in dialogue with Agamben.<sup>890</sup> Both have developed a great interest in the question of happiness. They consider the possibility of a new perspective of human existence in society. As I will show, Badiou, like Agamben, presents a conception of happiness that is opposed to capitalism. Thus, comparing Agamben's theory of happiness with Badiou's helpfully brings into critical conversation two thinkers who have engaged with each other's work. Moreover, this comparison will help us determine the relevance of Agamben's discourses on happiness and economy, as it consists in highlighting the similarities and differences in the views of Agamben and Badiou.<sup>891</sup>

There seems at first sight to be no direct link between Agamben's work on happiness and Nussbaum's capabilities approach. The two authors developed their respective theories of happiness independently. However, I think they may be brought into dialogue for at least two reasons: one methodological and the other conceptual. Methodologically, Nussbaum's capabilities approach, like Agamben's theory, is a political and ethical counter-theory. Nussbaum also challenges the direct association of happiness—or 'wellbeing', as she calls it—with economy.<sup>892</sup> Conceptually,

<sup>889</sup> Prozorov, 'Agamben, Badiou and Affirmative Biopolitics', 165.

<sup>890</sup> In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben mentions Badiou's notion of 'the event' to elaborate on his own concept of 'the exception.' See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 24–25. For more details on the affinities between Agamben and Badiou, see Prozorov, 'Agamben, Badiou and Affirmative Biopolitics', 165–66.

<sup>891</sup> Most studies carried out hitherto have but rarely discussed Agamben and Badiou from the perspective of happiness. They emphasize their various readings of Pauline messianism. See for example, Baker, 'The Revolution Is Dissent: Reconciling Agamben and Badiou on Paul', 312–25; Kaufman, 'The Saturday of Messianic Time: Agamben and Badiou on the Apostle Paul', 37–54.

<sup>892</sup> Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 46–62, 199.

Nussbaum's notion of 'capabilities' betrays similarities with Agamben's notion of 'potentiality'. Both are concerned with what human beings are able to be and do beyond any categorisation and socio-economic or political formalisations. As Ingrid Robeyns explains, 'the core concept of the capability approach is the notion of a person's capabilities, that is, the set of things that a person is effectively able to do and to be'.<sup>893</sup> My analysis in this context focuses on emphasizing the similarity of Nussbaum's account of happiness to Agamben's. I also pay attention to how Nussbaum's particular approach differs from Agamben's and offers a more refined and comprehensive description of happy life.

This analysis is important, as it will help to problematize and evaluate Agamben's categories of happiness and economy within the broader historical and philosophical framework of the contemporary discourse on happiness and economy. I contend that Agamben's accounts of happiness and economy are most intelligible when situated in the context of the longstanding tradition of critical-theory studies, such as Nussbaum's and Badiou's that have sought to challenge the direct link between economy and happiness. Rather than focusing on *what* makes one happy, Badiou, Nussbaum and Agamben focus respectively on *how* one can become happy and live a happy life.

As noted, the assessment of Agamben's theory is relevant to the main issue of this chapter—i.e., the question of happiness, economy and the environmental crisis—because, seen from the viewpoints of biopolitics and capitalism, happiness pertains not only to economy but also to ecology. Since the natural world is the primary resource of human existence, the result is that humans relate to the environment as to an exploitable entity. The natural world is used as a source of resources that are transformed to meet our increasing demands for the sake of the biopolitical and capitalist happiness. This approach to life, economy and environment is precisely what Agamben, Badiou and Nussbaum call into question in their respective accounts of the 'real' happy life. Before I proceed to discuss Badiou's and Nussbaum's studies in relation to Agamben's, I must first consider one of the implications Agamben's understanding of happiness has for the notion of 'work'. Agamben himself does not elaborate specifically on the notion of work in relation to the environmental crisis. But this subject is important at this juncture for at least two reasons.

First, in defining the happy life in opposition to economy, Agamben not only questions the entire apparatus of contemporary economy and politics but also challenges the overemphasis modern society places, under the influence of biopolitics and capitalism, on work and productivity. As far as I understand it, Agamben's account of

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<sup>893</sup> Robeyns, 'Capability Approach', 40.

happiness beckons us to rethink the concept of work. Second, work is an important component of the global economic system. As such, the concept of work is directly linked to economy, happiness, environment and how we see the world around us. The question of work is, therefore, the question of our relationship with the world. Work seems to be one of the privileged modes through which humans relate to the world. The environment and life are exploited and transformed through work. Work is, as in a capitalist setting, the extraction, instrumentalization and use of natural resources based on a rationality that emphasises production for unlimited progress.<sup>894</sup>

It is true that humans have always transformed the world in order to live. But the problem now seems to be, if there is an environmental crisis, that it has appeared because the frontiers and *telos* of our transformation and exploitation of the world have evolved. Since the advent of capitalism and all its corollaries, our exploitations and transformations of the natural world have become limitless. Human work in and on nature has reached an unprecedented height. We exploit the environment excessively. This excessive exploitation puts pressure on the environment, thereby leading to the crisis we are now facing. The fact, therefore, is that there are close links between our notions of work, economy, happiness and ecology. Unless these relations are taken into serious consideration, humanity may not see the end of the tunnel when it comes to addressing the ecological crisis. In other words, to think of work from an ethical perspective is to take an important step towards a solution to the crisis of the environment. Agamben's theory of form-of-life may be helpful in this context.

### 2.1 Happiness: Economy, Work and Environment

We have seen that Agamben defines the happy life as a form-of-life that is inoperative, that is, as a life that lacks a specific work and is not determined by work. This understanding of the happy life contributes to a new perspective from which we can rethink the concept of work and our relation to the natural world. The crucial point in this context is not to take a specific position; my interest is merely to draw attention to a possible implication that understanding happiness from the perspective of inoperativity may open to us. As mentioned above, the notion of work structures our relation to the environment. This relation is often, if not usually, conceptualised in terms of the exploitation and transformation of the environment for the sake of the happy life. Thus, whether within or outside the context of Agamben's thought, happiness cannot be dissociated from the notion of work. In common parlance, to be happy is also partly to work and/or to have good work—in the sense of *work* as that which provides the economic means needed to live in society. Besides, in accord with Virno's account of labour-power—which, as I have argued, refines Agamben's

<sup>894</sup> Agamben, 'The Work of Man', 2; *The Use of Bodies*, 15; Fusco, *Form of Life*, 118–19.

take on the politicisation and governance of life—it is through work that human life is subordinated to biopolitics.<sup>895</sup> It is those in power who define and impose the regulations that govern work and how it should be compensated. Thus, it can be argued that, through work, human life is inscribed into the calculations of power. It is equally through work that humans exercise control and power over the natural world, which they use to live happily in the world, so far as the biopolitical and capitalist account is concerned. And, as we have seen, happiness in this context corresponds to a life that conforms to the political and economic conventions of society.<sup>896</sup>

Furthermore, the notion of work occupies pride of place in Agamben's description of happiness and economy. In 'The Work of Man', he clearly connects the problem of happiness to the notion of work. This elaboration intervenes in the context of his discussion of Aristotle's attempt to define happiness as both the highest good and the goal of human existence in the *polis*. Agamben argues that, since Aristotle, the category of work plays a crucial role both in defining the happy life and in assigning human beings a specific nature or essence.<sup>897</sup> It is equally through the category of work that Agamben, in *The Use of Bodies*, undertakes to redefine life and human beings as without work.<sup>898</sup> The questions, therefore, are how one should understand the concept of work from the perspective of Agamben's account of the happy life, and what role this understanding plays in the interactions of economy, happy life and the ecological crisis. What does *to work* mean in this context?

To address this question, it is important first to highlight briefly what is generally understood as work. Only then can we understand Agamben's vehement criticisms of *oikonomia* and his definition of happiness as a being without work.<sup>899</sup> In the fourth chapter of *Form of Life: Agamben and the Destitution of Rules*, Gian Giacomo Fusco argues that 'when capitalism with its correlated ethics and economics paradigms' became the central socio-political system of society in early modernity, 'work—that is wage labour'—acquired 'the meaning of the moral value that we all know'.<sup>900</sup> He goes on to say that, before capitalism, work lacked any specific exchange value. It was conceived of as a human activity performed to realize one's existential needs. With capitalism, however, economic value is attached to work. Work has become something that can be exchanged for economic gain.<sup>901</sup> What Fusco points to is apparent in the term

<sup>895</sup> Chapter 1, Section 3.2 above.

<sup>896</sup> See Chapter 1, Section 3.2 above.

<sup>897</sup> Agamben, 'The Work of Man', 1–10.

<sup>898</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 3–23.

<sup>899</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 3–23.

<sup>900</sup> Fusco, *Form of Life*, 119.

<sup>901</sup> Fusco, *Form of Life*, 119.

*labour market* or *job market*, which is commonly used to talk about the possibilities available in society when one seeks work. It implies that work is a good, a commodity, that can be sold in exchange for a monetary gain. As Fusco puts it, work or labour ‘is surrounded by an aura of dignity, privilege, self-fulfilment and social recognition’.<sup>902</sup>

In ‘The Work of Man’, Agamben emphasises the same idea. He states that work is an essential aspect of life in modern society, dominated as modern society is by capitalism. In the capitalist framework, work is associated with realizations, achievements, production and the fulfilment of specific actions and goals.<sup>903</sup> He goes on to say that work in this sense is conceived of as producing something or performing specific tasks.<sup>904</sup> But Agamben thinks this understanding of work is a travesty of its essential meaning. For him, work is not a purposeful activity. To emphasize this idea, Agamben resorts in *The Use of Bodies* to the distinction Aristotle makes between *praxis* and *poiesis* when considering human activities. In the first instance, human activity relates to itself as being and having an end in itself. *Praxis* has no specific end or goal (*telos*) outside itself. In the second case, on the contrary, human activity is seen and described as a means to an end, for *poiesis* means to make or produce something. It presupposes a particular type of relationship between a means and an end.

Agamben laments that this distinction has been forgotten in modern society, such that work has been reduced to the sphere of *poiesis* and, therefore, to the sphere of production.<sup>905</sup> Work in this sense seems to be a kind of oppression of the natural world which ultimately produces a world wherein both human beings and material goods are reduced to mere means for the services of the market. In this sense, work is conceived from an anthropocentric perspective. It emphasises human interests in opposition to and above those of the natural world. The environment is regarded as a reserve of resources that must be exploited for the production and consummation of human economic needs. This over-exploitation and instrumentalization of the environment can lead to deterioration of the ecosystem and, in this way, to the ecological crisis. Hence, whether implicitly or explicitly, the notion of work is germane to economy, happiness and ecology. The happy life is seen as one which emphasises excessive consumption and economic growth without seriously considering their consequences for the environment.

<sup>902</sup> Fusco, *Form of Life*, 119.

<sup>903</sup> Agamben, ‘The Work of Man’, 2; *The Use of Bodies*, 15.

<sup>904</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 7 and 11.

<sup>905</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 7 and 12.

On the contrary, Agamben thinks work is not primarily directed towards production. It is rather a 'praxis and mode' of being that is unproductive.<sup>906</sup> This is to say that work is a human activity with no qualifications whatsoever, whether economic, moral or political. Understood from the perspective of use as autoaffection, work, so far Agamben is concerned, should be seen, therefore, as an activity through which human beings act on themselves and transform themselves. Thus, in defining the happy life as a life of being without work—that is, as a life without any specific vocation or tasks to accomplish, which consists only in experiencing life as such—Agamben seems to see work from an ontological perspective. Work for him is a form-of-life, a mode of being. Thus, Agamben offers up a fruitful way to rethink the concept of work detached from the realm of economy. As his analysis of Ancient Greek slavery in *The Use of Bodies* indicates, work should be considered as a simple mode of being that consists in using the body for the sake of life. In other words, work is the *de facto* use of the world and the self, irrespective of achievements. This idea connects well to Agamben's thesis that the happy life consists in the *de facto* use of material goods, which is itself reminiscent of the Franciscan *forma vitae*, as we discussed earlier.<sup>907</sup>

Therefore, from Agamben's perspective *to work* does not mean to produce; it means just to exist in the mode of use of the self and of the world. As we have seen, this is a use detached from economic motives. Through the category of inoperativity, Agamben's account of happiness deactivates our modern conception of work. Work is no longer to be understood as something external or as a means to an end but rather as a praxis that is internal to the dynamics of human life itself. Such an understanding of work challenges the link between work, economy and happiness that negatively impacts the environment. Understood as a *praxis* and use of the self and of the world, this account of work derived from Agamben's notion of form-of-life also breaks the logic of exploitation, transformation and consumerism which defines our modern society. In doing this, it liberates life from the oppressive influence of economy and reduces the effect of anthropocentric impact on the natural world.

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<sup>906</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 12.

<sup>907</sup> Chapter 3, sections 2.2.2 and 4 above.

## 2.2 Happiness as Becoming a Subject: Badiou and Agamben

In a short book entitled *Happiness*, Badiou comes up against the problem of happiness in relation to economy.<sup>908</sup> Like Agamben, Badiou also challenges the close link between economy and happiness and offers an account of happiness that departs from its modern, capitalistic conception. Therefore, putting Agamben's account of happiness and economy into relation with Badiou's will enable us to adopt a critical perspective on Agamben's views and evaluate them within a larger framework.

Unlike Agamben, Badiou does not provide an extensive genealogy of economy. He conceives of economy, rather, as 'a great school of submission'.<sup>909</sup> According to Badiou, economy is dominated by a capitalist ideology that emphasises profit over human life as such and, for just this reason, stifles the individual freedom to become a subject by conforming human life to the wishes of the global economic market. Under the influence of economy, human life is harmonized to the demands of society. Furthermore, Badiou specifies that economy is 'the reign of the commodity, the reign of communication, monetary universality and technical productive specialisation' that ties individual subjectivity to 'the calculation of security'.<sup>910</sup> Regarding happiness, Badiou contrasts what he calls the 'semblance of happiness' to 'real happiness'.<sup>911</sup> According to him, the 'semblance of happiness' does two essential things: First, it reduces happiness to fulfilment of the capitalist ideology of profit-making; second, it maintains the constituted and established political and economic order.<sup>912</sup> Abandoned to the ideology and pursuit of such satisfaction, Badiou concludes, life 'falls under the law of the circulation of objects, money and images'.<sup>913</sup>

'Real happiness', for Badiou, is the experience of a life liberated from the economic and political alienation. This happiness consists in discovering one's numerous possibilities by refusing to consent to social conventions and the laws of the market.<sup>914</sup> He writes that 'no happiness is conceivable if the individual does not surmount the web of mediocre satisfactions in which it is held by its animal, to become the

<sup>908</sup> Badiou's book, *Happiness*, was first published in French under the title, *Métaphysique du bonheur réel*. The English translation to which I refer here does not, unfortunately, translate the French title properly. The translation should read, *The Metaphysics of Real Happiness*. Mention of the terms *metaphysics* and *real happiness* in the title would be significant, as they indicate Badiou's renovating project: a subtle reconstruction of the idea of happiness in opposition to a false account of it. Badiou himself calls this false account 'semblance of happiness'.

<sup>909</sup> Badiou, *Happiness*, 71.

<sup>910</sup> Badiou, *Happiness*, 46.

<sup>911</sup> Badiou, *Happiness*, 40.

<sup>912</sup> Badiou, *Happiness*, 87–88.

<sup>913</sup> Badiou, *Happiness*, 54.

<sup>914</sup> Badiou, *Happiness*, 72.

Subject of which it is capable—and every individual disposes, more or less secretly, the capacity of becoming Subject'.<sup>915</sup> In this passage, Badiou makes two points which, I think, together express a thought that is similar to Agamben's view on happiness and economy. First, Badiou specifies that happiness is opposed to satisfactions that reduce human existence to the level of animality. The merit of this thesis is that it challenges the contemporary tendency to reduce the happy life to a kind of fulfilment of desires that are politically and economically predetermined.<sup>916</sup> According to Badiou, happiness conceived from this perspective has a watchword which implies normalizing and harmonizing life to economic and political demands: namely, *harmony* or *consensus*.<sup>917</sup>

Second, for Badiou, happiness is a process of subjectivation or becoming oneself. This 'becoming Subject' entails subtracting oneself from the capitalist ideology that associates happiness with satisfactions. Badiou argues that the process of becoming a subject consists in raising 'up against the world as it is and against the dictatorship of established opinions'.<sup>918</sup> Since the happy life must be conceived against the current factual conditions of the world, Badiou concludes that it is a 'logical revolt'.<sup>919</sup> The claim that happiness is a 'logical revolt' means that it should be conceived as an attempt to defy the predetermined conditions and circumstances that trap life in the realm of economy and political power. For Badiou, true happiness must break from and arise from the logic of what is regarded as the good life. The truly happy life is a rebellious kind of life, in that it is experienced and lived against social and economic conventions. Thus, we can say that true happiness, so far as Badiou understands it, involves a radical shift of attitude and thinking against the established economic and political order.<sup>920</sup>

Badiou's definitions of happiness and economy, so interpreted, are fruitful when it comes to legitimating Agamben's definitions for at least two reasons. First, they show that Agamben is not the only philosopher who has risen against the predominance of economy in conceptualizing and understanding happiness. Like Agamben, Badiou also

<sup>915</sup> Badiou, *Happiness*, 69.

<sup>916</sup> Badiou gives a list of these politically and economically predetermined desires with which happiness is generally associated: 'a quiet life, the abundance of little everyday satisfactions, interesting work, an appropriate salary, and iron constitution, a happy couple, memorable holidays, lovely friends, a well-appointed household, a comfortable car, a sweet and faithful domestic pet, trouble-free and charming children who are successful at school'. See Badiou, *Happiness*, 34.

<sup>917</sup> A. J. Bartlett and J. Clemens, 'Forward' to *Happiness*, by Badiou, 12.

<sup>918</sup> Badiou, *Happiness*, 69.

<sup>919</sup> Badiou, *Happiness*, 41.

<sup>920</sup> Badiou, *Happiness*, 41 and 45.

questions the capitalist conception of happiness. He distinguishes and contrasts two notions of happiness: ‘the semblance of happiness’ and ‘real happiness’. The first of these, ‘the semblance of happiness’, corresponds to what I referred to, in accord with Agamben’s terminology, as the biopolitical account of happiness. What Badiou’s and Agamben’s conceptions of *biopolitical* happiness have in common is the harmonization of life with economic and political conventions. The possibility and freedom of choice and action are thereby reduced. Therefore, the process of becoming a subject is compromised. Human existence in society becomes simply an attempt to fulfil and realise the societal ideology. The happy life in this context is the subjection and conformation of life to the circumstances of social and economic demands. Badiou even states that ‘the subject cannot come to be there. Because a subject is born from the incalculable encounter of an unknown possible, to which is knotted a becoming-Subject’.<sup>921</sup>

Second, ‘real happiness’, or what from Agamben’s perspective I termed *the ethico-ontological account of happiness*, entails the liberation of life from current economic and political conditions. Badiou insists that real happiness consists in discovering and experiencing ‘*new forms of life*’,<sup>922</sup> which means living differently from the order of the world, and adopting a form of life that does not align with the pressure of economy and politics. In this sense, happiness becomes the way in which one constitutes oneself as a subject in contrast to social conventions. Badiou even goes on to argue that happiness is kind of a revolutionary life, that is, a life that goes beyond the dictatorship of the established social and economic circumstances. By so living, a subject discovers what he or she can become—or to put it in Agamben’s vocabulary, the subject discovers his or her pure potentiality to be or to not be.<sup>923</sup> Not only do individuals liberate themselves from the influence of social and economic norms, they also live in accord with their potentiality.

For both Agamben and Badiou, the happy life is a subjective effort to break from society. Whether this rupture from society is practically possible is arguable. However, Agamben’s and Badiou’s aim is to conceive of a form of life that is not confined to the dictates of the established political and social order, a life that is not decided upon beforehand but is rather understood as an open-ended process of becoming. As Badiou argues, ‘in this process of emancipation, we experience the fact that happiness is the dialectical negation of satisfaction. Happiness is on the side of

<sup>921</sup> Badiou, *Happiness*, 72.

<sup>922</sup> Badiou, *Happiness*, 49, 124.

<sup>923</sup> Badiou, *Happiness*, 85–86.

affirmation, of creation, of the new, and of genericity. Satisfaction is on the side of the reduction of subjectivity to objectivity'.<sup>924</sup>

Concretely, therefore, it means that any attempt to understand and define the being of happiness must distinguish between happiness understood as conformity to the social order and happiness conceived as a personal effort to experience one's potentiality. For both Agamben and Badiou, happiness as conformity confines life to the dictatorship of the power of sovereignty and economy. In contrast, the second conception of happiness, which is what Agamben and Badiou put forward, considers life beyond the logic of power. The happy life is experienced as a life that is fundamentally in potentiality. The point is that it is not economy (and the accompanying overemphasis on work, productivity, rentability, financial prosperity, accumulation and consumption of goods) that counts for the happy life. *Happiness* refers rather to the liveability of life itself—that is, to 'the potentiality not to (do or be)', as Agamben puts it.<sup>925</sup> Happiness, therefore, is an existential phenomenon that cannot be *managed* by laws and reduced to material satisfaction. It could be concluded, for Agamben as well as for Badiou, that happiness is an ethical project: a relation to the self and a becoming subject.

Nevertheless, Badiou's account of the happy life differs significantly from Agamben's. The difference concerns the way in which one becomes subject, that is, adopts a form-of-life that transcends sovereign and economic power. While Agamben rejects revolution in the process of the happy life, Badiou sees revolution as the *conditio sine qua non* to enact happiness. For him, happiness is a form of life that is closely related to engagement for a political or ethical cause. This idea appears when he interprets happiness as a 'logical revolt', as I explicated above. Badiou defines this logical revolt as 'a desire for revolution', that is, as a radical opposition to 'the dictatorship of the established opinions'.<sup>926</sup> By 'the established opinions', Badiou means the world as 'dominated by global capitalism'.<sup>927</sup> In this way, Badiou, unlike Agamben, seems to offer a concrete and practical way to break from biopolitics. As just argued, the break from biopolitics and its interpretation of the happy life are possible only through revolution. In Badiou's philosophy, *revolution* denotes a radical and sudden change from factual social and political conditions. This revolution, according to him,

<sup>924</sup> Badiou, *Happiness*, 88.

<sup>925</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 45; *Potentialities*, 179. Agamben expresses the same idea in *The Use of Bodies*, 54–56.

<sup>926</sup> Badiou, *Happiness*, 41.

<sup>927</sup> Badiou, *Happiness*, 81.

is achieved through the collective action of individuals who become aware of their alienation and want a better life and world.<sup>928</sup>

Thus, Badiou thinks that revolution, considered as a path to happiness, should be a conscious and wilful movement of the population to reverse and alter the current states of economy and politics, in which everything ‘falls under the law of the circulation of objects, money and images’.<sup>929</sup> Badiou concludes that ‘we know that something is changing in the world when we experience that happiness is not the predetermined objective of the process of change but the creative subjectivization of the process of itself. The world is changing when we can declare, as did Saint-Just, that happiness is a new idea’.<sup>930</sup>

Note that Badiou does not explain the notion of ‘subjectivization’. However, considering the context of its mention, it could be read as the process by which an individual becomes a subject and engages with an event. An event, according to Badiou, is a disruption and interruption that alters the factual existential conditions and so opens up new possibilities for change in the world. In his words, ‘the event is the name of something that is locally produced in a world, and which cannot be deduced from the laws of this same world. It is a local rupture in the ordinary becoming of a world’.<sup>931</sup> From this perspective, becoming a subject consists in taking a radical position for a change in how one understands oneself and the world. The notion of happiness that comes from this process is characterized by faithfulness to the event, to a new form of life that acts in accord with what is discovered. Badiou accordingly argues that becoming subject—enacting the form-of-life, as Agamben describes it—is not conceivable until one concretely experiences a ‘rupture with the course of the world’.<sup>932</sup>

Though Badiou offers an account of happiness that, like Agamben’s, questions the mainstream conception, he departs greatly from Agamben’s conception when it comes to how happiness can be experienced. Badiou’s conception is more realistic in essence. Like Agamben, Badiou recognizes that the modern understanding of happiness results from and inscribes life into the larger apparatus of control and domination of sovereignty and economy; however, Badiou also prescribes how real happiness can be reached. He does not confine himself to critiquing the *dispositifs* of capitalism but also proposes a way to go and live beyond the logic of biopolitics and capitalism. In contrast, a great

<sup>928</sup> Badiou, *Happiness*, 56.

<sup>929</sup> Badiou, *Happiness*, 54.

<sup>930</sup> Badiou, *Happiness*, 88–89.

<sup>931</sup> Badiou, *Happiness*, 81.

<sup>932</sup> For more details, see Badiou, *Happiness*, 82–87.

flaw in Agamben's account is that Agamben seems to confine himself to describing an abstract and practically unrealisable notion of happiness. Given Agamben's perspective, one wonders how form-of-life can be disentangled from the dynamics of biopolitics if no practical and revolutionary change takes place in the world.<sup>933</sup>

### 2.3 Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach and Agamben's Form-of-Life

Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach is a 'counter-theory'.<sup>934</sup> She elaborates on it in *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*. The book develops a political theory of ways in which a society can create conditions that encourage human empowerment and the development of capacities that are essential to human wellbeing. In this context, Nussbaum defines the capabilities approach as one that criticizes the omnipresence of the notion that income is the proper measure of quality of life. The approach opposes the cult of richness and utility in defining wellbeing.<sup>935</sup> In Nussbaum's words, 'the capabilities approach can be provisionally defined as an approach to comparative quality-of-life assessment and theorizing about basic social justice. It holds that the key question to ask, when comparing societies and assessing them for their basic decency or justice, is the following: '[W]hat is each person able to do and to be?'<sup>936</sup> An important point in this passage is that, in assessing wellbeing (or happiness), the capabilities approach does not focus on prosperity. It rather looks at a person's potentiality: what he or she is able to do and be. That is, it looks at a constellation of possibilities for choosing and acting. These possibilities, Nussbaum argues, 'are not just abilities residing inside a person but also the freedoms or opportunities created by a combination of personal abilities and political, social, and economic environment'.<sup>937</sup>

To clarify her definition, Nussbaum distinguishes between 'internal capabilities' and 'combined capabilities'. 'Internal capabilities', according to her, refers to a person's personality characteristics: intellectual and emotional capacities, bodily integrity, health, learning and perception skills. 'Combined capabilities' names the association of an individual's internal capabilities with the social, political and economic conditions in which he or she lives.<sup>938</sup> An important element in Nussbaum's argument is the notion of ability: e.g., learning skills. This notion connects directly to Agamben's notion of potentiality. We have already seen that, in both *Homo Sacer* and *Potentialities*, Agamben also understands potentiality as one's ability or skill to

<sup>933</sup> For more details, see Chapter 3, sections 2.1 and 3 above.

<sup>934</sup> Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 41.

<sup>935</sup> Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 46–62.

<sup>936</sup> Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 18.

<sup>937</sup> Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 20.

<sup>938</sup> Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 20–21.

do something and to become this or that.<sup>939</sup> In both Agamben and Nussbaum, this notion emphasizes the freedom people have both to live the kind of life they want and to become the type of person they want.<sup>940</sup> From this perspective, it can be said that Nussbaum's capabilities approach, like Agamben's approach, points to the fact that life is not and cannot be determined once and for all. Human life transcends social and political conventions. The happy life is one that is lived as an experience of one's ability in society. This is why Nussbaum says, regarding the nature of capabilities, that capabilities are what 'this person is able to do and to be'.<sup>941</sup> This idea also comes forward in Agamben, especially in *The Coming Community*, when he argues that the human being is nothing other than a possibility or a potentiality to be or to do.<sup>942</sup> And later, in *The Use of Bodies*, he describes this potentiality as the condition for happiness, as he writes that a human being is defined by 'the mode in which it maintains itself in relation with a pure potential in a work and constitutes-itself as form-of-life, in which *zoè* [*sic*] and *bios*, life and form, private and public enter into a threshold of indifference and what is in question is no longer life or work, but happiness'.<sup>943</sup>

However, unlike Agamben, Nussbaum puts forward a list of ten capabilities: 'life, bodily health, integrity of the body, emotions, practical reason, senses, imagination, and thought, affiliation, play, other species, and control over one's environment'.<sup>944</sup> According to her, these capabilities account for wellbeing or the happy life. They must comprise the foundation of any politics of happiness.<sup>945</sup> Thus, Nussbaum's capabilities approach seems to offer a more appealing approach to happiness than Agamben's. She does not confine herself, as Agamben does, merely to describing wellbeing as an experience of potentialities or capabilities. She clearly outlines the potentialities that make up a happy life in society. From this perspective, I think Nussbaum's approach provides a more persuasive account of happiness/wellbeing. It seems more specific and concrete in nature than Agamben's. As a matter of fact, this approach does not understand life only from the perspective of its relation to economy and jurisdiction, as Agamben's does. As Robeyns and Byskov explain, one of the claims the capabilities approach makes is that 'well-being should be understood in terms of people's capabilities and functionings'.<sup>946</sup> As regards the meaning of

<sup>939</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 3 above; Agamben, *Potentialities*, 179; *Homo Sacer*, 21, 46–47.

<sup>940</sup> For more details on the importance of the notion of "ability" in Nussbaum, see Robeyns, 'Capability Approach', 40.

<sup>941</sup> Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 20.

<sup>942</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 42.

<sup>943</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 247.

<sup>944</sup> Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 33–34.

<sup>945</sup> Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 36.

<sup>946</sup> Robeyns and Byskov, 'The Capability Approach', 1.

*capabilities*, Robeyns and Byskov specify that capabilities ‘are the doings and the beings that people can achieve if they so choose—their opportunity to do or to be such things as being well-nourished, getting married, being educated, and travelling; functionings are capabilities that have been realized’.<sup>947</sup>

The capabilities approach, therefore, locates life within and so understands it from a wider range of elements than just in relation to law, economy and sovereignty. These elements include social, economic, political, environmental and psychological factors, and even relations with others or what Nussbaum calls ‘affiliation’.<sup>948</sup> All these aspects are constitutive of human life in society and play a vital role in happiness. As we have already seen, form-of-life, according to Agamben, is a life that is, on the one hand, extracted from political and economic realms, and, on the other, is experienced in relation to the self. However, what is not clear regarding Agamben’s account of form-of-life is whether the exit of life from society truly guarantees the experience of life as pure potentiality. Experience demonstrates that human life is fully deployed and lived only in a community of individuals, or in society. In this sense, what is required to make happiness possible is certainly not the extraction of life from society. As Badiou suggests in his account of happiness, what is really needed is to work towards changing the current structures and factual conditions of society.<sup>949</sup> For instance, consider the case of a little girl who could play piano, given an opportunity.<sup>950</sup> If this child is placed among animals in a forest rather than in a community of people with pianos, she might never realize her potential. From Agamben’s perspective, it could be said that the child experiences her potentiality in the form of an impotentiality—that is, as an ability to not be or to not do—as potentiality for Agamben is simultaneously potentiality to be and to not be, to do and to not do.<sup>951</sup>

Nonetheless, the fact remains that Agamben’s own definition of impotentiality suggests that it is experienced as a wilful and free privation in an environment wherein it could pass into actuality. It is not something imposed by external coercion, whatever this may be.<sup>952</sup> ‘Beings that exist in the mode of potentiality’, Agamben writes in *Potentialities*, ‘are capable of their own impotentiality; and only in this way do they become potential’.<sup>953</sup> Interestingly, he makes the same argument in *Homo Sacer*.

<sup>947</sup> Robeyns and Byskov, ‘The Capability Approach’, 1.

<sup>948</sup> For example, ‘being able to live with and toward others, to engage in various forms of social interaction’. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 34.

<sup>949</sup> Badiou, *Happiness*, 41 and 82–87.

<sup>950</sup> This is how Agamben himself defines potentiality in *Potentialities*, 179–80.

<sup>951</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 45.

<sup>952</sup> Agamben, *Potentialities*, 182–83.

<sup>953</sup> Agamben, *Potentialities*, 182.

He argues that potentiality ‘maintains itself in relation to actuality in the form of its suspension. It is *capable* of the act in not realizing it, it is sovereignly capable of its own im-potentiality [*impotenza*]’.<sup>954</sup> As I understand it, the non-actualisation of potentiality, and thus impotentiality, emanates from a wilful decision. I think that being capable of impotentiality in this sense means deciding not to bring potentiality into actuality. Impotentiality is a wilful decision that consists in withholding potentiality from being actualised and captured in a definite mode. Therefore, in Agamben’s sense, potentiality means two things: On one hand, it means being capable of doing or becoming something; on the other hand, it is freely deciding not to actualize that capability. The little girl who could play piano given the opportunity is capable of her impotentiality only if she declines to play even though all conditions dispose her to play. Though Agamben himself does not say so, his sense of (im) potentiality seems to suggest that external conditions and the community in which one lives play an important function in the actualisation or non-actualisation of potentiality and happiness.

Against this background, it seems that happiness or potentiality are not dependent merely on a life that is opposed to economy and jurisdiction. We have already seen that Agamben closely connects happiness to potentiality. He describes happiness as a form-of-life that relates to itself and transcends all social and political formalisations. But does opposing life to economy and politics suffice to live happily? In accord with Nussbaum’s capabilities approach, I think happiness also involves a range of other conditions that are important in becoming a subject. In other words, to be happy, it does not suffice to live outside the influence of economy and sovereignty, nor even to constitute oneself as a subject in Agamben’s sense. As Nussbaum explains, ‘the most important elements of people’s quality of life are plural and qualitatively distinct: health, bodily integrity, education, and other aspects of individual lives cannot be reduced to a single metric without distortion’.<sup>955</sup> These aspects seem completely absent from Agamben, who, as we have seen, considers the happy life only in relation to the self and to life itself. As in the Cartesian description of a subject (the *ego*), the self in this sense is transparent to itself and suffices to itself and in itself.<sup>956</sup> Nussbaum’s approach therefore points to the fact that life cannot be reduced and described from a single point of view: that of the relation with the self. Besides the relation with the self, happiness also includes other dimensions that make up a person’s life in society.

<sup>954</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 45.

<sup>955</sup> Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 18.

<sup>956</sup> Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, 39–43.

Nussbaum mentions aspects such as the relation with others, ‘control over one’s environment’ and relation with other living beings or ‘*other species*’.<sup>957</sup>

Seen from this perspective, I find that Nussbaum’s approach to and description of happiness is more specific than Agamben’s. Not only does she insist that happiness depends on various external factors in addition to the relation to life itself, but she also maintains that happiness occurs within, rather than without, society. According to Agamben, form-of-life (or the happy life) is experienced as an exit (or withdrawal) from the frontiers of economy and sovereignty. This analysis indirectly implies the formation of a new political community, which is to be built on the ashes of the current political and economic constitution of society. But a question arises as to whether this is possible. If such a community is at all possible, it will certainly be one of a few wise people.<sup>958</sup> Rather than encouraging us to exit from society, Nussbaum suggests that, to make happiness possible, the current political and economic situation must be corrected and improved. She writes that, ‘the approach is *concerned with entrenched social injustice and inequality*, especially capability failures that are the result of discrimination or marginalization. It ascribes an *urgent task to government and public policy*—namely, to improve the quality of life for all people, as defined by their capabilities’.<sup>959</sup>

Two points need to be highlighted in the above quote. First, Nussbaum recognises that the current constitution of society is problematic. Due to marginalization and discrimination, there are injustices and inequalities among people that are in fact expressions of power. The result is that some people have a good quality of life, while others do not. Happiness seems, therefore, to be reserved only for a group of specific people. Second, Nussbaum says that the government’s role is to improve the quality of life of the population in a society. This point is important because it shows that happiness does not depend solely on one’s relation to life; happiness also entails a relation with the *polis*. The latter is that in which life is experienced and lived, whether individually or collectively.

In this sense, exiting from society—for which Agamben argues—does not seem to provide a convincing route to achieving happiness. What is required to make happiness possible at the individual and collective level is to change society. This change must be not merely conceptual or attitudinal in relation to life. Likewise, the change must not consist merely in experiencing the factual conditions of life

<sup>957</sup> Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 34.

<sup>958</sup> Lordon, *Vivre Sans*, 91–92.

<sup>959</sup> Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 19.

in the form of *hōs mē*, as Agamben argues. On the contrary, this change must also concern the entire economic and institutional system of the world. Thus, Nussbaum's approach suggests that pressure should be placed on governments to create conditions that facilitate *anthropogenesis*, the becoming of subjects, and, therefore, happiness. Nussbaum states that the capabilities approach 'is focused on choice or freedom holding that the crucial good societies should be promoting for their people is a set of opportunities, or substantial freedoms, which people then may or may not exercise in action: The choice is theirs. It thus commits itself to respect for people's powers of self-definition'.<sup>960</sup> Therefore, the merit of the capabilities approach, as defined by Nussbaum, is that it calls for systemic, radical change rather than merely for an attitudinal transformation. Thus, the capabilities approach recognizes the influence that the political and economic system has in shaping life and how humans relate with the environment.

### 3. Economy, Happiness and Ecological Crisis

Agamben's account of *oikonomia* and happiness does not merely call upon us to rethink the notions of happiness and economy. It also helps us to problematize and otherwise render intelligible certain contemporary issues—such as the ecological crisis—within a broader conceptual framework. This section attempts to examine how and to what extent Agamben's conception of economy, the happy life and related notions (namely, use and inappropriability) helps us to analyse the ecological crisis. However, before addressing this question, a few preliminary caveats should be expressed.

In the *Homo Sacer* series, Agamben does not link his work to the ecological crisis. In fact, he does not directly and explicitly address the problem of ecology at all. He uses the term *ecology* only once in *The Use of Bodies*: when discussing the essence of the human being (which he defines as a being without work) and the human attempt to master the world. In this context, he states that human mastery and dominion over the world 'give rise to contradictions that ecology does not manage to work out'.<sup>961</sup> However, Agamben does not develop this statement. He neither explains what he means by 'contradictions' in this context nor elaborates on how human power over the world produces them such that ecology is unable to govern them. Furthermore, Agamben does not analyse the implications his account of sovereignty and economy—which is essentially about power and domination—has for ecology. Consequently, as Mick Smith argues, one can say that 'it is not even clear in Agamben's terms what the defining act of sovereignty

<sup>960</sup> Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 18.

<sup>961</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 15.

with regard to nature would be, since nature (lacking a political dimension of its own) can't be so reduced'.<sup>962</sup> Smith further considers Agamben's lack of interest in ecology—'the nonhuman world as being placed in permanent state of exception'—as a major weakness in his approach to biopolitics.<sup>963</sup> Contrary to Agamben, Smith argues that 'we might say that the natural world is precisely where the state of exception originally takes the form of rule, at least where dominant Western philosophical and political traditions are concerned'.<sup>964</sup> As will become clear in what follows, I agree with Smith's observation that the environment in which humans live is precisely the place for the exercise of power and the capture of life into the calculations of economy. Drawing upon Agamben's works, I suggest that, while it remains disconnected from ecology, Agamben's account of *oikonomia* and happiness is nonetheless pertinent to addressing ecological crisis for at least two reasons: The first concerns his definition of biopolitics in both *Homo Sacer* and *The Kingdom and the Glory*; the second is related to his description of use in *The Use of Bodies*.

As for the first reason, in *Homo Sacer* and *The Kingdom and the Glory*, Agamben describes biopolitics as the operation of power over life.<sup>965</sup> In *Homo Sacer*, he examines and problematizes biopolitics from the point of view of sovereign power and life.<sup>966</sup> He argues that the originary activity of sovereign power is the production of bare life in the exception.<sup>967</sup> As I demonstrated above, Agamben conceives of bare life as life that lies at the threshold, that is, at the intersection of *bios* and *zōē*<sup>968</sup>; it is a life that can be ended.<sup>969</sup> In *The Kingdom and the Glory*, the power-life relationship is analysed from the perspective of government (*oikonomia*).<sup>970</sup> What is at stake in both cases is that Agamben understands biopolitics as an exercise of power over life.<sup>971</sup> As he specifies at the onset of *Homo Sacer*, the life that is the object of power is not only *bios* or 'the qualified life'; it is also life in general, that is, human life and the life of all other living beings. This is captured in the term *zōē*, which indicates the life that is 'common to animals, men and gods'.<sup>972</sup> Furthermore, the life in question is also bare life; the life that is produced through the activity of sovereign power and exposed to death with impunity. The crucial point in this description of life is that, for Agamben,

<sup>962</sup> Smith, *Against Ecological Sovereignty*, 125.

<sup>963</sup> Smith, *Against Ecological Sovereignty*, 107.

<sup>964</sup> Smith, *Against Ecological Sovereignty*, 106–07.

<sup>965</sup> For more details, see chapters 1 and 2 above.

<sup>966</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1–12.

<sup>967</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 7, 88 and 90.

<sup>968</sup> Chapter 1, Section 3 above; Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 181.

<sup>969</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 83 and 88.

<sup>970</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 19.

<sup>971</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 100–09; *Homo Sacer*, 120–25.

<sup>972</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1.

the separation between *bios* and *zōē* also implies the separation between *nomos* and the *physis*,<sup>973</sup> the political order and the natural order, or the human and the nonhuman worlds. As a result of this separation, sovereign power can create bare life.

While *bios* refers to the life of the human being in the *polis*, *zōē* applies to life as a biological datum. Bare life is the production of sovereign power.<sup>974</sup> The result is that politics is constituted as an action of sovereign power which, in the end, captures life and dominates over it. Since biopolitics applies to life in general, it could then be argued that, manifested either in the form of sovereignty or economy (government), the operation of power is not localised. It is rather more diffused than one could ever imagine.<sup>975</sup> The siege of life by power through the state of exception extends up to the environment or the ecology.<sup>976</sup> In other words, the activity of sovereign power does not limit itself to the *polis*. Sovereign power also captures and acts upon *zōē*. Since the environment is the locus of the deployment of *zōē*, the activities of the sovereign power bear equally on the environment. To realise this point, one needs only to think about how political power promulgates laws concerning the protection of the environment and how the human being should relate to the ecology. In this way, sovereign power claims a grip on ecology and the latter becomes an object of political calculations. This idea seems apparent in Agamben's statement that political power operates as a 'threshold of articulation between nature and culture, *bios* and *zōē*'.<sup>977</sup>

From the Greek *oikos* and *logos*—that is, household and discourse, respectively—ecology can be understood as the study of the locus in which life is unfolded and captured to become an object for political and economic decisions.<sup>978</sup> From an etymological perspective, it can be said that ecology is linked to *oikonomia* (economy). Both are related to the *oikos* (the household); they are concerned about the administration of the *oikos* and the examination of the relationship between various living beings and their environment (ecology).<sup>979</sup> Furthermore, as I will show later, the environment—the earth, the ecosystem, plants, etc.—is crucial to the economy and the way in which happiness is generally conceived. The environment provides

<sup>973</sup> Van der Heiden, 'Exile, Use, and Form-of-Life', 2–3.

<sup>974</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1–3 and 83.

<sup>975</sup> See also Smith, *Against Ecological Sovereignty*, xv.

<sup>976</sup> For more details, see also Smith, *Against Ecological Sovereignty*, 107–11.

<sup>977</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 181.

<sup>978</sup> Smith makes a similar claim when he speaks of the politicisation of nature. In his words, 'nature enters politics and ethics primarily as that over and against which ruling powers define their present political state, as the "apolitical" realm over which they first and foremost claim to exercise their sovereign power'. Smith, *Against Ecological Sovereignty*, 107.

<sup>979</sup> Dermot, *Theology and Ecology in Dialogue*, 14–15; Imanaka, Prussia and Alexis, 'Laudato Si' and Integral Ecology', 51.

us with material means and goods that are necessary for the existence of economy and the pursuit of happiness, as understood from the point of view of biopolitics.<sup>980</sup> Since Agamben's theory of happiness derives from his critique of sovereignty and economy,<sup>981</sup> one could also argue that the way in which power relates to life also concerns the environment, as the environment includes all other living beings, such as animals, plants, etc. Because it includes life in general, the environment is equally an object for politics, economy and happiness for two reasons. First, the environment is that in and through which life is both captured into politics and governed by political power in the state of exception. It is in the environment that the sovereign power exercises power over individuals and can create bare life. Second, as I have just pointed out, the environment is also seen as a resource for economic prosperity and the happy life, as conceived from the viewpoint of biopolitics.

Reading the ecological crisis in the light of Agamben's ethical theory can also be traced to his definition of *use*. In both *The Use of Bodies* and *The Highest Poverty*, Agamben defines *use* in relation both to the self and to things in the world. I have already explained that Agamben describes his understanding of use in the context of his elaboration of the Franciscan mode of life. The Franciscans, Agamben argues, conceived of monastic life as an attempt to situate life beyond any mere juridical formalism.<sup>982</sup> He writes: '[I]f, in the Franciscan theorists, use appeared as the dimension that is opened when one renounces ownership, here the perspective is necessarily reversed and use appears as *the relation to an inappropriable*, as the only possible relation to that supreme state of the world'.<sup>983</sup> A few lines later, Agamben provides a list of what is inappropriable: namely, 'the body, language and landscape'.<sup>984</sup> For the purposes of my argument here, I focus on the third and last of these: landscape. He describes the landscape as the animal environment, the human world and all the elements the world is made of.<sup>985</sup> In his words, 'when we look at a landscape, we certainly see the open and contemplate the world, with all the elements that make it up'.<sup>986</sup>

<sup>980</sup> For more details on the link between economy and ecology, see studies by economists such as Leefers and Castillo, 'Bridging the Gap Between Economics and Ecology', 1–10; Vukovic and Shams, 'Economy and Ecology: Encounters and Interweaving', 1–5.

<sup>981</sup> See chapters 1 and 2 above.

<sup>982</sup> Chapter 3, Section 2.2.2 above; Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 110–16; *The Use of Bodies*, 81.

<sup>983</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 81. The notion of the inappropriable has already been dealt with. See Chapter 3, Section 4.2; Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 80–94; *Creation and Anarchy*, 25–50.

<sup>984</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 82.

<sup>985</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 91.

<sup>986</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 91.

Thus conceived, Agamben's description of landscape is germane to the notion of environment. It is important to note in this context that a landscape does not concern human beings only; it is also of interest to all other living beings. To put it otherwise, a landscape comprises both human and nonhuman lives. Since Agamben discusses this notion of landscape in the context of his definition of *use*—a definition which he puts forward to redefine how the human being (life) should relate with world—one can draw the following conclusion: Landscape and the way one relates to it play an important role in Agamben's definition of form-of-life (or happy life). Thus, form-of-life can also be read as the way in which one relates to landscape and also *uses*—in the Agambenian sense—it. This is to say that the relation to landscape and its *use* are crucial to the happy life. As was already discussed, relating to the world in the form of use is the thesis Agamben puts forward in *The Highest Poverty* when discussing the Franciscan theory of use.<sup>987</sup> The fact that Agamben is interested in the role of the landscape in happiness indicates the possibility of drawing upon his works for reflexions on, and solutions to, the environmental crisis.

It is quite fascinating that Agamben is sensitive to this understanding of the landscape. But it is more surprising that he does not develop this aspect of his work in relation to the environmental crisis. He confines himself to doing two things. First, he describes the elements that, according to him, make up the landscape: namely, 'woods, the hills, the lakes, the villas, the headlands, the springs, streams, canals, flocks and shepherds, people on foot or in a boat, those hunting or harvesting'.<sup>988</sup> Second, Agamben specifies that a landscape is a dwelling place, a home to humans in which the form-of-life is realised.<sup>989</sup> This definition connects closely to the meaning of *ecology*, as noted above. Agamben makes these assertions when he discusses the environment (landscape) as a 'paradigm', that is, an example<sup>990</sup> of the 'Inappropriable'.<sup>991</sup> His argument is that the environment transcends all human attempts to control, dominate or reduce it to any specific political or economic determination. These Agambenian observations are relevant. In accordance with his methodological principle developed in *The Signature of All Things*—that 'the genuine philosophical element in every work, whether it be work of art, of science, or of thought, is its capacity to be developed'—I think his remarks on landscape open up the possibility of developing his work on *oikonomia* and form-of-life in connection with the problem of the environmental crisis.<sup>992</sup>

<sup>987</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, xviii. See also Chapter 3, Section 2.2 above.

<sup>988</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 91.

<sup>989</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 91.

<sup>990</sup> See Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 17–19.

<sup>991</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 89–90.

<sup>992</sup> Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 7–8.

Thus, we return to the question that was raised at the beginning of this section: How and to what extent could Agamben's redefinition of the notions of *oikonomia* and the happy life offer a fruitful lens through which to examine the ecological crisis? But first, it is vital that we understand how and to what extent our relationship with the environment is influenced by the dominant biopolitical discourse on economy and happiness.

I have already pointed out that economy seems to be reduced, in modern times, to increases in income and the production, distribution and consumption of goods.<sup>993</sup> This understanding of economy emphasizes labour, productivity and an increase in wealth and accumulation of goods—all aimed to meet human desires as proxies for happiness. The link between economy, labour productivity and happiness (often described as wellbeing) has already been documented. Studies by economists have emphasized that labour productivity is highly valued and considered a key measure for economic success.<sup>994</sup> Similarly, labour productivity has been described as central to individual happiness.<sup>995</sup> The problem with this understanding is that, under the influence of the sovereign and economic power, humans tend to consider the environment merely as a deposit of resources to be exploited and consumed on behalf of human social, economic and political needs. Voided of its absolute value, the environment is reduced and subjected to the activities of sovereignty and economy. In other words, the environment exists only in reference to power and insofar as it is useful to economy and sovereignty for the sake of biopolitical happiness. The result is that the environment becomes a mere object of economic and sovereign calculations and profits, irrespective of the impact these calculations may have on life and the environment itself. Politically and ethically, this means that human beings relate to the environment as to a manageable or governable entity that is at their disposal. The environment appears to us as a commodity, objectivated and thus reduced to bare life in accord with the Agambenian definition—as previously noted.<sup>996</sup> In this sense, the only right and value the environment has, so to speak, is whatever human beings influenced by sovereignty and *oikonomia* ascribe to it.<sup>997</sup>

<sup>993</sup> See General Introduction, Section 2.1 above; Primera, 'Economic Theology, Governance and Neoliberalism', 113–14; Zartaloudis, 'Government/*Oikonomia*', 84 and Karsenti, 'Agamben et le mystère du gouvernement', 355–57.

<sup>994</sup> Jackson and Victor, 'Productivity and Work in the 'Green Economy'', 101–08.

<sup>995</sup> See Isham, Mair and Jackson, 'Work Wellbeing and Productivity in Advanced Economies', 1–9.

<sup>996</sup> Chapter 1, Section 3 above; Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 181.

<sup>997</sup> While criticizing human sovereignty over the environment, Smith makes a similar argument in a more radical way. He argues that, under the influence of economy and technology, the natural world is reduced to a standing reserve. Smith, *Against Ecological Sovereignty*, 102.

The result is that, conceptually, politics, ethics and happiness are subordinated to the economy and the laws of the global market. The human being's relationship to the world, life and the very concept of happiness are dominated by economy and the quest for profit—or to what I may call a *consumerist mode of life*. Everything is considered as a means to an end that is chiefly economic gain. Consequently, the environment—the nonhuman world—and human life itself are meaningful and useful only because of their economic value.<sup>998</sup> This is the logic, I think, that characterises capitalism: namely, the pursuit of productivity and profit. In *Creation and Anarchy*, Agamben makes it clear that capitalism has become the religion of our time. Reflecting on the implications of 'one of the most penetrating posthumous fragments of Walter Benjamin' that bears the same title, Agamben affirms that capitalism believes in making money.<sup>999</sup> He stresses that this making of money is achieved through 'ever greater quantities of labor and future production'.<sup>1000</sup> Production, according to Agamben, is achieved through the objectivation, exploitation and commodification of the environment and life in general. This is to say that everything is reduced to, and seen as, a mere good or commodity that can be transformed and used for profit.<sup>1001</sup>

Thus, in pursuing economic goals and happiness (both understood from the perspective of biopolitics), human beings sovereignly exploit the world, dominate it and capture it into their political and economic mechanisms. As Agamben puts it without further ado in *The Use of Bodies*, the human endeavour to master and dominate 'over nature gives rise to contradictions that ecology does not manage to work out'.<sup>1002</sup> However, Agamben unfortunately does not mention any of the 'contradictions' that pose a challenge to ecology. In fact, as I have already pointed out, he does not even explain the meaning of the term *contradictions* as used in this context. Nonetheless, on close examination, I find that Agamben's talk of contradictions alludes to the exploitation of the environment. A few lines after speaking of these contradictions, Agamben seems to specify that they are an outcome of the human being's relationship with the world, as understood from the perspective of power, domination and mastery. He argues that, when humans seek to appropriate the world to themselves

<sup>998</sup> Smith also maintains this thesis. See Smith, *Against Ecological Sovereignty*, 105.

<sup>999</sup> Agamben, *Creation and Anarchy*, 69–70.

<sup>1000</sup> Agamben, *Creation and Anarchy*, 71.

<sup>1001</sup> As Smith argues, 'the forests and their myriad inhabitants are thus conceptually reduced to so many board feet of timber, the once roaring rivers to so many kilowatt hours of hydroelectricity. From more radical perspectives, and at the risk of seeming ungrateful for small mercies, we might regard even those patches of the world momentarily set aside from more corrosive forms of technologically mediated commodification as beings left in a state of suspended animation, as hanging dearly onto bare life above the gallows-drop of global capitalism'. Smith, *Against Ecological Sovereignty*, 103.

<sup>1002</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 15.

‘by means of the other, then the relation of use decays into exploitation’.<sup>1003</sup> From this point of view, I can say that, if we continue to relate to the world from the perspective of power and exploitation, and if we continue to think of happiness from the viewpoint of economy, as thus described, then ethics (happiness) and politics will always result in the reification and exploitation of life as such and of the environment in general. The environment and life will come to mean and will become nothing other than purely exploitable and manipulable commodities which are used to secure economic growth and ‘the happy life’ as understood in the logic of biopolitics.<sup>1004</sup>

This reduction of the environment and life to a commodity exposes the world in general and humanity in particular to the possibility of becoming ‘*homines sacri*’.<sup>1005</sup> This is not only because the human being sovereignly takes charge over the environment to increase economic wealth and happiness; it is also because the human being is always already caught up in an understanding of politics, ethics and happiness that is defined by that very conception of life. Life is seen as a property, a resource, that is exploitable for political and economic reasons. The question now is how to conceive of and envisage a new human relation to the environment and life, a relationship that will not subordinate the happy life to the economy and, thus, to the corrosive exploitation of the environment and of life itself.

Agamben’s account of the happy life or form-of-life seems to be pertinent in this case. His notion of happiness has the potential to correct our conceptions of economy and the happy life as well as our relationship with the world. I have already demonstrated that Agamben conceives of the happy life as a form-of-life that consists in the use of the self and of the world. And he understands use in opposition to ownership and right.<sup>1006</sup> Thus described, the Agambenian account of form-of-life breaks from the sovereign and economic predatory relation to life and environment. Politically and ethically, the form-of-life beckons us to look at the world and relate to it in the mode of inappropriability. Human acting and relating to the world will consist in what Agamben, in *The Highest Poverty*, refers to as the *de facto use*:<sup>1007</sup> that is, a purely natural use of the world.<sup>1008</sup> This means that the environment and life should not

<sup>1003</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 15.

<sup>1004</sup> Smith defends a similar idea. Arguing against human sovereignty over nature, he contends that, ‘if we regard the natural world as nothing but a resource, then humanity is left, at best, with nothing to become other than the orderer of that resource. At worst, human lives come to be entirely dictated by this projection, by our being caught up in endless cycles of resource mobilisation’. Smith, *Against Ecology Sovereignty*, 105.

<sup>1005</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 84 and 111.

<sup>1006</sup> See Chapter 3, Section 4 above; Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 123–24.

<sup>1007</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 111.

<sup>1008</sup> De Boer, ‘Happy Life,’ 187.

be theorized from a utilitarian and capitalist perspective. Both perspectives claim ownership and right over life and the world. On the contrary, life and the natural world should be looked at and experienced as that which cannot be appropriated in any way.<sup>1009</sup> Thus, rather than merely opposing the idea of sovereignty over nature and life, Agamben's theory of happiness denotes, as Giovanni Marmont argues, an 'acting which deactivates any proprietorial modes of relating'.<sup>1010</sup> Acting, in this case, does not imply a sovereign and economic relation with life and environment.

Thus, while economy captures life (*bios* and *zōē*) and reduces it to a pure commodity, the happy life, or the form-of-life, in contrast, liberates life and the environment from any claim from sovereignty and economy. In line with use and inappropriability, form-of-life disposes us to consider the world and life as having ends in themselves. Agamben's concept of form-of-life can potentially, therefore, enact a paradigm shift in our relationship with the world. Form-of-life makes us move from a relation to the world that is purely economic to one that is existential. The existential mode of relation coincides with the abdication of positive rights and simple use of the world. In this way, the world and life are liberated from the signatures of law and economy.<sup>1011</sup> In the same way that a horse, for instance, has no right over its oats but only uses them—in the sense of the *de facto* use—in eating them, so too a human being has no right over the environment. He or she enjoys only its simple or *de facto* use. As De Boer adequately puts it, 'the perception of the world through the modality of appropriation (identities, consumption) is to be replaced by a perception of the world as inappropriable, as contained in the Franciscan virtues of poverty and humility. Both perceptions lead to ways of life, but only the latter sees the world as it is, leading therefore to happy life'.<sup>1012</sup> A plausible implication of this paradigm shift is that it will no longer be economy and sovereign power that direct and condition our politics, our ethics and our relationship with environment and society. Instead, it will be ethics—in the sense we have seen in Agamben, that is, the free relation to self and to the world—that will guide politics, economy and the human being's relation to environment. While economy emphasizes profit and regulations irrespective, at times, of their consequences for life and the environment, it seems that ethics, articulated from the viewpoint of Agamben, will seek to strike a balance in the relationship between life and the environment. Such an understanding and orientation may reduce human predation of the environment. In defining happiness as the simple use of life and of the world, Agamben's account of ethics, or form-of-life breaks the subject/object

<sup>1009</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 81.

<sup>1010</sup> Marmont, 'Another Use, Another Sociality,' 195.

<sup>1011</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 136.

<sup>1012</sup> De Boer, 'Happy Life,' 187–88.

opposition and the duality and dichotomy of nature vs human.<sup>1013</sup> The human being and life in general are seen not as separate from nature but as integral parts of it.

As Colby Dickinson argues in *Giorgio Agamben's Homo Sacer Series: A Critical Introduction and Guide*, Agamben questions, through the notion of use, the entire tradition of Western politics, ethics and economy that emphasizes action, work and effectiveness. In Dickinson's words, 'it is for this reason that, for Agamben, the Franciscan movement rises to an elevated prominence within the *Homo Sacer* series. The simple act of renouncing ownership emphasises not the will of the subject, but merely the "nature of things"'.<sup>1014</sup> By relating to life and to the environment in the mode of use—which is to say, form-of-life—one removes life and the environment from the logic of economy and opens them to a different use.<sup>1015</sup> This different use is the *de facto* use that recognizes the independent and autonomous existence of the inappropriable. As Dickinson rightly remarks, the inappropriable in Agamben is 'that which cannot be brought into one's possession, but which remind humanity of its precarious and ultimately impoverished existence'.<sup>1016</sup> I have already shown that concrete examples of Agamben's 'inappropriable' include the landscape and the environment.<sup>1017</sup> Not only could Agamben's approach to happiness and the inappropriable be interpreted as a critique of any form of human sovereignty over the *phusis*, it also makes us rethink a politics and an ethics that is not based on power, economy and sovereignty. If pushed to the extreme, Agamben's notion of form-of-life, considered together with corollaries such as use and inappropriability, points to the fact that the world is more than how we perceive and relate to it. It has its essence and existence irrespective of how we relate to it and what we decide to do with it.

Agamben's account of happiness may, therefore, have the potential to deactivate our economic relation to the world and help us recognise—even emphasize—the relative autonomy of the world and our dependency on it. Agamben seems to suggest as much when he comments on the relationship which the Franciscan *forma vitae* exhibits towards the environment. Agamben clearly states that

The assimilation of the Franciscan form of life to an animal life in Bonagratia and Richard of Conington corresponds faithfully to the special importance that animals had in the biography of Francis (preaching to animals, the liberation of the sheep and the two lambs,

<sup>1013</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 62.

<sup>1014</sup> Dickinson, *Giorgio Agamben's Homo Sacer Series*, 87.

<sup>1015</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 136.

<sup>1016</sup> Dickinson, *Giorgio Agamben's Homo Sacer Series*, 88.

<sup>1017</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 91; Dickinson, *Giorgio Agamben's Homo Sacer Series*, 89.

his love for worms). If on the one hand animals are humanized and become ‘brother’ (‘he called all creatures by the name of brother’), conversely, the brothers are equated with animals from the point of view of the law.<sup>1018</sup>

In this passage, Agamben seems to re-emphasize the thesis with which he concludes *Homo Sacer*: the inseparability between *bios* and *zōē*, and the constitution of a form-of-life in which both *bios* and *zōē* are reconciled with each other in a manner that is indistinctive.<sup>1019</sup> This idea not only breaks but also transcends all separatist and divisional accounts of life that set *bios* against *zōē*. Consequently, Agamben seems to suggest that both the natural world and the human world depend on each other, for, as he argues, ‘the animals are humanized’, and the human world is animalized. An implication of this thesis is that human beings should not relate to nature as though to an exploitable and reduceable commodity. But it is surprising that Agamben does not connect this part of his work to any ecological motive. Even so, I think this Agambenian passage is meaningful when it comes to the problem of ecology. Besides re-emphasizing the idea Agamben offers at both the beginning and the end of *Homo Sacer*—namely, that life (*zōē*) is a common property human beings share with the rest of the environment (symbolised here by animals)—the excerpt understands the human being in close relationship with the environment.<sup>1020</sup> This close relationship is seen in the special care, according to Agamben’s reading, which the Franciscans had for nature. Not only did they care for animals, plants, etc.; they also loved them and called them ‘brothers’.

If human beings can be equated with animals—at least from the perspective of the simple of fact of living—then the way in which humans use and otherwise relate to the world, directly or indirectly, affects humans themselves.<sup>1021</sup> At stake is the articulation of a new paradigm of the relationship of the self with the self and with the world, a paradigm that breaks the logic of biopolitics and so understands life and the world in general as having their intrinsic value beyond any political and economic determinations. The question now is how to envisage and realise this break from sovereign power and economy. Agamben’s response to this question is destitution. I have already discussed this notion extensively.<sup>1022</sup> It suffices to mention that Agamben understands destitution as an escape from the dialectic that characterises biopolitics and that involves the exclusion and inclusion of life in general in the exception.

<sup>1018</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 111.

<sup>1019</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 188.

<sup>1020</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1–2 and 188–89.

<sup>1021</sup> See Chapter 3, Section 4.2 above.

<sup>1022</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 3.3 and Chapter 3, Section 3.

Destitution disposes and opens life and the world to a different use. This means that life and the world are detached from the dynamics and calculations of biopolitics, sovereignty and economy. In this way, they are restored to their being as such.

This movement of destitution corresponds to what Heidegger, in paragraph 18 of *Being and Time*, terms 'letting something be'.<sup>1023</sup> Agamben himself refers to this Heideggerian concept when he discusses the meaning of the notion of use in Heidegger's thought.<sup>1024</sup> Despite referring to this Heideggerian concept Agamben fails to pay attention to the significance and implications this category has for his own concepts, including destitution, use and the inappropriability of the world.<sup>1025</sup> How should we understand Heidegger's 'letting something be', and how does it help articulate Agamben's form-of-life (use, destitution and inappropriability) as a philosophical and conceptual insight into the ecological crisis? In *Being and Time*, Heidegger defines 'letting something be' as the fact of leaving 'something ready-to-hand *be so-and-so as it is already and in order that it be such*'.<sup>1026</sup> In other words, letting something be means freeing what is ready at hand and the world in general from the capture of human power and activity, and releasing its potential to be as such. Letting be is neither passivity nor activity; it is instead a manner of being and relating to the world that liberates the world from the predation of human control and capture. From this angle, I subscribe to Van der Heiden's thesis that, for Heidegger, letting be is 'a form of abandonment by which beings let go of their original *Fug*, compliance in the handing out of being so that being as a whole – *das Seiende im Ganzen* – becomes a sheer plurality of present, isolated beings. In their isolation, these beings merely strive for their "continued existence"'.<sup>1027</sup> In Heidegger's own words,

Letting something 'be' does not mean that we must first bring it into its Being and produce it; it means rather that something which is already an 'entity' must be discovered in its readiness-to-hand and that we must thus let the entity which has this Being be encountered.<sup>1028</sup>

Two main points draw my attention in this passage. First, Heidegger seems to question the idea that *Dasein* is the principle that brings being into existence. Second, things in the world, according to Heidegger, are discovered and encountered

<sup>1023</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 117.

<sup>1024</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 45–47.

<sup>1025</sup> In his article, 'On Use and Care: A Debate between Agamben and Heidegger', 318–20, Van der Heiden articulates a similar criticism against Agamben's reading of Heidegger.

<sup>1026</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 117.

<sup>1027</sup> Van der Heiden, 'On Use and Care', 139.

<sup>1028</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 117.

as already being there. The things that are discovered as already being there are generally *Dasein's* own world and objects in the world.<sup>1029</sup> What is decisive here is that letting be enacts a fundamental ontological change in the relation with and use of the world. It is the relation of the irreducibility of the world to, I would say, any human political and economic goals. 'Letting be' recognizes the free and independent existence of the world and liberates it from the human predatory logic. Things in the world are only discovered, encountered and used in the sense we have seen with Agamben. As Smith rightly comments, 'to let something be is to hold open the possibilities of beings appearing in ways that are significant while not simply conforming to our expectations, desires, or definitions. It is to recognize that a being has such potential significance precisely because it transcends (goes beyond) what we would otherwise make of it'.<sup>1030</sup> Heidegger's notion of 'letting be', thus understood, is interesting here because it is, to a great extent, germane to Agamben's notion of the inappropriability of the world. The common point between both notions is that they recognize and defend the relative autonomy and existence of the environment. Though the latter can be used for existential purposes, it cannot be reduced to human desires and determinations. Agamben himself makes clear that to use the world is to relate to it as to something that is inappropriable.<sup>1031</sup> Likewise, Heidegger maintains that letting an entity be is freeing it for its readiness at hand.

With respect to Heidegger's thesis, I suggest that Agamben's idea of form-of-life may provide a fruitful way to think about the problem of ecology. Letting the world as well as life be implies detaching them from biopolitics and opening them to their potentiality of being as such. In other words, a plausible alternative to the ecological crisis is to transcend and break from the conception of human existence that subordinates the world and life to human power and reduces them to mere properties. The politics and ethics of inappropriability and of letting things be, therefore, implies not subjecting life and the environment to the definitions of economy and sovereignty. Instead, they should be thought of in a way that opens their possibilities to be whatever. For example, to relate to a tree and to use it in a mode of inappropriability and to let it be would mean, as Smith says, 'to encounter it *as that tree*—as something alien, irreducible to our purposes (or any other ends it might serve as a means to), and independent'.<sup>1032</sup> Only from this perspective can we reduce the effects of the ongoing ecological crisis and so liberate life and the environment from the operations of biopolitics.

<sup>1029</sup> Haugeland, 'Letting Be', 93.

<sup>1030</sup> Smith, *Against Ecological Sovereignty*, 108.

<sup>1031</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 81.

<sup>1032</sup> Smith, *Against Ecological Sovereignty*, 108.

## 4. Economy, Happiness and the Ecological Crisis: Agamben *vis-à-vis* Pope Francis

Since the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis<sup>1033</sup> has been very critical of the current global, capitalist, economic system and the conception of happiness that is centred on economic prosperity.<sup>1034</sup> He develops his approach to politics and economy in his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, and his encyclical letter, *Laudato Si'*.<sup>1035</sup> I will not provide a summary of the themes and main arguments which Francis puts forward in these works, as this has already been partly achieved, and because that is not relevant to my analysis.<sup>1036</sup> My focus is instead to critically engage these works in order to bring forth and examine Pope Francis' account of economy and happiness. In doing so, I will consider how and to what extent his conception overlaps with or differs from Agamben's and how it can help to articulate the problem of the ecological crisis.

But one may ask, on what ground should Agamben's account of *oikonomia* and form-of-life be read in connection with Pope Francis'? In the *Homo Sacer* series, Agamben neither mentions nor discusses Pope Francis or any aspect of his work. Likewise, Pope Francis neither refers to nor engages with Agamben's work. However, two plausible arguments warrant bringing these thinkers into dialogue when it comes to articulating the problem of economy, happiness and the environmental crisis. The first reason is exogenous and can be traced back to the source from which both Agamben and Francis draw their insights. The second is thematic and conceptual. Concerning the first point, Agamben and Pope Francis both depend greatly on Saint Francis of Assisi. In fact, Francis of Assisi is an important interlocutor in both Agamben's and Pope Francis' works. They comment on the *forma vitae* of the saint to develop important aspects of their accounts of *oikonomia* and form of life. Agamben presents *The Highest Poverty* as a philosophical and political examination of the life

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<sup>1033</sup> I am not considering Pope Francis from the perspective of his office as the Head of the Catholic Church but rather as a contemporary thinker like any other—though a thinker who has contributed a great deal to the discourse on political economy and who has been very critical of it.

<sup>1034</sup> For example, on December 10, 2018, the 17<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, Pope Francis lamented that the contemporary economic system is exclusive in essence and is built upon 'economic models directed to profit alone and the exploitation of those who are most vulnerable, such as children'. Pope Francis, 'Annual Address to Members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See'.

<sup>1035</sup> For references to these documents, I do not mention page numbers. I rather refer to the number of sections, as is officially done with referencing and quoting from the documents of the Catholic Church.

<sup>1036</sup> See, for instance, Boston, 'Laudato Si': A Plea from Francis', 12–20; Braun, 'Francis and Economic Democracy', 203–24.

of Saint Francis of Assisi, performed to conceive life and economy from a novel perspective. Thus, Agamben writes as follows:

The book closes, therefore, with an interpretation of the message of Francis and of the Franciscan theory of poverty and use [...] to think a form-of-life, a human life entirely removed from the grasp of the law and a use of bodies and of the world that would never be substantiated into an appropriation.<sup>1037</sup>

Likewise, Francis of Assisi is the protagonist and most compelling figure of Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*.<sup>1038</sup> This is already evident in the title of the encyclical. *Laudato Si'*, translated as 'Praise be to You', is taken from the words of a poetic hymn by Saint Francis of Assisi, in which he praises God for the wonders of the environment.<sup>1039</sup> Pope Francis himself clearly states that his encyclical is a reflection on the life of the saint, performed to analyse life and happiness in relation to ecology. 'I believe', he states, 'that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically'.<sup>1040</sup> According to Pope Francis, the life of Saint Francis is a paradigm of what it means to be human, a being who is both in relation with the self and open to alterity, that is, to other beings and the environment.<sup>1041</sup> In a recent address to the youth gathered in Assisi for the 'Event Economy of Francesco', Pope Francis describes the life of Saint Francis not only as a model of good life that is most needed today but also as an example of economy and relationship with the environment. In his words,

Today, a new economy inspired by Francis of Assisi can and must become an economy of friendship with the earth and economy of peace. It is a question of transforming an economy that kills into an economy of life, in all its aspects. That 'good life' is not the sweet life or living it well. Good living is the mysticism that the indigenous peoples teach us to have in relation to the earth.<sup>1042</sup>

Two points draw my attention in this quote. First, Pope Francis speaks of the need for an economy that is friendly to the environment. This economy may be understood

<sup>1037</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, xiii.

<sup>1038</sup> The impact of Saint Francis upon Pope Francis' life and thought has already been documented. For example, see Zhang, 'How St. Francis Influenced Francis' *Laudato Si'*, 42–56.

<sup>1039</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 1.

<sup>1040</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 10.

<sup>1041</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 11.

<sup>1042</sup> Pope Francis, 'Address of His Holiness Francis for the Event "Economy of Francesco"', 2.

as an attempt to search for and maintain a balanced relationship between human activities and the environment. One of the major concerns of this economy is the development and promotion of a friendly relation with ‘the earth’—a relation that is not based on and dominated by a will to power but that rather respects the otherness of the environment and does not subject it to human sovereign power. The second point is that Pope Francis opposes ‘good life’, which in this context I understand as happiness, to ‘sweet life’. By invoking ‘sweet life’, he criticizes a form of life that emphasizes, and is built around, economic growth, consumerism and economic power.<sup>1043</sup> On the contrary, the good life is one that maintains a harmonious relationship with others and the environment.<sup>1044</sup> Understood from this perspective, Pope Francis’ account of happiness parallels and complements to a great extent Agamben’s. I analyse this point more extensively below, where I elaborate on Pope Francis’ notion of happy life.<sup>1045</sup>

Agamben’s and Pope Francis’ views regarding economy, happiness and their impact on the environment can also be compared based on the thematic affinities that emerge from them. We have already analysed the meaning and function these notions have in Agamben’s thought.<sup>1046</sup> As my elaborations in the following subsections show,<sup>1047</sup> the themes of economy, happiness and environmental crisis play a crucial role in the thought of Pope Francis—as they also do in Agamben’s thinking. A close inspection of Pope Francis’ recent pastoral and theological pronouncements and publications reveals that he has given a great deal of attention to political economy. Agamben and Pope Francis are two of the most important of contemporary thinkers who are critical of the current capitalistic constitutions of economy and happiness. They wish to envisage life beyond the alienating structures of the currently dominant economic and political system. Bringing them into critical dialogue will highlight the continuity and discontinuity between their respective approaches to economy and the happy life. Thus, Pope Francis’ account will help to situate Agamben’s ideas on economy and happiness within a broader context. Pope Francis’ approach to economy and happiness can at once make Agamben’s approach more intelligible and expose its limitations. For the sake of coherence and readability, I will first outline the similarities in Agamben’s and Pope Francis’ approaches and then discuss differences and divergences. In so doing, I will address the following question: What understanding of *oikonomia* and happiness emerges from Pope Francis’ *Evangelii*

<sup>1043</sup> Pope Francis, ‘Address of His Holiness Francis for the Event “Economy of Francesco”’, 4; *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 54.

<sup>1044</sup> Pope Francis, ‘Address of His Holiness Francis for the Event “Economy of Francesco”’, 2.

<sup>1045</sup> See Chapter 4, Section 4.2.

<sup>1046</sup> Chapters 1, 2 and 3 above.

<sup>1047</sup> Chapter 4, Section 4.1 and Section 4.2.

*Gaudium and Laudato Si'*, and how and to what extent does it relate to, differ from or supplement Agamben's?

#### 4.1 Pope Francis' Approach to Economy

Like Agamben, Pope Francis is very critical of the modern discourse on *oikonomia* and happiness. Using a language that is severe and sometimes very harsh, Pope Francis challenges the modern and dominant conception of economy and happiness. Although he develops his account separately from that of Agamben, Pope Francis, like Agamben, thinks that modern economy alienates life and the human being. Pope Francis first elaborates upon economy in *Evangelii Gaudium*. He describes the dominant global economic system as a mechanism of control and domination. He argues that economy creates and aggravates social division and exclusion. In a section entitled 'No to an economy of exclusion', he notes that, 'just as the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say "thou shalt not" to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills'.<sup>1048</sup> In Pope Francis' view, the current economic system causes injustices and inequalities in society. It sets frontiers between people, opposing the rich and the poor, those who have economic power and those who do not.<sup>1049</sup> For him, the current economic system is more beneficial to the rich: It disempowers the poor and excludes them from accessing basic resources. According to Pope Francis, because it does this, the modern economy cannot guarantee a happy life, or the good life quality and the integral development of all individuals in society.<sup>1050</sup> Thus, he radically concludes that 'economy kills'.<sup>1051</sup>

Who or what does economy kill, and how does it kill? According to Pope Francis, it is the human being that is killed. Economy kills in the sense that it shapes human behaviour and relation to the self and to the world by introducing and celebrating the culture of consumption. Through this culture, everything, including human life, is related to, and considered as an object or a useful resource for consumption. This is to say that life in general is reduced to the state of mere goods that can be exploited and then disposed by the economic system. This is why Pope Francis writes,

Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded. We have created a 'throw away' culture which is now spreading. It is no longer simply about exploitation and

<sup>1048</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 53.

<sup>1049</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 59.

<sup>1050</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 117.

<sup>1051</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 53.

oppression, but something new. Those excluded are no longer society's underside or its fringes or its disenfranchised—they are no longer even a part of it.<sup>1052</sup>

As in the passage quoted earlier, here also Pope Francis insists that the current model of economy is exclusive in essence. In this context, however, he confines himself only to lamenting the factual and historical conditions of the current economy. He does not seem to offer an alternative. His alternative appears in *Laudato Si'*. In affirming that the current economy is exclusive and dominates over life, Pope Francis' account appears to share important similarities with Agamben's critical inquiry into economy. I have already noted that Agamben sees *oikonomia* as a biopolitical control and domination of life. For Pope Francis too, economy results in the division of life and the reduction of life to a mere object of political and economic power. In this way, economy prevents individuals from experiencing their lives as potentiality in the *polis*.<sup>1053</sup> Both Agamben and Pope Francis question the 'economic rationality'<sup>1054</sup> of the contemporary world. In their view, the current economic model does not work for the good of life. On the contrary, it exploits life and the world for the benefit of those in power.<sup>1055</sup> This is to say that modern economy is a means of the omnipotence of political power.<sup>1056</sup> Through economy, political power invests life and society, and it then shapes life accordingly into a single direction: pursuit of economic growth. The law of the global economic market becomes what regulates, controls and directs human life, freedom and choices.

From this perspective, economy can be thought of as a dispositive of power. And happy life in this context becomes a form of blind observation and reproduction of political, social and economic goals. In this sense, the individual potentiality to be or to do, to think and to act, is precluded or at least totally dominated by the specific power mechanism which is economy. Pope Francis expresses this as follows: '[T]he culture of prosperity deadens us; we are thrilled if the market offers us something new to purchase. In the meantime, all those lives stunted for lack of opportunity seem a mere spectacle; they fail to move us'.<sup>1057</sup> Pope Francis radicalises this point in

<sup>1052</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 53.

<sup>1053</sup> Chapter 1 above.

<sup>1054</sup> I borrow this concept from André Gorz, a social-theory critic. He uses the term in his *Critique of Economic Reason* to qualify a conception of economy that emphasizes productivity, efficiency, profit and calculation as the basic characteristics of economy and life. In this rationality, something (such as life) is valuable only when it yields profits. See Gorz, *Critique of Economic Reason*, 109.

<sup>1055</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 53.

<sup>1056</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xii.

<sup>1057</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 54.

*Laudato Si'*. He problematizes the current historical conditions in which everything, including life, politics and environment, is influenced and understood from the perspective of economy. For him, the contrary should be the case. Thus, he concludes:

Politics must not be subject to the economy, nor should economy be subject to the dictates of an efficiency-driven paradigm of technocracy. This frequently leads to an overproduction of some commodities, with unnecessary impact on the environment.<sup>1058</sup>

Agamben also defends a similar thesis in *The Kingdom and the Glory*. He argues that the current biopolitical society is characterized by 'the triumph of economy and government over every other aspect of social life'.<sup>1059</sup> The point is that, under the influence of economy, human life is alienated and evaluated only from the perspective of productivity and profit.<sup>1060</sup> In *The Coming Community*, Agamben also makes it clear that the coming politics should break from the dynamics of biopolitics, that is, from the influence of sovereign power and economy.<sup>1061</sup> Agamben and Pope Francis reach a common conclusion: namely, that the current economy and politics jeopardize life and that there is a need to develop a different form of politics and economy. For Agamben, this new politics is realised in the form-of-life. For Pope Francis, it is achieved through the notion of 'integral ecology'.<sup>1062</sup>

Read from the perspective of biopolitics, I find that Pope Francis' account of economy in general stresses the idea that the technocratic economic paradigm has provided humanity with an extraordinary power. This power is the ability to take charge over life and the environment; it is the power to control, dominate and reduce, through technological apparatuses, both life and the environment to things which are exploitable for economic purposes. This power governs all aspects of human life in society, from politics to the relationship with the environment, passing all the way through to ethics and human relations. In other words, the entire human existence and the world at large are taken into the grip of this power—namely, economy, understood as both government of life and pursuit of prosperity. This is what Pope Francis calls a 'tremendous power'.<sup>1063</sup> He continues by saying that this power is exercised as and through 'an impressive dominance over the whole humanity

<sup>1058</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 189.

<sup>1059</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 1.

<sup>1060</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 53.

<sup>1061</sup> See Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 85–86; Chapter 2, Section 3.2.

<sup>1062</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 84–85.

<sup>1063</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 104.

and the entire world'.<sup>1064</sup> With this power, the human being can manipulate life and the environment. In addition, humans can shape life and the environment *ad libitum* such that both correspond to and respond to human wills and desires. Thus, human activities with respect to life and the environment are expressed in the form of predation, appropriation, exploitation, use and consumption. As Pope Francis states, the

subject makes every effort to establish the scientific and experimental method, which in itself is already a technique of possession, mastery and transformation. It is as if the subject were to find itself in the presence of something formless, completely open to manipulation.<sup>1065</sup>

A crucial point in this quote is the idea concerning 'possession', 'mastery' and 'manipulation' of life and the environment. This idea of Pope Francis seems similar to Agamben's criticism of biopolitics. Though they reason from two different perspectives, they both seem to reach the same conclusion: that the current economy results in mechanisms of predation, exclusion and produces what Agamben would call 'bare life',<sup>1066</sup> that is, a being to act upon, an entity devoid of any intrinsic value and to which any type of form or shape may be given, provided that the latter serves economic purposes. Pope Francis clearly expresses this idea above when he avers that the subject seems 'to find itself in the presence of something formless, open to manipulation'.<sup>1067</sup> Consequently, life in general and the environment are seen and utilized as means to an end. The end in question in this context is economic gain and political determinations. This is to say that life and the environment are meaningful and useful only insofar as they can be exploited for economic value. In other words, for both Pope Francis and Agamben, the current economic system commodifies life and the environment, reducing them to bare life and a storehouse for resources.

As described above, both of Pope Francis' accounts of economy and happiness—in *Evangelii Gaudium* and his address at the "Event Economy of Francesco"—show important similitudes to Agamben's. Yet his elaborations in *Laudato Si'* seem more refined than Agamben's ideas and differ from them a little bit. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis, unlike Agamben, approaches the question of economy and happy life in a close and direct relationship with the problem of technology and ecology. Admittedly, Agamben also discusses the question concerning technology in *The Use of Bodies*; but

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<sup>1064</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 104.

<sup>1065</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 106.

<sup>1066</sup> See Chapter 1 above.

<sup>1067</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 106.

he does not elaborate there on its consequences for the environment.<sup>1068</sup> He only addresses the issue of technology from the perspective of ‘the idea of instrumentality as the essential characteristic’ of technology.<sup>1069</sup> In this context, Agamben does not at all relate technology to ecology and barely relates it to happy life. On the contrary, Pope Francis ties the following four phenomena closely together: technology, economy, happiness and the environmental crisis. In fact, he interprets the environmental crisis—the main subject of *Laudato Si’*—as a direct outcome of technology, the global economic model and an account of happiness that, according to him, are oriented toward profit and material prosperity.<sup>1070</sup>

Pope Francis goes on to argue that the modern economy is informed and driven by the ‘technocratic paradigm’.<sup>1071</sup> He describes this paradigm as a conception of life or existence that ‘exalts the concept of a subject who, using logical and rational procedures, progressively approaches and gains control over an external object’.<sup>1072</sup> What is crucial in this paradigm is the quest for mastery, possession, manipulation and transformation of the world. The world is regarded as a ‘resource and commodity subject to the laws of the market’.<sup>1073</sup> Hence comes the exploitation, manipulation and transformation of the world through technological apparatuses.<sup>1074</sup> Said differently, economy, driven by technology, according to Pope Francis, celebrates the search for profit, domination and ‘unlimited growth’<sup>1075</sup> that is realised through exploitation.<sup>1076</sup> In his words, ‘economic powers continue to justify the current global system where priority tends to be given to speculation and the pursuit of financial gain, which fail to take the context into account, let alone the effects on human dignity and the natural environment’.<sup>1077</sup> I must say that Pope Francis is not against profit or economic development *per se*. In many instances, he has recognized and highlighted the goodness and importance of economy and technology.<sup>1078</sup> Instead, he is critical of the emphasis that economy, under the influence of technology, puts on profit as its driving force and essential characteristic. For him, what is problematic in this model of economy is that it creates exclusion and inequalities.

<sup>1068</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 66–79.

<sup>1069</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 69.

<sup>1070</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 16.

<sup>1071</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 106.

<sup>1072</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 106.

<sup>1073</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 30.

<sup>1074</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 106.

<sup>1075</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 106.

<sup>1076</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 106.

<sup>1077</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 56.

<sup>1078</sup> See for example, Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, nos. 102, 109 and 129.

Furthermore, Pope Francis argues that such an understanding of economy seems to confine happiness to a life that focuses only on the accumulation and consumption of material goods. From his viewpoint, this form of economy has negative and harmful consequences on both life and the environment because economy commodifies life. ‘Life’, Pope Francis avers, ‘gradually becomes a surrender to situations conditioned by technology, itself viewed as the principal key to the meaning of existence’.<sup>1079</sup> According to Pope Francis, technology is the driving force behind economy. That life ‘becomes a surrender’ to technology means that life is reduced to and shaped by technological and economic determinations. In this way, the happy life is a life that unquestionably and unconditionally aligns with factual economic and technological conditions. What matters for the happy life in this context is the satisfaction of personal and immediate economic needs, irrespective of the impact these might have on others and the environment.<sup>1080</sup> Pope Francis criticises this account of happy life. For him, it leads to the deterioration of the environment.<sup>1081</sup> He identifies both economy and the understanding of happiness that emanate from it as causes of the degradation and destruction of the environment. Deprived of its intrinsic meaning and value, the environment, Pope Francis says, is reduced to a ‘pure object of utility’, to ‘raw material to be hammered into useful shape’.<sup>1082</sup> So, for him, the problems of technology, economy, happiness and the ecological crisis are united. This is to say that real happiness, for Pope Francis, consists rather in recognition of the interdependence of the self, the other and the environment.<sup>1083</sup>

## 4.2 Happiness: Recognizing Alterity and Interconnectedness

Like Agamben, Pope Francis understands happiness in opposition to economy. While Agamben’s account of the happy life is directly linked to his own criticisms of biopolitics, Pope Francis’ account stems from what he calls ‘integral ecology’.<sup>1084</sup> The question, therefore, is what Pope Francis means by *integral ecology* and how it relates to and accounts for happiness. Pope Francis elaborates extensively on this concept in the fourth chapter of his encyclical, *Laudato Si’*, which is entitled ‘Integral Ecology’. The chapter discusses the correlation that exists and must be maintained between humans and all other living beings and the environment in which they all live.<sup>1085</sup>

<sup>1079</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 110.

<sup>1080</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, nos. 123 and 144.

<sup>1081</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, nos. 190 and 195.

<sup>1082</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 115.

<sup>1083</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 117.

<sup>1084</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 137.

<sup>1085</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 138–62.

In this context, Pope Francis defines integral ecology as a holistic and integrated approach to life, politics, economy and the environment. In his words, integral ecology ‘entails reflection and debate about the conditions for the life and survival of society and the honesty needed to question certain models of development, production, and consumption. It cannot be emphasized enough how everything is interconnected’.<sup>1086</sup> In his thinking, integral ecology is characterized as a critical theory that aims at two things. First, it is concerned with the existential conditions of the sustainability of life and society. From this perspective, integral ecology, so far as Pope Francis is concerned, is a theory of how life and the environment can be saved from disintegration. It is so by virtue of developing a broader approach to life and the environment by restoring the dignity of human life and protecting nature.<sup>1087</sup> In consequence of this theory, any economic, ethical and political strategy that does not work for the preservation and protection of life can be seen as harmful and as something that, therefore, must be discarded.<sup>1088</sup> Second, integral ecology takes issue with any form of reductionism. Reductionism is construed here as an approach to life that seeks to understand it from a single perspective: in this case, maximization of profits. From this reductionist perspective, everything, including life and the environment, is valuable only insofar it yields economic profits, which are often considered in isolation from anything else. The only thing that matters is increase in productivity and material prosperity.<sup>1089</sup> Pope Francis thinks such an approach to life is problematic. It presents a fragmented definition of life. On the contrary, he argues, life is more than economy. It is involved in relations to the environment, ethics, politics, etc.—all of which are interconnected.<sup>1090</sup>

Paramount in Pope Francis’ concept of integral ecology is the attempt to defend the relationship between humanity and the environment. What is at stake in this context is the development of a balanced approach to life, an approach that does not focus only on profit. Instead, integral ecology integrates and respects all dimensions that pertain to human life in close connection with the environment. Thus, Pope Francis writes as follows:

[W]hen we speak of the ‘environment’, what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it. Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as

<sup>1086</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 138.

<sup>1087</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 139.

<sup>1088</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 195.

<sup>1089</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 195.

<sup>1090</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 138.

a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it.<sup>1091</sup>

Pope Francis' concept of integral ecology, as it appears in this quote, seems to argue against any approach to life that opposes 'nature' to 'society' and, consequently, understands humans in separation from nature. This point is fascinating because it connects to Agamben's notion of form-of-life. Through the category of form-of-life, Agamben seeks to bridge the gap or dichotomy between *zōē* and *bios*, nature and culture, *oikos* and *polis*, politics and nature. Form-of-life reintegrates all these aspects of life in general in an inseparable relationship.<sup>1092</sup> Likewise, Pope Francis' notion of integral ecology seeks not only to promote a broader account of life but also to develop a balanced and united approach to life and nature. The human being is seen as part of nature, and nature is seen as an important aspect of human life. Hence, Pope Francis concludes that 'just as the different aspects of the planet—physical, chemical and biological—are interrelated, so too living species are part of a network which we will never fully explore and understand'.<sup>1093</sup>

Within the conceptual framework of integral ecology, Pope Francis conceives of happiness as a life that recognizes, and is open to, alterity. In this context, *alterity* is conceived as the otherness of nature and its relative autonomy and interconnectedness, which is the mutual interdependence of humans and nature. This conception of happiness entails adopting, according to Pope Francis, three basic attitudes. The first is the simplicity of 'lifestyle'.<sup>1094</sup> He characterizes this as 'a non-consumerist model of life'.<sup>1095</sup> It is a life that opposes the current, dominant economic model. For Pope Francis, the current model regards the world and life in general as goods to be dominated and exploited.<sup>1096</sup> On the contrary, the non-consumerist life (or happy life) is a life that does not emphasize accumulation of goods and excessive exploitation of the environment.<sup>1097</sup> Happy life, for Pope Francis, as for Agamben, consists in a simple use of the world. This means that the world is not to be regarded as an entity that we own such that we can shape and exploit it *ad libitum*. The world and life in general, instead, transcend our human economic and political calculations. Life and nature are here to be used in the form of the *de facto*

<sup>1091</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 137.

<sup>1092</sup> See Chapter 3, Section 2; Van der Heiden, 'Exile, Use and Form-of-Life', 3.

<sup>1093</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 138.

<sup>1094</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 23, 111 and 203.

<sup>1095</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 112.

<sup>1096</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 12.

<sup>1097</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 111.

use; as Agamben argues, we are to relate to them as that which is 'Inappropriable'.<sup>1098</sup> The second and third elements that account for happiness, according to Pope Francis, are a 'sense of community'<sup>1099</sup> and care for the environment. By 'sense of community', Pope Francis means the awareness that we all belong to and live in a common environment. Whether we are aware of it or not, we depend on each other.<sup>1100</sup> In this way, Pope Francis points to the fact that everything is already always involved in relations with everything else, and that life must be understood as a set or network of relations.<sup>1101</sup> He writes that, 'everything is connected. Once the human being declares independence from reality and behaves with absolute dominion, the foundations of our life begin to crumble'.<sup>1102</sup>

What Pope Francis means in this passage is that human life is fundamentally not about power or domination and control. Economy and politics should not be seen as the most important principles that define and guide human life in society and its relationship with the environment. For him, life is first and foremost about relationship and openness to alterity, which is to say, relationship with the self, with the other and with the environment.<sup>1103</sup> From his viewpoint, it is this awareness of openness that accounts for happy life or quality life in society. It is equally what conditions the nobility of human existence.<sup>1104</sup> In this way, Pope Francis criticizes the idea of a happy life centred around economic progress and growth. According to him, this approach to life reduces the quality of people's lives in society by leading both to the exploitation and destruction of environment, and to the depletion of resources.<sup>1105</sup> This entails that economy, politics and ethics must be understood and must operate in a way that contributes to the respect of the alterity (otherness) of the environment and to the maintenance of a balanced relationship with it.

Therefore, Pope Francis argues that the solution to the environmental crisis is an economy, a politics and an ethics that locate life within a framework that affirms relations with others, including other living beings and the environment.<sup>1106</sup> As he writes, 'our openness to others, each of whom is a "thou" capable of knowing, loving and entering into dialogue, remains the source of our nobility as human persons'.<sup>1107</sup>

<sup>1098</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 42; 69; Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 80–94; *Creation and Anarchy*, 25–50.

<sup>1099</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 179.

<sup>1100</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 140.

<sup>1101</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 42, 140 and 179.

<sup>1102</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 117.

<sup>1103</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 119.

<sup>1104</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 119.

<sup>1105</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 194.

<sup>1106</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 111.

<sup>1107</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 119.

Based on this claim, I find that, if humans are part and parcel of the environment, and if the environment is our *habitat* (*oikos*, or what Pope Francis calls ‘our common home’),<sup>1108</sup> then every person’s actions upon or against the environment are directly or indirectly actions upon or against human life. The ecological crisis, therefore, is a crisis of and about the human being. To stop the crisis, economy, politics and ethics should become interested in taking care of the environment and life, and not merely for profit or economic prosperity. Moreover, they should become concerned about the protection and preservation of life and the environment, and they should show this concern by promoting an account of life that emphasizes alterity and interconnectedness. Thus, I find that, philosophically, Pope Francis’ integral ecology and the account of happiness that stems from it provide us with plausible grounds to think of life, economy and politics in terms of interdependence and co-responsibility. This entails paying attention to the impact each of these dimensions of life may have upon each another. The development of one must not be achieved to the detriment of the other. Consequently, the happy life is a life that seeks to bring ethics, economy, environment and politics together in interdependence and mutual dialogue.

From this point of view, Pope Francis’ account of happiness seems to refine Agamben’s. As aforementioned, Pope Francis understands and describes the happy life as a network or a set of interdependent relations. Agamben does the same thing.<sup>1109</sup> But there is the difference between Pope Francis’ approach and Agamben’s concerning the essence and implications of the relations in question. Agamben seems to emphasize only one aspect of the relation in his description of happiness: It is the relation with the self. Though the question of community plays a crucial role in his account of the happy life, this community is described and analysed from the sole perspective of the individual self who seeks, on the one hand, to oppose the current factual conditions of biopolitics and, on the other hand, to live beyond them.<sup>1110</sup> The self occupies pride of place; everything revolves around it. His accounts of form-of-life and community, therefore, can be termed *self-oriented*. For him, form-of-life is a life that is inseparable from the self.<sup>1111</sup> Contrary to Agamben, Pope Francis stresses the importance of relation, not only with the self, but also and more significantly between the self, others and the environment. Pope Francis, more or better than Agamben, offers a comprehensive and integral approach to happy life. According to Pope Francis, happiness is a phenomenon that involves not only the individual but also others, namely the environment and the society in which the individual lives.

<sup>1108</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, no. 1–13.

<sup>1109</sup> See Chapter 3, Section 2 above.

<sup>1110</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 3.1 above.

<sup>1111</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 207; Chapter 3, Section 2.1 above.

Pope Francis' approach, contrary to Agamben's, points thus to the idea that the happy life does not consist merely in resisting and exiting current biopolitical conditions. More than this, the happy life consists in a life that is open to the other: to the human and nonhuman environment.

This means that the problem of happiness, economy and ecology should not be addressed solely from the viewpoint of an attitudinal change and the destitution of the current biopolitical dispositions, as Agamben suggests. In addition, happiness, economy and ecology should be conceptualized and problematized from a broader perspective: the perspective of interconnection between all aspects of human existence. As Pope Francis states, 'if everything is related, then the health of a society's institutions has consequences for the environment and the quality of human life'.<sup>1112</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

This chapter has been guided by two central purposes. The first is to problematize Agamben's ethical theory—his account of form-of-life or happy life. The second is to examine how and to what extent it could be useful in what is one of the most decisive crises of our time: the environmental crisis. One way to assess Agamben's discourse on form-of-life is to situate it within a broader context. Thus, I outlined how Agamben's form-of-life questions the modern understanding of the concept of work. I showed how the modern notion of work is connected to happiness, economy and the ecological crisis, and how Agamben's senses of happiness and inoperativity call us to conceive work from a new perspective that is entirely separated from the current emphasis on exploitation, transformation and productivity. Work should be understood primarily and simply as *praxis* rather than as *poiesis*. Furthermore, I compared Agamben's theory with insights derived from two important thinkers in the contemporary era—Badiou and Nussbaum—who have also theorized the happy life in relation to the currently reigning model of economy. Then I addressed the problem of the ecological crisis from the perspective of Agamben's ethical discourse. In this context, I considered how Agamben's theory aids the search for plausible solutions to the ecological crisis. Lastly, I offered a critical comparison of Agamben's and Pope Francis' thoughts on economy, happiness and the ecological crisis.

Three main conclusions have been reached over the course of this chapter. The first is that Agamben's discourse is not *per se* unique and can be situated within a wider constellation. Though Agamben, Badiou, Nussbaum and Pope Francis each argue

<sup>1112</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 142.

from different perspectives, they also reach a common conclusion: The modern model of economy and happiness is problematic because it alienates life and subjects it to the power of sovereignty and economy, which, in the end, negatively affects the environment. For instance, Agamben, Badiou and Nussbaum agree that both economy and life (happy life) have been contorted by capitalism by being reduced to a sellable and buyable commodity. In contrast, Agamben, Badiou and Nussbaum oppose happiness to the current model of economy. For them, *mutatis mutandis*, the happy life is a life that resists the current dispositions of power and projects itself as a process of subjectivation and experimentation with one's potentiality to be and to do. Thus, Agamben argues that happiness is a life that breaks from all the mechanisms of biopolitics. Likewise, Badiou states that the happy life is a life that is freed from the current political and economic conditions and so discovers new forms of living. And for Nussbaum, happiness is a life that consists in experiencing one's potentiality or ability in society. However, despite their common critical approach to the modern account of life and economy, Badiou and Nussbaum differ from Agamben especially when it comes to how happiness should be achieved in society. Thus, while Agamben suggests an exit from the existing political and economic states of affairs as the condition for and path to form-of-life, Badiou insists that happiness is realised through revolutionary actions and choices that oppose factual existential, political and economic determinations. For her part, Nussbaum insists that the happy life is possible only when one's potentiality is met with external conditions that promote human wellbeing and development. She also emphasizes the importance of affiliation with one's environment in the process of pursuing happiness.

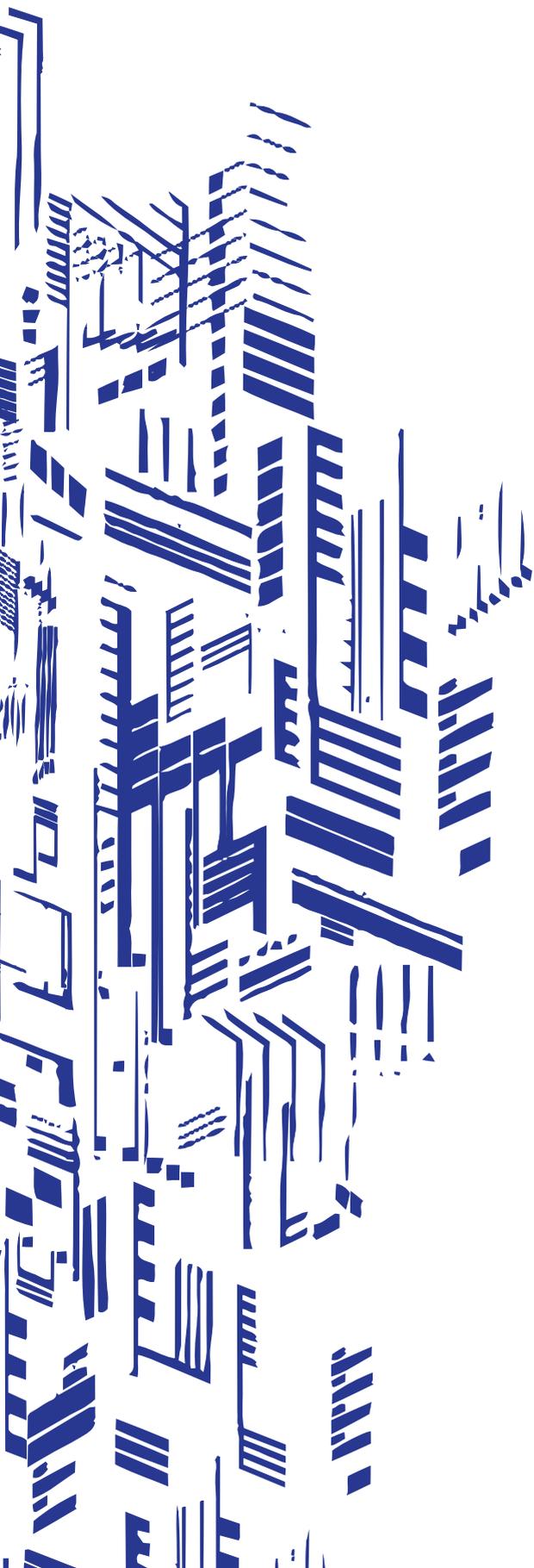
Another important outcome of this chapter is the observation that Agamben's accounts of *oikonomia* and form-of-life do not merely question the mainstream discourse on economy and happiness. His notion of form-of-life, with its correlated concepts such as inappropriability and use, offers interesting perspectives from which to think about the problem of the environmental crisis. Though Agamben himself does not directly connect his work to any ecological motive, his accounts of biopolitics in *Homo Sacer* and *The Kingdom and the Glory* and his description of *use* in *The Use of Bodies* together provide some illuminating insights for thinking up a solution to the problem of the ecological crisis. As a matter of fact, the current ecological crisis is connected to the way in which economy and happiness are generally conceived in modern times. For modern politics and economy, the pursuit of happiness amounts to the production, accumulation and consumption of goods. But the fact is that conceiving life from this point of view leads to excessive exploitation of the environment, thereby causing the deterioration of nature. On the contrary, Agamben's ethical theory, enshrined in his notion of form-of-life, can correct the modern understanding of economy and

happiness. For example, by insisting that the happy life consists in the *de facto* use of life and the world, Agamben's conception of form-of-life compels us to view life and the environment as an Inappropriate.

The last general result of this chapter is that Agamben's discourse on economy, ethics and the happy life is germane to Pope Francis' approach to economy, happiness and the ecological crisis. Both draw inspiration from the life of Saint Francis of Assisi and develop this inspiration from different perspectives. They find that the current model of economy and happiness serves ultimately to maintain and reinforce the ideology of the *status quo* and culminates in mechanisms and techniques of separation, exclusion and inequality. In so doing, the modern economy produces a life that is devoid of its intrinsic value, or what Agamben calls 'bare life'. According to Agamben and Pope Francis, a good life is a life that integrates all aspects of human existence and consists both in the *use* of the world and in recognition of the autonomy of the world. Despite these similarities, Pope Francis' account of economy and happiness differs slightly from Agamben's. Two main differences may be pointed out in this case. First, Agamben does not directly establish a connection between economy, happy life and the crisis of the environment. However, there are some thematic and conceptual motives that allow us to connect his account of happy life and economy to the crisis of the environment. His notions of inappropriability, use and form-of-life provide interesting alternatives that we may use to address the conundrum of the ecological crisis. Thus, reading this crisis from the perspective of Agamben's ethic is a hermeneutic task. Unlike Agamben, Pope Francis directly links economy, happiness and the ecological crisis. For him, the degradation and destruction of the environment is a consequence of the current take on economy and happiness guided by technology.<sup>1113</sup>

Second, Agamben understands the happy life mainly as a relation of life to the self and an attempt to go beyond the *status quo* of biopolitics. On his part, Pope Francis stresses that, though happiness consists in a relation with life as such, it is not only a relation with the self. A happy life also involves also a relationship with the environment and with others in the society in which one lives, for everything is interrelated and interconnected. All things considered, Agamben's and Pope Francis' accounts should not be regarded as contradictory but rather as complementary. Each emphasises one or another aspect of happiness.

<sup>1113</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 106.



## **GENERAL CONCLUSION**

TOWARDS AN ETHICS  
BEYOND ECONOMY

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In this study, I have examined the meaning and role of the notion of happiness in relation to economy and ethics in Agamben's account of biopolitics. I have not been concerned with the question of happiness *per se*, nor with happiness in relation to economy or ethics alone; I have rather been concerned with happiness in connection with economy and ethics in the political thought of Agamben. My main interest has been to consider, based on Agamben's work, whether happiness can or must be managed and controlled in predominantly capitalistic and political terms or whether it is instead an ethico-ontological mode of life proper to the individual. This work therefore bears the title, *The Management of Happiness: Economy and Ethics in Agamben*. Agamben provides a very complicated and multifaceted conception of happiness. In fact, two main and opposing accounts of happiness may be identified in his work. Agamben starts by criticizing what I called *the biopolitical account of happiness*, which, according to him, subordinates life to sovereignty and economy. Then he proposes his own account of happy life, which I called *ethico-ontological*. This account treats happiness as a life that seeks to realise itself outside the bounds of sovereignty and economy.<sup>1114</sup> Despite the complexity and intricacy of Agamben's approach, happiness, for him, is not something that must be governed. In a nutshell, Agamben understands happiness as an ethical and ontological posture towards life. For him, happiness is a life that escapes the mechanisms of sovereign power and economy and, in so doing, constitutes itself as a process of subjectivation—that is, the becoming of self as an authentic being. Thus defined, happy life is the leitmotif of Agamben's critical remarks against biopolitics and the negative impact that biopolitics has on life. In this sense, happiness is the key concept that bridges Agamben's *pars destruens* with his *pars construens*.

Two considerations motivated me to delve into the ethical aspects of Agamben's elaborations on biopolitics from the perspective of happy life, ethics and economy. First, the notion of happiness in relation to economy and ethics in Agamben has so far received very little attention. The increasingly critical and wide-ranging secondary studies of Agamben's work have focused largely on its political commitments and significance. His work has, thus, often been interpreted from a negative angle. Critical treatments of Agamben's work usually question some of his controversial theses—such as his claim that the state of exception is the paradigm of politics and that bare life is at the foundation of politics in the West.<sup>1115</sup> Very few studies so far have concentrated on the meaning of his form-of-life and the role it plays in relation to economy and ethics in his account of biopolitics. Scholars who have come up against this problem have not sufficiently emphasised how form-of-life relates to

<sup>1114</sup> See Chapter 1, sections 1 and 3.3 above.

<sup>1115</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 6–9 and 166–70; *State of Exception*, 1–4.

economy and ethics in Agamben. Consequently, the ethical and affirmative potential inherent in his work has been left out of consideration. Second, Agamben's account of biopolitics treats so many diverse themes and problems in so many books that it seems to lack internal coherence. It seemed, therefore, important to find a particular trope that can stand as the key to connect, read and thematically interpret Agamben's work as a whole. It is my contention that his critical take on sovereign power and economy (biopolitics) is premised on the happy life. Form-of-life is the alternative he introduces to overcome the current constitution of politics and economy. Through the category of form-of-life, he endeavours to provide a different account of life and how humans relate to it in the *polis*.

Thus, I began my study by analysing the significance of the question of economy in Agamben's work (Chapter 1). The central claim I made in that context is that Agamben offers a specific and intricate account of economy, which he traces back to Ancient Greek and Christian sources, and to which he ascribes a biopolitical meaning. Based on the original meaning of *economy*—the management of life in the *oikos*—Agamben understands economy not only in relation to life in the *oikos*, but also, and most importantly, as that through which life is equally brought into the *polis*. In other words, economy is the means through which political power—that is, biopower and sovereign power (Agamben, unlike Foucault, conflates the two notions)—captures life in society, controls it and produces bare life. In this way, the notion of economy is vital to Agamben's account of biopolitics. The emphasis on economy shows that, for him, biopolitics is not only about domination but also and especially about the government of life as such. The notion of economy indicates that biopolitics, so far as Agamben is concerned, is a double-faceted phenomenon. It is simultaneously about sovereignty and economy. At issue in this double structure of biopolitics is the capture of life, its management and the production of bare life. The happy life and the ethics that derive from this articulation are nothing but pure products of power. The happy life is a life that is organized around productivity and the increase of economic prosperity according to the prescriptions of sovereignty and economy. The first chapter, therefore, is a necessary step in addressing the problem of happiness in relation to economy and ethics in Agamben. It addresses and explains the main concepts and notions upon which subsequent chapters are premised.

In Chapter 2, I provided a detailed account of the meaning and function of the notion of ethics in relation to happiness and economy in Agamben's work. My core objective for the chapter was to uncover the foundations of Agamben's redefinition of life and its relation to political power. For this reason, I first examined the relationship between ethics and law in Agamben. My main contention in the chapter is that

Agamben opposes ethics and law and advocates for an ethics without and outside the law. He understands ethics as the way in which one becomes a subject. I accordingly addressed the manner in which Agamben conceives of the interplay between ethics and politics. In substance, I argued that, so far Agamben is concerned, ethics and politics are two intertwined domains because both aim at the constitution of community and the happy life. I concluded the chapter with an examination of the meaning of happiness in relation to ethics and economy. The central point in this context was to demonstrate that Agamben views ethics and happiness in opposition to economy and all legal determinations. While biopolitics understands and defines life as dependent on political power, ethics, as Agamben understands it, sets life outside the domain of power. Thus, one of the major claims in Chapter 2 is that, through his account of ethics, Agamben lays the foundation of his *pars construens*: namely, his notion of form-of-life. Form-of-life is, thus, the ground upon which both his redefinition of life in society and the coming politics are built.

In the third chapter, I concentrated on the significance of this key notion—form-of-life—in Agamben’s account of happiness in relation to economy and ethics. While Chapter 2 provides a detailed description of the meaning of ethics according to Agamben, Chapter 3 develops and examines what form-of-life means in his work. The central contention of this chapter is that form-of-life is the new politico-ethical life that Agamben puts forward as an alternative or a solution to the problem of economy and sovereignty. This thesis was developed following a threefold structure. I first offered an extensive conceptual explanation of form-of-life, with a view to highlighting its intricate meaning and function in Agamben’s account of how the happy life relates to economy and ethics. In a second movement, I discussed how form-of-life concretizes Agamben’s politics of destitution. In the last step, I provided a detailed account of the relation between form-of-life and use. I mainly argued that form-of-life or the happy life brings forth a new use of life and the world around us. This use is not to be understood as the fact of utilizing something for a specific purpose but rather as a process of autoaffection and free relation to life and to the world. In this context, Agamben understands happiness as life that is inseparable from its form and is in relation to itself. It is a life which neither sovereignty nor economy can control, and which they cannot at all dominate or manage. For Agamben, happiness is not to be viewed in preponderantly economic terms, which is to say, in terms that emphasize productivity, operativity and increases in economic wealth according to the prescriptions and conventions dictated by political power in society. On the contrary, happiness for him is an ethico-ontological experience of life itself outside all attempts at jurisdiction.

Building on the third chapter, the last chapter (Chapter 4) is focused on problematizing Agamben's theory of ethics, happiness and economy by drawing on contemporary studies of the problem of happiness in relation to economy and ethics. I considered whether Agamben's ethico-ontological conception of happiness is relevant if situated within a broader philosophical context, and I also asked whether it might help make broader contemporary issues, such as the environmental crisis, intelligible. For this reason, I compared Agamben's theses with, for instance, those of Badiou, Nussbaum and Pope Francis on the same problem. Second, I examined how Agamben's theory of happiness can be helpful in philosophically addressing the problem of the environmental crisis. I made two main claims in this context. First, Agamben's ethico-ontological conception of happiness, in relation to economy and ethics, is germane to critical analyses of Badiou, Nussbaum and Pope Francis on the same problem. In this sense, Agamben's theory is not *per se sui generis*; it is yet another perspective on the malaise many have also expressed against the current model of politics and economy. Nonetheless, his approach is original and relevant because he provides a genealogical analysis of the problem of happiness in connection to economy and ethics. He excavates the foundations of the problem at issue all the way from antiquity and examines its ramifications in the present time. In doing that, he proposes an alternative that challenges the entire philosophical tradition of the West and the very conception of happiness. Second, Agamben's ethico-ontological account of the happy life offers interesting insights with which to consider the problem of the ecological crisis, though Agamben himself does not directly link his work to any ecological motives. This was the philosophical ground which allowed me to initiate a conversation between Agamben and Pope Francis, who has been at the front of the fight against the ecological crisis.

It should, therefore, be emphasised that Agamben's account of the happy life, economy and ethics has unfolded in two successive yet correlated phases, each of which has engendered a specific perspective to serve the overall philosophical and political objective of the *Homo Sacer* project: that is, to examine the relationship between politics and life. Agamben writes that 'the issue was rather to call into question the commonplace and the very originary structure of politics, in order to try to bring to light the *arcanum imperii* that in some way constituted its foundation and that had remained at the same time fully exposed and tenaciously hidden in it'.<sup>116</sup> Concerning the first part, he elaborates on biopolitics and life from the perspective of sovereign power and economy. The crucial point he puts forward in this context is that the capture of life, and the resulting production of bare life in the exception by sovereign power, is the originary activity of politics (Chapter 1). As I argued, from this

<sup>116</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 263; *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xi–2; *Homo Sacer*, 6–8.

perspective, happiness is conceived as a product of sovereign power, as it consists in aligning life to political and economic determinations.

The second phase of Agamben's project reads biopolitics from the viewpoint of form-of-life and its corollary concepts, such as destitution, inoperativity, use and inappropriability. The central elements in this case are, first, the emancipation of life from the realm of sovereign power and economy and, second, the definition of an ethics that understands life beyond law and economy—as I argued in chapters 2 and 3. Seen from this angle, I conclude that happiness is not a *by-issue* in the general framework of Agamben's *Homo Sacer* project. On the contrary, the happy life is the hub of his account of biopolitics and ethics. What is at stake in his critical attacks on economy and sovereignty is life and ethics, understood as *ethos*, that is, a being-at-home with oneself.<sup>1117</sup> All the other themes and issues which Agamben discusses in his *Homo Sacer* project revolve around and point towards form-of-life or happy life. It follows that happiness is not merely the turning point of his coming politics; the happy life is simultaneously the *archè* and the *telos* of his critical account of economy and ethics as articulated in the *Homo Sacer* series.<sup>1118</sup> Thus, Agamben's *pars destruens* is directly and inseparably connected to his *pars construens*.<sup>1119</sup> He calls biopolitics (sovereign power and economy) into question for the sake of life—happy life. According to him, the happy life, as it is generally conceived, is nothing other than 'qualified life' (*bios*):<sup>1120</sup> a life imprisoned in the shackles of political and economic norms, a life that is managed by and subjected to the dynamics of the capitalistic model of economy. For Agamben, economy—understood specifically as the governance of life in general—is that through which life is included in politics and thereby managed. In contrast to this, he wants to conceive of the possibility of using and relating to life, to others and to the world around us in a manner other than what occurs now under the dispositions of economy and sovereign power.

In fact, Agamben wants to save life and set the happy life beyond the realm of economy and political jurisdictions. According to him, these jurisdictions stifle potentiality. Thus, this study differs from the increasingly critical analyses of Agamben's work in that I have drawn attention to the affirmative ethical and political motives upon which Agamben's entire *Homo Sacer* project is based. Furthermore, as I argued in Chapter 2, while ethics and politics are interwoven and overlap for Agamben, ethics and form-of-life are opposed to economy. Economy for him only subjugates life—

<sup>1117</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 27–28; *Language and Death*, 106. See also Chapter 2, sections 1 and 2.3.

<sup>1118</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 1–9 and 188; *The Use of Bodies*, 263–73.

<sup>1119</sup> Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, xiii.

<sup>1120</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1.

and its use (in the Agambenian sense of *use*)—to the dictates of the laws of the global market: operativity, productivity and the excessive accumulation and consumption of goods and services. On the contrary, as Agamben argues, the ethics of the coming politics liberates life and its use from economy. In doing this, ethics understands and describes the happy life as a 'sabbatical' life.<sup>1121</sup>

In other words, happiness is not tied to the fulfilment of some economic and political conventions or objectives. Form-of-life is being 'whatever being' and living whatever life, as Agamben repeatedly contends in *The Coming Community*.<sup>1122</sup> Happiness is becoming oneself; it is being-at-home with the self (*ethos*) outside all legal and economic restrictions. It is as though Agamben is saying that happiness lies within ourselves individually, that it is located neither somewhere outside our beings nor in any material things. If we want to be happy or experience happiness, we should return to ourselves, for this will ultimately enhance our quality of life. Our everyday life should be the *archè*, the starting point for our quest for happiness. This is the key to the transformation of thinking and acting that will tremendously impact our perception and relation to life and to the world.

I would like now to sketch the elements that have proved essential in presenting and interpreting Agamben's account of happiness in relation to economy and ethics, thereby summarizing the most important conclusions that have emerged from this study.

1. Agamben's conception of *happy life*—posited as that which accounts for the internal coherence and significance of his *Homo Sacer* project—cannot be adequately understood unless it is situated within the general context of his criticism of the metaphysical and (bio)political tradition of the West. From his perspective, this tradition constitutes the historical, conceptual and theoretical framework from which our modern and contemporary notion of happy life emerges. This is why I commenced this work by revisiting and examining Agamben's critical account of biopolitics in Chapter 1. If I turned mainly to *Homo Sacer*, *The Kingdom and the Glory* and *State of Exception* in this context, it was because I found resourceful material in these sources which Agamben uses to challenge the current constitution of politics, economy and life. For Agamben, biopolitics—considered from Antiquity to the present—is ontologically the production of bare life in the exception. The production of this bare life is an

<sup>1121</sup> Agamben understand the 'sabbatical' life as a life that is inoperative in the sense we have seen. See Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 246 and 250.

<sup>1122</sup> See, for instance, Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 1–2 and 67–68.

act of sovereign power resulting from the division of life into *bios* and *zōē*. Thus, for him, politics is essentially an act of violence over life. It consists in including life in the *polis* and, at the same time, excluding it from the city by capturing life in the state of exception.<sup>1123</sup> The state of exception is therefore the most fundamental *locus* in which sovereign power exposes life to the force of law.

2. The notion of economy plays a crucial role in Agamben's account of biopolitics and happiness. Understood as the management of life, *economy* points to the idea that, for Agamben, biopolitics is a double-structure phenomenon that articulates sovereignty and governance together in a complex relationship. What is at stake in this relationship is the inclusion and, in consequence of this very inclusion, the exclusion of life from the *polis*. (Bio)politics is thus understood as the activity of sovereign power over life through and in the exception. In this context, happy life is presented as a life that reproduces the model of life, which sovereign power dictates through the economy. Consequently, happiness and ethics correspond to the harmonization of life to sovereign power and, more importantly, to economy, given that the economy emerges as the dominant pole and form of political power in our epoch.
3. Agamben endeavours to conceive of an alternative to the biopolitical account of happiness. He advances a new conception of politics and life that is premised on a totally new conception of ethics. Based on a close examination of *The Coming Community*, *Means without End* and *Remnants of Auschwitz*, I argued that Agamben's ethical project is divorced from all the legal *dispositifs* of sovereign power and economy that seize life and capture it up into the mechanisms of biopolitics. Ethics is the domain of the constitution of the self as subject beyond any of the formalisations that define biopolitics. In this way, Agamben opposes ethics and economy. In so doing, he shifts ethics and politics to another site: a site of being-at-home with self. Ethics and the happy life are cast beyond and outside the boundaries of all sorts of social, economic and political regulations that seek to define life and give it a specific and unilateral form: *Bios*. The breaking of these biopolitical mechanisms is realised through *destitution*, a concept which Agamben understands via consideration of various themes, including the Pauline *hōs mē*, inoperativity, potentiality, use and, more concretely, form-of-life. The main result in this context is that ethics and form-of-life (happy life), for Agamben, comprise a sort of philosophical and political reaction against any presuppositional system that seeks to codify life and harmonize it with economy. Ethics, on the contrary, establishes the possibility of envisaging new forms of life, new ideas and endeavours to adapt to the ever-changing existential and factual conditions. Rather than just being an antidote to bare life, happy life and ethics

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<sup>1123</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 8.

in Agamben constitute an experience of the relation to the self and to life itself outside any jurisdiction. This is why, in *Means without Ends* and *The Use of Bodies*, Agamben constantly insists that form-of-life emphasizes potentiality as the main characteristic of life. This is to say that life does not have a specific qualification and determination to enact and fulfil.<sup>1124</sup> Through his account of ethics and form-of-life, Agamben offers us the possibility of finding a new use of life and the world at large in order to create a novel manner of being with which to relate to life and the world, including to humans.<sup>1125</sup>

4. As I argued in Chapter 3, at the centre of Agamben's account of ethics and form-of-life in *The Highest Poverty* and *The Use of Bodies* is the need to provide philosophical and political reasons to consider life in opposition to economy and legal norms. If humans must take up their vocations as beings who are fundamentally inoperative and capable of suspending the apparatuses of sovereignty and economy,<sup>1126</sup> then there is no need for them to look beyond themselves. By promoting new uses of life and the world, we are to find within ourselves the potential to deactivate the current economy and sovereignty. According to Agamben, this happens through the destitution of the conceptual and theoretical tradition that has dominated the formation of our thoughts about economy and happiness. In *The Highest Poverty*, Agamben premises this account of ethics and life opposed to economy on the Franciscan's *forma vitae* and understanding of use. In this context, he describes use as a process of the autoaffection of the self rather than a way of exploiting something for purposeful ends.
5. Agamben's ethico-ontological conception of form-of-life is potentially germane to the accounts of good life provided by many contemporary thinkers, including Badiou, Nussbaum and Pope Francis. The common factor among their various approaches is their reaction against the current model of economy that pulls life into its dynamics. Our comparison of Agamben's ethical theory with Badiou's, Nussbaum's and Pope Francis' has not only pointed up crucial similarities among them, but has also revealed the limit of Agamben's notion of the happy life. Though each author has developed his account of happiness from a different angle, they all seem to agree that a real happy life is opposed to economy. The happy life must not be viewed from a mainly economic perspective as something that can be controlled and regulated. On the contrary, real happiness consists in the experience of pure potentiality and of living whatever life. Nevertheless, Agamben, Badiou, Nussbaum and Pope Francis differ in the fact

<sup>1124</sup> De la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, 4–7.

<sup>1125</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 27–29; *The Use of Bodies*, 58–61.

<sup>1126</sup> De la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, 7.

that Agamben locates happy life outside economy and sovereign power without properly elaborating the concrete and practical ways through which happiness can be achieved. His account of destitution thus remains purely theoretical. In contrast, Badiou, Nussbaum and Pope Francis seem to prescribe concrete and specific ways to attain happy life. These include, for instance, revolution and taking relations with others into serious consideration.

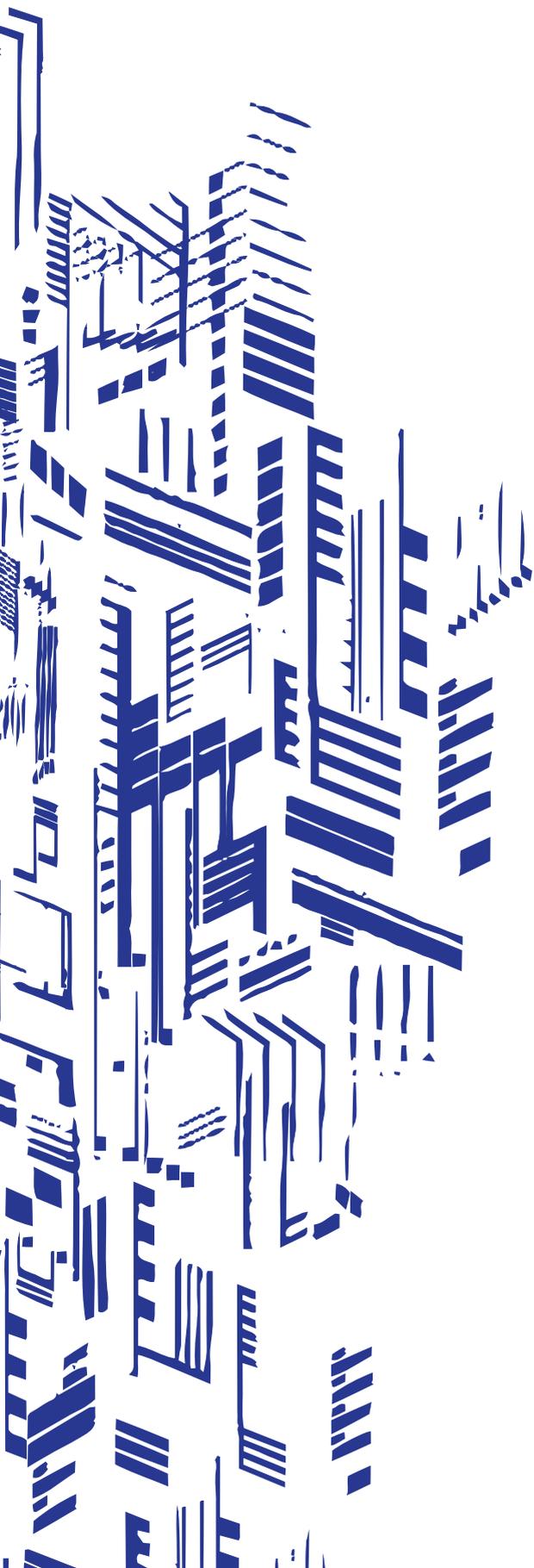
6. Finally, as Chapter 4 revealed, Agamben's theory is also relevant when it comes to addressing the current ecological crisis. It offers some important insights that may correct our conception of the world and how we relate to it. By defining happy life in opposition to economy, Agamben's ethico-ontological account of form-of-life challenges any conception of life that defines life predominantly from the perspective of productivity, as modern politics and economy do. Consequently, form-of-life liberates life and the world from the human will to power and domination. Life and the world are thus regarded as inappropriables. This is to say that, to save life and the world, ethics and politics and any approach to life should be considered beyond economy and sovereignty. The desire to live life as such should precede any attempt to dominate or make profit. In this sense, ethics is not to be understood as a code of conduct that prescribes how individuals should live, work and act in society in accord with all economic and political regulations.

While I agree with those who complain that Agamben's ethico-ontological notion of form-of-life fails to provide concrete lines for practical actions which can change the factual political and economic dispositions that dominate life in society, I submit that Agamben's account of form-of-life offers interesting insights which we can use to think critically about many problems that beset contemporary society. For this reason, we need to go beyond and outside the mechanisms of the politicization of life. It is this phenomenon that has made us to face, as Agamben stipulates, the current 'bloody mystification of a new planetary order'.<sup>1127</sup> We need, therefore, to investigate new possibilities of conceiving human life. This necessitates an ethics that escapes sovereign power and economy and stops the division of life into various forms. It is only from this perspective that life will *re-acquire* its 'impotent omnivalence of whatever being', that 'communicate[s] only in the empty space of the example, without being tied by any common property, by any identity'.<sup>1128</sup> For Agamben, this is what happiness—the new politico-ethical life—means and this is what should be the very *telos* to which every politics must be committed.

<sup>1127</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1 and 38.

<sup>1128</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 9–10.





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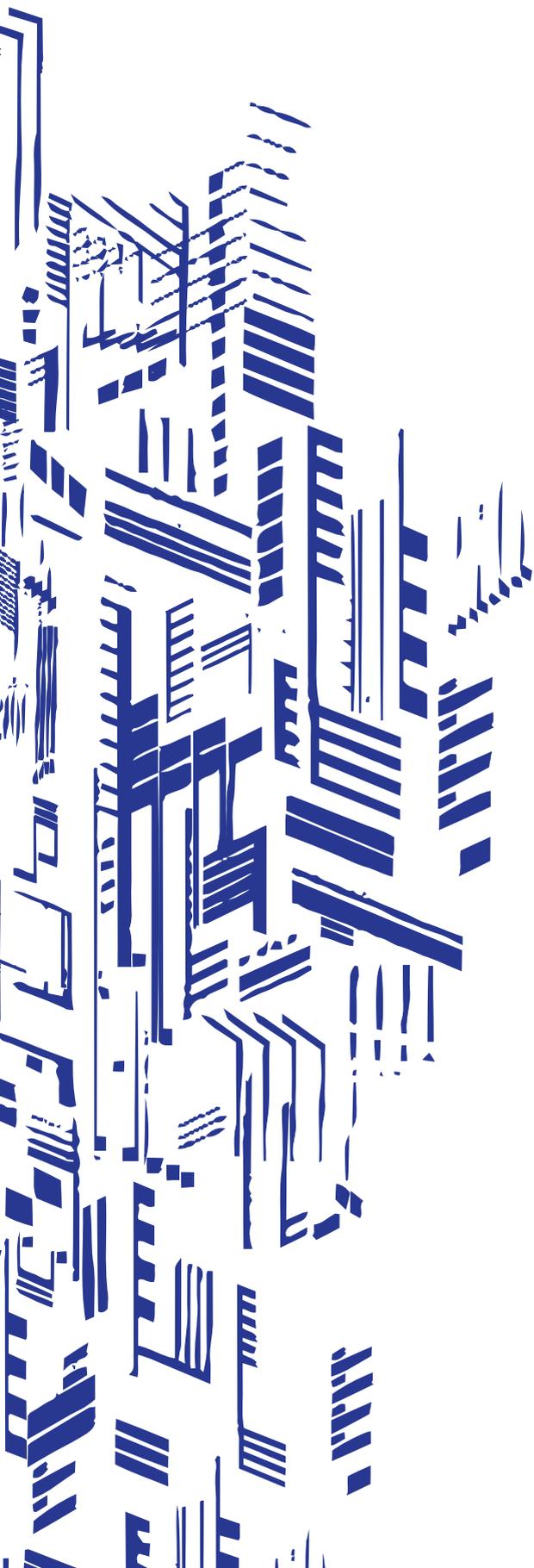
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## **APPENDICES**

Summary

Samenvatting

Acknowledgements

Curriculum Vitae

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## Summary

The aim of this study is to analyse the connection between happiness, ethics, and economy in Agamben's account of biopolitics. I argue that Agamben articulates two different notions of happiness. On the one hand, he criticizes a predominantly capitalistic conception of happiness, which is based on biopolitics and subordinates life to sovereign power and economy. On the other hand, he suggests an alternative idea of the happy life, which must be realised outside the framework of sovereignty and economy and enables individuals to become themselves. I conclude that happiness is of utmost importance when it comes to understanding why Agamben criticizes biopolitics and how he envisions new forms of political and ethical emancipation.

In the first chapter, I discuss Agamben's account of economy. Agamben argues that economy is a significant aspect and paradigm of biopolitics. In this context, I explain why he contends that biopolitics prevents an authentic experience of happiness. Moreover, I examine the connection between political theology and economic theology. According to Agamben, the biopolitical management of happiness subscribes to the logic of sovereign power and economy. Happiness therefore becomes nothing more than the fulfilment of political and economic goals.

In the second chapter, I analyse Agamben's account of ethics and his critique of the law. The aim of Agamben's ethics is to liberate life from the framework of sovereign power and economy. His conception of ethics prioritizes freedom and emphasizes the logic of inoperativity, which deactivates those categories that have defined biopolitics. According to Agamben, the happy life is a life that realises its potentiality of being as such. I also examine how Agamben conceptualizes the relationship between ethics and politics. He considers them to be two domains that are closely intertwined because they both aim at the formation of the community and the experience of the happy life.

In the third chapter, I analyse Agamben's notion of 'form-of-life' in relation to economy and ethics. I contend that 'form-of-life' overcomes the determinations of sovereign power and economy. Accordingly, 'form-of-life' designates the new ethical and political life that Agamben envisages as a solution to the problem of biopolitics. Moreover, the concept of form-of-life prompts a new form and understanding of the notion of 'use'. *Use* does not mean utilizing something for some specific practical and economic purposes. On the contrary, *use* is a process of free relation to life and to the world; a relation that does not emphasise power and productivity. 'Form-of-life' is, therefore, another concept Agamben employs to conceptualize the happy life.

In the fourth chapter, I evaluate Agamben's conception of happiness, economy, and ethics in relation to Badiou's notion of 'real happiness', Nussbaum's 'capabilities approach' and Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'*. I underline that the specificity of Agamben's theory lies in his distinctive biopolitical approach to happiness, ethics and economy. I also examine how and to what extent Agamben's account of happiness may help us to philosophically articulate the problem of the ecological crisis. I argue that Agamben's theory provides us with some interesting insights in this respect, which I elaborate further in a philosophical dialogue between Agamben and Pope Francis.

## Samenvatting

In deze studie onderzoek ik het verband tussen geluk, ethiek en economie in Agambens werken over biopolitiek. Ik beargumenteer dat Agamben twee verschillende opvattingen van geluk hanteert. Aan de ene kant bekritiseert hij een overwegend kapitalistische opvatting van geluk, die gebaseerd is op biopolitiek en die het leven ondergeschikt maakt aan soevereine macht en economie. Aan de andere kant suggereert hij een alternatief idee van het gelukkige leven, dat gerealiseerd moet worden buiten het kader van soevereine macht en economie, een leven dat individuen in staat stelt zichzelf te worden. Ik laat zien hoe 'geluk' een cruciale rol speelt in Agambens kritiek op biopolitiek én in de nieuwe vormen van politieke en ethische emancipatie die hij voorstelt.

In het eerste hoofdstuk bespreek ik Agambens visie op economie. Agamben stelt dat economie een belangrijk aspect en paradigma is van de biopolitiek. Dit verklaart mijns inziens waarom hij stelt dat biopolitiek een authentieke ervaring van geluk verhindert. Bovendien onderzoek ik het verband tussen politieke theologie en economische theologie. Volgens Agamben volgt de biopolitieke regulering van geluk de logica van de soevereine macht. Geluk wordt zodoende niets anders dan de vervulling van politieke en economische doelen.

In het tweede hoofdstuk analyseer ik Agambens uiteenzetting over ethiek en zijn kritiek op de wet. Het doel van Agambens ethiek is om het leven te bevrijden van de kaders van soevereine macht en economie. Zijn opvatting van ethiek geeft prioriteit aan vrijheid en benadrukt de logica van inoperativiteit, dat wil zeggen, dat ze de biopolitiek deactiveert. Volgens Agamben is het gelukkige leven een leven dat zijn potentieel om als zodanig te zijn, realiseert. Ik onderzoek ook hoe Agamben de relatie tussen ethiek en politiek conceptualiseert. Hij beschouwt ze als twee domeinen die nauw met elkaar verweven zijn in zoverre ze beiden gericht zijn op de vorming van de gemeenschap én de ervaring van het gelukkige leven.

In het derde hoofdstuk analyseer ik Agambens notie van 'levensvorm' in relatie tot economie en ethiek. Mijn stelling is dat 'levensvorm' de bepalingen van de soevereine macht en de economie overwint (of: Mijn stelling is dat 'levensvorm' zich onttrekt aan de bepalingen van de soevereine macht en de economie.) 'Levensvorm' duidt zodoende het nieuwe ethische en politieke leven aan dat Agamben voor ogen heeft als oplossing voor het probleem van de biopolitiek. Bovendien brengt het concept 'levensvorm' een nieuwe vorm en een nieuw begrip van het concept 'gebruik' met zich mee. *Gebruik* betekent niet iets gebruiken voor specifieke praktische en economische

doeleinden. Integendeel, *gebruik* is een proces van vrije relatie tot het leven en tot de wereld; een relatie die niet de nadruk legt op macht en productiviteit. ‘Levensvorm’ is om die reden een ander concept dat Agamben gebruikt om het gelukkige leven te conceptualiseren.

In het vierde hoofdstuk evalueer ik Agambens opvatting van geluk, economie en ethiek in relatie tot Badiou’s notie van ‘echt geluk’, Nussbaums ‘capabilities’ benadering en Paus Franciscus’ *Laudato Si’*. Ik beargumenteer dat wat Agambens theorie onderscheidt van de andere drie genoemde benaderingen, ligt in zijn biopolitieke benadering van geluk, ethiek en economie. Ik onderzoek ook hoe en in welke mate Agambens uiteenzetting van geluk ons kan helpen om het probleem van de ecologische crisis filosofisch te articuleren. Ik stel dat Agambens theorie ons in dit opzicht een aantal interessante inzichten verschaft, die ik nader uitwerk in een filosofische dialoog tussen Agamben en paus Franciscus.

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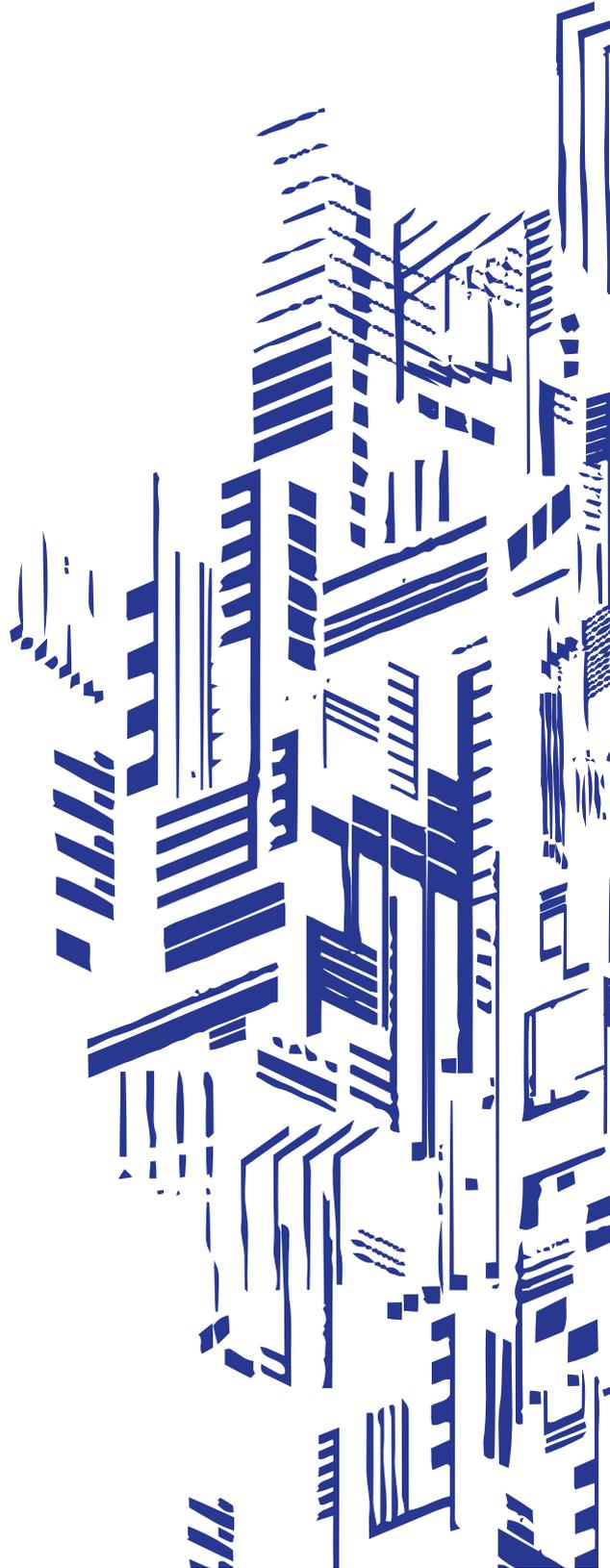
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## Curriculum Vitae

Alphée C.S. Mpassi obtained a master's degree in theology from Duquesne University (USA) in 2013. He completed both a master's degree and a research master's degree in philosophy at Radboud University in 2017 and 2019, respectively. His research master's thesis discussed the methodological significance of the notion of 'paradigm' in Giorgio Agamben's philosophy, especially in his *Homo Sacer* corpus. In June of 2019, Alphée was awarded a scholarship by the Dutch Province of the Holy Spirit Congregation to carry out a doctoral research project at Radboud University as an external PhD candidate. The project investigates the philosophical import and social relevance of the interplay between economy, ethics and happiness in Agamben's account of biopolitics. During his PhD study, Alphée Mpassi participated in several colloquia. His publications include:

- 'Education in the Spiritan Mission in Congo-Brazzaville: An Historical-critical Overview'. In *Spiritans Horizons*, no. 20 (2023): 119–30.
- *Introduction à la méthode herméneutique de Hans-Georg Gadamer : lecture suivie de Vérité et Méthode*, Paris : L'harmattan, 2019.
- 'Préjugés, autorité et tradition chez H.G. Gadamer'. In *Revue Phares*, n. 9 (2009) : 145–53.



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