ARTÍCULOS

Revista de **Filosofía**
ISSN: 0034-8244

https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/resf.68296

EDICIONES COMPLUTENSE

Immunity and Community in Esposito, Derrida and Agamben[1]

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Recibido: 11 de marzo de 2020 / Aceptado: 24 de marzo de 2021

Abstract. Roberto Esposito (1998; 2002; 2008) examines how current immunological apparatuses originally designed to protect communities end up undermining the very body they sought to protect. By "immunological apparatuses" he refers to a wide range of phenomena, ranging from technical devices such as security cameras, discourses promoting the suspicion of the other, or laws seeking a supposedly safe distance in regards to those deemed dangerous. This paper compares Esposito's view on the interplay between community and immunity with Giorgio Agamben's and Jacques Derrida's. For them, these two notions are not so central, but Agamben's inquiry into the state of exception, and Derrida's reflections on certain binomia, such as hospitality-hostility and justice-law, shed light on the same interplay. After pointing out their similarities, I argue s that the raison d'être of their ultimate and irreconcilable difference is that Agamben's approach is *antinomic*, while Derrida's is *aporetic* and Esposito's is rather *dialectical*.
Keywords: Agamben; autoimmunity; community; Derrida; Esposito; immunity; violence.

[es] Inmunidad y comunidad en Esposito, Derrida y Agamben

Resumen. Roberto Esposito (1998; 2002; 2008) explora cómo una serie de aparatos imunológicos actuales, originalmente diseñados para proteger a las comunidades, acaban menoscabando las mismas comunidades que intentaban proteger. Para él, dichos aparatos immunológicos incluyen una amplia gama de fenómenos: desde cámaras de videovigilancia a discursos y leyes que promoueven de personas supuestamente peligrosas. Este artículo compara la visión de Esposito de la interacción entre la comunidad y la inmunidad con la de Agamben y Derrida. Estas dos nociones no ocupan un lugar central en el pensamiento de Agamben y Derrida. Sin embargo, las reflexiones de Agamben sobre el estado de excepción, así como las reflexiones de Derrida sobre los binomios hospitalidad-hostilidad y justicia-ley, arrojan luz a esta interacción. Después de señalar sus similitudes, sostenemos que, en última instancia, sus propuestas difieren porque el enfoque de Agamben es *antinómico*, mientras que el de Derrida es *aporético* y el de Esposito *dialéctico*.
Palabras clave: Agamben; autoinmunidad; comunidad; Derrida; Esposito; inmunidad; violencia.

How to cite: Rosàs Tosas, M. (2022): "Immunity and Community in Esposito, Derrida and Agamben" , en *Revista de Filosofía* 48 (1), 93-112.

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1 Realizado dentro del marco del proyecto "Pensamiento contemporáneo posfundacional: hacia una crítica de la violencia del fundamento (PID2020-117069GB-100)", con Laura Llevadot como investigadora principal.

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1. Introduction

Living in common comes at the expense of a considerable degree of violence. Or so reads a major tradition within Western thought –either some inflict violence on others, or violence is repressed and discouraged through violence. One way or another, communities are always haunted by violence.[3] In spite of this unavoidable violence, the tradition goes, living in a community has so many advantages that it is worth suffering the costs.

Often, democracy has been presented as a regime that has the merit of protecting individuals from this potential violence that can be inflicted both by other individuals and by sovereigns and its repressive apparatuses. Or, at least, democracy has been touted as the regime that best contains a significant portion of this violence. However, the idea that democracy contains and prevents violence has been the object of serious critique: it is contradicted not only in practice, on a daily basis, but also in the theory, and by political theorists writing from very different, sometimes even irreconcilable, angles. On one extreme of the spectrum, the Nazi jurist and political theorist Carl Schmitt (1922/1985) famously pointed out the unavoidable violence at work in democracy when he revealed the logic of the "state of exception" included in the constitution of Western democracies, that is, the temporary suspension of some rights and laws for the preservation of the legal order. On the other extreme, several left-wing philosophers claim that a less violent form of life in common is possible and needed.

The present paper focuses on three of these philosophers. Our aim is to explore comparatively the ways in which Esposito, Agamben and Derrida describe the ties between violence and community, its implications and the possibilities to interrupt the ongoing work of violence and open up a peaceful democracy. None of them regards Western democracy, in its present form, as the solution to violence. On the contrary, they precisely identify and study how some mechanisms originally designed to protect from violence –a sort of immunological apparatus– end up, first, bringing about other forms of violence and, second, modeling community in certain ways that the three of them deem negative.

This paper aims to describe the view that each writer has on the interplay between community and the immunological devices designed to protect it, and to compare them so that their proposals shed light on each other's. It also identifies their subtle but significant differences, and examines the far-reaching implications of said differences. To put it briefly: this paper is an attempt to demonstrate that their differences lie in the fact that Agamben's thought is *antinomic*, while Esposito's is rather *dialectic*, and Derrida's is *aporetic*.

Before moving on, a terminological clarification is needed: the terms community and immunity are not central to the works of the three thinkers. In the case of Esposito, they are. However, in the case of Agamben and Derrida, the reflections on community and immunity, in my view equally important to those by Esposito, appear under other labels, which will be pointed out throughout the paper. The terminological clarification is that they all view "community" –under whatever

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[3] This knot between community and violence has been extensively studied by a number of philosophers, anthropologists and sociologists. See the already classical texts by Douglas (1966) and Girard (1972/1987), as well as more recent developments, such as Keane (2004), Ross (2005), and Gaon (2009).

label it appears in their work– as the experience of a shared habitat by a number of individuals.[4] And that, regardless of the label under which they refer to "immunity", our use of the term will include both its *juridical meaning* and the *metaphorical use of its biological meaning*. In other words, by "immunity" we will refer either to the condition of not being subject to certain obligations or authorities, that is, of being exempt from certain duties, or to the condition of being protected against external dangers[5], of being invulnerable to them.

As we shall see, the two meanings of immunity are often interrelated, but not always and not in the same ways. Both terms rest on the presupposition that there is a clear-cut distinction between the proper and the alien, between the I and the other. And both describe a situation of protection from what is deemed alien. But the second definition –the biological metaphor– is more easily and more often linked with violence, insofar as disease is understood as an attack and immunity as the resistance against that attack. In the following pages we shall examine the different ways these two meanings are interwoven in the works of Esposito, Derrida and Agamben.

2. Esposito's community –what constitutes us and what we lack

Put very succinctly: Esposito (2008/2013) praises communities and argues that, nowadays, immunological devices initially designed to protect communities have intensified so much that they no longer protect them, but, on the contrary, undermine them. The originality of his thought is that, unlike most criticism against the logic of immunitas, he considers that this logic does not need to be *toppled*, but might be *traversed*. That is, he maintains that the logic of immunitas, unfortunately, *often* leads to scenarios that he deems negative –such as Nazism–, but it might also be traversed and overcome. Although Esposito does not put it in Hegelian terms, it could be said that *he proposes to perform a dialectical negation in order to attain a dialectical synthesis* –the negative moment needs to be traversed and some aspect of it is preserved in the dialectical synthesis. But, as we shall see, it is a matter of a partial or precarious synthesis.

Esposito developed his view on the phenomenon of community in *Communitas* (1998/2010) and addressed the logic of immunity in *Immunitas* (2002).[6] A few years later, he examined the interplay between the two in *Terms of the Political: Community, Immunity, Biopolitics* (2008/2013).

Esposito labels as "community" the most ideal state that can be reached. For him, the importance of community lies in the fact that it constitutes the condition of our existence. In his own words:

> We need community because it is the very locus or, better, the transcendental condition of our existence, given that we have always existed in common. The law of community is thus understood as the exigency according to which we feel obligated not to lose this originary condition –or, worse, not to turn it into its opposite (Esposito 2008/2013, p. 14).

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4 In the age of Internet, it is important to underline that this habitat does not need to be physical –it suffices to think of communities of people who live thousands of kilometers apart and who will never meet in person.

5 In the biological metaphor, the perceived "dangers" are diseases.

6 In 2004 appeared *Bios*, closing the trilogy.

Put this way, it might seem that he postulates that community is our *originary* form of life, which would place him far away from those views on humankind based on the idea that community is a state to come that can be reached or conquered. Esposito's view is not that simple, though. He certainly believes that community is our originary condition, but *not in chronological terms*. According to him, community has never fully existed –and, actually, will never fully exist. For him, community is "neither an origin nor a *telos,* but the condition, both singular and plural, of our complete existence" (Esposito 2008/2013, p. 26).

Esposito's notion of community is haunted by the following paradox: community defines us, and we need it, since it constitutes our *res* (2008/2013, p. 15); but, at the same time, community is unrealizable. He maintains, then, "not only that community has never been realized but that it is unrealizable" (p. 15). In short, community is *necessary*, but also *impossible*, and, therefore, can only be experienced as a flaw or a lack. Much of Esposito's work is an attempt to describe how to realize this unrealizable community or, which is the same, how to "constitute something that already constitutes us" (p. 15), but that can never be experienced fully.

What, to his mind, binds communities together, is the debt that we all have towards others. As he had advanced in *Communitas* (1998/2010) and would soon after develop in *Terms of the Political* (2008/2013): "*communitas* is the totality of persons united not by a 'property' but precisely by an obligation or a debt" (1998/2010, p. 6). In Esposito, then, there is a critique of Hobbesian individualism and of a metaphysics that hinges on an individual "enclosed in his own absoluteness" (2008/2013, p. 17). And he defends, instead, that we are *exposed* to each other. We have the capacity, he adds, to overcome individual interest and individual differences, open up to others and respond to them. Yet, at the same time, this capacity is limited, since individual interest and differences also constitute our nature. Hence the reason why community is unrealizable (p. 20).

Community is, then, always precarious, always partial, "so much that we must conclude that what we have in common is precisely this lack of community" (p. 15). This unavoidable and perpetual precariousness of any community is certainly inherent to any community. However, Esposito writes, some of the factors that undermine community should be confronted because they put community in danger. He mainly refers to the fear of that (and those) which are different. Esposito celebrates differences. For him, "[d]iversity, alterity, hybridization are not necessarily limits or dangers against which one must be on guard in the name of self-centered pureness of the individual and the species (…); they can actually be considered a richness and an opportunity" (p. 98). He holds that, unfortunately, *fear of* the different and of the other tends to turn into the *protection from* the different and, ultimately, its *exclusion*, when possible. That is, being *exposed* to each other might generate so much uncertainty that, nowadays, many communities tend more and more to design and implement devices of protection in the form of laws and control apparatuses that institute and guarantee enough distance between individuals.

Consequently, while, at first, it might seem that immunitas tries to preserve communitas, Esposito maintains that an intensification of immunitas ends up deactivating communitas (p. 6, 127). The apparatuses mentioned, which work as a sort of immune system, become so sophisticated, strong and omnipresent that they

end up attacking what they wanted to protect.[7] In other words, *immunitas* leads to auto-immunity and this, in turn, to the destruction of community. What, then, is at stake is *immunity* rather than *community*.

For Esposito, "Hobbes and Locke are the first theoreticians of this general process of immunization that encompasses all modern political categories" (p. 128). These theorists, like all immunitary devices, ultimately aspire at eradicating violence, but they never succeed (p. 129). At this point, Esposito explicitly aligns his thinking with Benjamin's critique of the law: "law is nothing other than violence against violence for the ultimate control of violence" (p. 129).

Esposito goes on by comparing the logic of both phenomena: while *communitas* prescribes *caring* about the other, *immunitas* prescribes *defending* the proper and *protecting* from the other, who is regarded as alien and dangerous. Immunity has to do with separation and exclusion, while community has to do with relation and inclusion. Immunity brings us back within ourselves, encloses us, by making individuals exempt from the obligation of taking care of the other. By contrast, community opens us up to our outside in a movement of ecstasy (p. 41; p. 44).

Despite their diverging logic, *communitas* and *immunitas* are not mutually exclusive, but rather they form a continuum, at least for the two following reasons. First, because, as just explained, community, in its attempt to protect itself, can turn against itself. And, second, due to a common etymological origin: *munus*. Esposito reminds the reader that *munus* refers to "task", "duty", or "law. Therefore, members of a community are those that:

> are not bound by just any relationship, but precisely by a *munus* –a 'task,', 'duty,' or 'law.' (…). [T]hey are bound by an 'obligation.' Members of a community are such if and because they are bound by a common law (p. 14).

The content of the common law varies across communities. That is, what makes community a community does not depend on the type or *content* of the law, but on the *fact* that common life is inspired or regulated by the *exigency* or the *imperative* of a common law. This is why community "prescribes nothing else but the exigency of community itself" (p. 14).

Esposito underlines that *munus* might also mean "gift", and he emphasizes that this second meaning is close to the first, even if it might not be apparent at first. It is a matter of a very particular gift, though: "a gift that is to be given rather than received. Therefore, even in this second case, they are bound by an 'obligation.'" (p. 14). Common law, then, prescribes to give, and this gift adopts the form of caring for each other. In *Communitas*, he had put it in the following way: "The subjects of a community are united by an 'obligation' in the sense that we say, 'I owe *you* something,' but not, 'you owe *me* something'" (1998/2010: p. 6). This is why Esposito concludes that community has to do with *care* rather than with *interest* (2008/2013, p. 25).

The *immunis*, in turn, is the person who escapes from this obligation, that is, "he or she who is exempt or exonerated" (p. 39) from the duty and the gift to give. In the

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[7] He had advanced this idea in *Immunitas*, concluding that "[l]aw constitutes community through its destitution. It does so, by extreme paradox, exactly insofar as it seeks to strengthen its identity, to ensure its mastery over its own identity" (2002/2011, p. 22).

aforementioned words, it is the individual that is bound to others by laws that *protect* him from others rather than by laws that prescribe *caring* for the other.

Contrary to most expectations, Esposito's proposal is not to liberate ourselves from the need for protection, but to radicalize it. Immunization, he maintains, might lead to a fertile path: it might protect us from too much immunization. In other words, Esposito does not claim the need to stop the logic of *immunitas*, but to intensify a certain aspect of it: the logic of *immunitas* has to be pursued further in order to protect from the very logic of *immunitas*. In his words:

> What if we tried to rethink community beginning by completing the process of immunization? After all, a world without an outside –that is, a world completely immunized– is by definition without an inside. At its most successful, immunization may also be propelled to immunize itself from itself in order to reopen the breach, or the time, of community (p. 46).

Lewis (2015) has lucidly grasped why, in Esposito's work, auto-immunity might have a positive outcome. As Lewis sees it, auto-immunity refers to the way "immunity can turn against itself, undermining the organism's immune defense *for better or worse* (our emphasis)" (p. 214). That is, autoimmunity can be understood "either as a militaristic defense against the foreign, or as an hospitable relation to the other" (p. 222). In the first case, autoimmunity is deemed negative. By contrast, the second way of understanding autoimmunity might lead to a fertile outcome, since it is this second type that constitutes "the origin of a breach in the supposedly impermeable boundaries of the individual which opens that individual self to its 'other,' rendering the immune individual inherently *communal*, which is to say *political* in its very organismic life" (p. 214).

This potential positive outcome of immunity has to do with the fact that Esposito advocates for a subject exposed to others, not locked within itself or self-sufficient, and, in Esposito's and Lewis' view, this openness is only possible if this second type of autoimmunity is at work. When autoimmunity is not at work, identity is oppositional –the self is what the other is not– and the immune system is what guarantees the boundary between the self and the other and, therefore, preserves this oppositional identity. Against this background, Esposito proposes a non-oppositional identity: for him, there is no self without an incorporation of a certain doses of the other; there is only self within a community. And this is only possible when immunitas turns into auto-immunitas and dismantles the self-sufficient self. Only then, in Lewis' words, there is the "possibility of a genuine intertwining of self and other" (p. 224).

In Esposito's work, it is certainly unclear how to perform the transition to this stage: how is this sort of dialectical synthesis to be achieved, even with only moderate success –since communitas is always to come, after all? Esposito's analysis is particularly lucid in its description of the negative moment, but the moment of contradiction in which immunitas turns into communitas remains highly enigmatic.

3. Agamben's community in the autoaffection of language

Agamben is precisely interested in a similar moment of contradiction, but with subtle differences: a moment in which community is simultaneously preserved

and threatened by mechanisms that Esposito would classify within the logic of immunitas. I am referring to the state of exception, which Agamben addresses in several works, but in particular detail in *Homo Sacer* (1995/1998), *The Time that Remains* (2000/2005), and *State of Exception* (2003/2005).

In extreme circumstances, Western constitutions allow for the declaration of the state of exception: the temporary suspension of certain laws in order to preserve law and the order in force. It is a matter of a territory of indiscernibility between the inside and the outside of the law (Agamben 1995/1998, p. 16). Schmitt (1922/1985) provided a deep analysis of this phenomenon, and Agamben's contribution to contemporary political thought could be summarized as follows: the state of exception is no longer an exceptional state, but, according to him, the West lives in a permanent state of exception in which, as such, the inside and the outside of the law can often not be distinguished. Exceptionality has become the rule, Agamben claims –echoing Benjamin's eighth thesis on the philosophy of history–, in such a way that the state of exception, a device seemingly designed to protect individuals, ends up making them more vulnerable, because it deprives individuals of rights and harms them through certain laws, all with the alibi of the protection of the order in force. Agamben deems this situation extremely dangerous and goes so far as to claim that this permanent exception "is leading the West toward global civil war" (Agamben, 2000/2005, p. 87). Living in common in the West nowadays, therefore, seems to be possible only at the expense of an enormous degree of violence.

But, to Agamben's eyes, not all life in common is necessarily violent. Agamben uses the term "community" to refer to two different entities –violent communities and communities without violence. Or, put differently, he criticizes one type of communities –the ones inextricably interwoven with violence– and he praises another type of communities, in which violence is absent. But he refers to both of them with the same label. In *Homo Sacer I* (1995/1998) he examines the former; in *The Coming Community* (1990/1993), "The Idea of Language" (1999a) and "Language and History" (1999b) he describes the latter.

The *homo sacer* is a figure in Roman law that applies to those who have been judged for a crime and who, from that moment on, can be killed by any individual from the community without this act of violence being considered murder. The following nuance is of utmost importance: he can be *killed*, but not *sacrificed* (in a ritual). This is so because the *homo sacer* is considered mere life, bare life, and, as such, lacks the legal protections on his life that would apply to other members. Agamben points out that one of the particularities of this figure is that it is placed outside of the law by the very law. That is, the law excludes the *homo sacer* from its protection, just as it happens within the state of exception (Agamben 2003/2005).

For Agamben, the figure of the *homo sacer* preserves the memory of the primary exclusion thanks to which the political dimension was constituted. All constitution of a political order, he explains, requires the exclusion of other potential orders. The *homo sacer* bears the mark of this primary exclusion and actualizes it. The community rests upon this sort of sacred crime. Community constitutes itself by excluding him. The *homo sacer*, then, is excluded by the law and, simultaneously, works as the foundation of the law.

Agamben holds that the same mechanism informs the logic of other figures, such as the Muselmann –the Jew in the concentration camp, deprived of all identity and attribute, who, by law, has been excluded from the protection that the law grants

and who, like the *homo sacer*, is not an unnecessary figure of the legal order, but an extremely necessary figure.

Agamben's thesis is that these figures are not anomalies of the past, but the very paradigm of the Western political space (1995/1998, pp. 72-73). As aforementioned, we live in a *permanent* state of exception in which, as within any state of exception, several laws and rights need to be suspended for the preservation of the law and the order in force. But the particularity of the present moment, for Agamben, is that now it is ultimately impossible to distinguish between the inside and the outside of the law.

Within such a situation, the individual feels trapped and repressed by an all-encompassing law that is hard to identify with precision. Agamben described this phenomenon as a force-of-~~law~~: the law maintains its force but is not applied. Its potentiality remains, but not its actuality. In other words, within the state of exception, the formal essence of the law is separated from its applicability. The first remains, while the latter is suppressed.[8] It is a matter of a mere intentionality without content, of an impulse that is not exhausted in any particular legal form.

Agamben deems this situation oppressive and catastrophic. Within the communities articulated by this logic, violence is always at work –both at the foundational moment and on a daily basis. Although he does not put in these terms, turning to Esposito's terms it could be stated that this type of communities is informed by the *logic of immunity* –of exclusion and violence as means of protection.

Agamben dreams of another type of community –a community in which the force of law will have been deactivated and relations will no longer be regulated by laws.[9] In *The Coming Community* (1990/1993), Agamben explains that the current and most common form of belonging serves to affirm identity. The State, the representative of this order, needs to establish distinctions between forms of life, and to regulate each of them with laws. By contrast, the community he proposes will not be based on any type of division or identity, but on a perpetual opening and a radical impropriety. [10] The force of law will have been interrupted.

For most readers, it is probably hard to imagine how said community would work. Elsewhere, Agamben provides further clues: *community is realized in the autoaffection of language*. Agamben explains that we see the world *through* language, but not language *itself*, since language is always presupposed (1999a, p. 40). And he proposes to overcome this situation: language must *touch itself*. For him, community only realizes itself in this autoaffection of language.[11] In other words, what gathers together a community is a certain view of language; a community will only escape the aforementioned oppression when it will no longer presuppose said view.

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[8] Agamben underlines that this logic appears for the first time in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and that is also the logic to which Scholem (1989) refers as the *Geltung ohne Bedeutung* [validity without significance] in a letter to Benjamin dated 20 September 1934 to refer to the status of the law in Kafka's *The Trial*.

[9] Agamben develops how to interrupt the force of law in his analysis of Kafka's "Before the Law" (1995/1998, p. 37).

[10] Edkins, who examines the political implications of this sort of community, argues that the State cannot tolerate this, since it would imply the immediate dissolution of its power. In his words: "sovereign power is happy to negotiate the boundaries of the distinctions that it makes; what it could not tolerate would be the refusal to make any distinctions of that sort" (2007, p. 76).

[11] This notion of language, that has been described as "masturbatory," is clearly indebted to Benjamin's critique of language as an instrument and his defense of a language that does communicate its own communicability (1916/2002, p. 65 and following).

Thurschwell (2005) examines Agamben's idea according to which language can touch itself. For Thurschwell, this idea is closely connected to a certain way of understanding what the task of philosophy should be. For Agamben, traditional metaphysics values *absence*, that is, the impossibility of the advent to presence of the conditions of possibility of concepts. Thurschwell warns that, for Agamben, the task of philosophy should rather consist in leading language to its *immediacy* in such a way that it would no longer be *presupposed*, but *exposed* (p. 77). The conditions of possibility of language would emerge. With this thesis, Agamben would be opposing Wittgenstein's idea according to which what is expressed *within* language cannot be expressed *through* language.

While Agamben's diagnostic might be considered insightful, Agamben's proposal has been the object of bitter critiques because of his failure to provide a clear account for the transition to a stage without violence (Bielik-Robson 2010), that is, from the first type of community to the second type, as well as for the impossibility of language touching itself (Johnson 2007, p. 285).

4. The aporetic interplay between hostility and hospitality in Derrida

The notions of community and of immunity are not central to Derrida's work, but several of the reflections by Derrida undoubtedly constitute important theses on the way they are interwoven. As we shall see, Derrida implicitly aligns with Esposito and Agamben in many aspects, but, unlike them, he does not envisage a potential happy outcome.

A possible starting point to address the way Derrida perceives the knot between immunity and community is the notion of *autoimmunity*, which does play a relatively important role in his work.[12] Derrida deals with this notion in "Faith and Knowledge" (1996b/2002), in "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides" (2001), and in *Rogues* (2003a/2005). According to him, *democracy is immune to itself or, what is the same, autoimmune.* He takes the term autoimmunity from the biological domain: autoimmunity implies "protecting itself against its self-protection by destroying its own immune system" (1996b/2002, p. 80). The reason why he believes democracy is autoimmune is that there is a certain moment in which democracy requires at least one non-democratic decision. In *Rogues*, Derrida exemplifies this idea with some elections in Algeria: in order to safeguard democracy, some elections were canceled. Democracy was protected at the expense of vulnerating the very norms of democracy; democracy *attacked* itself.[13] To his mind, a similar autoimmunitary logic informed the terrorist attacks on 9/11.[14]

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[12] In fact, some authors consider that autoimmunity is a central notion of Derrida's work, arguing it is crucial for his understanding of politics (Vardoulakis 2018, p. 30).

[13] He had advanced this idea in his reading of the attacks of September 11th published in "Autoimmunity" (2001).

[14] At this point, it is worth mentioning that, according to Vardoulakis, in Derrida's work "there is not one, but multiple autoimmunitary processes described", a distinction that "is not highlighted by Derrida" himself (2018, pp. 31-32). According to Vardoulakis, on the one hand, there is a suicidal autoimmunity, which underlies Algeria's elections and 9/11, and, on the other, there "is autoimmunity as self-critique and as the perfectibility of democracy, which presents a risk since it inscribes violence within democracy, but it also presents its chance and its universalizable aspect" (p. 44). In spite of the lucidity of this point, we consider that holding this distinction proves problematic because it would imply distinguishing a bad autoimmunity from a good autoimmunity, a distinction that is ultimately impossible to sustain from a Derrida's perspective. Furthermore, the two types

If one reads together *Rogues* with other texts by Derrida, it becomes clear that, for Derrida, an autoimmunitary logic is not only at work within democracy, but within any type of political order or community. In "Declarations of Independence" (1986) and "Force of Law" (1989-1990), for example, Derrida holds that the instauration of any new order is always a sort of coup d'état that, as such, establishes a number of norms and laws that will produce, après coup, the justification of this new order (1989-1990, pp. 991-993). That is, the new order sustains itself. Recurring to the term auto-immunity –which does not appear in these two texts–, it could be posed as follows: the foundations of any community and of any regulation are immune to themselves, that is, do not apply to themselves. They found and justify a certain order, but the foundation of this order, the conditions of possibility of this order, are unjustified –or, at least, not justified by the norms and rules that the order in question inaugurates and prescribes.

But there is still more to that. This autoimmunitary logic is not only proper to any political order, but to every concept and reasoning. Every concept, as every order, as every reasoning, is damaged by itself; none escape unscathed. Completeness is a fantasy; totality is always fissured from within. This is why Derrida holds that even the most painstaking attempts to preserve the seeming purity of certain concepts or practices are condemned to failure. This is the case, for instance, of religious fundamentalism (1996b/2002, p. 89).

When it comes to the notion of community, it must be said that Derrida never thematized it extensively. It might very well be because, from a Derridean perspective, the notion of community, if we understand it as a group of people bound by mutual obligations and by significant shared characteristics, is highly problematic. At least for the following reason: because in order for a community to exist, there must be the possibility of *belonging* to it. And Derrida sees it as an impossible practice not only because he considers that the singular is irreducible to the general, [15] but also because, prolonging a motto of the Jewish tradition, he goes so far as to claim that we are always alienated from what we supposedly are and, therefore, always in exile.[16]

In spite of this difficulty, many of Derrida's reflections on the relation to the other can shed light on how a Derridean community would look. What we find across Derrida's vast work is that no community escapes a strong bond to violence, that is, to hostility and its defensive strategies proper to the logic of what Esposito labels the logic of immunity. It can be said, then, that, *for Derrida, the immunological logic is always inscribed, as a principle of ruin, within any community*.

This interdependency between community and immunity appears over and over again in several of Derrida's works, albeit under different labels. In my view, one of them is the binomia hospitality-hostility: just as in the case of the binomia community-immunity, hospitality and hostility are only apparently mutually exclusive. In reality, the first can only exist as long as the latter is at work, yet the latter undermines the first. Let's see this in deeper detail. Derrida extends Lévinas'

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of autoimmunity proposed by Vardoulakis participate of a common logic of autoimmunity, which, as just explained, consists of "protecting itself against its self-protection by destroying its own immune system" (1996, p. 80). This is why, in what follows, this distinction will not be made.

15 Hence his sympathy for queer theory (Cixous & Derrida 2004, pp. 75-76).

16 Just to mention some occasions in which these ideas appear in Derrida's work: "There is no possible habitat without the difference of this exile and this nostalgia" or "essential alienation in language –which is always of the other– and, by the same token, in all culture" (1996a/2002, p. 58).

reflections on ethics, which revolve around a certain understanding of hospitality: the need to respond to the suffering of the other by hosting him in his specificity is more important and prior to any theoretical deliberation about what one should do. Within hospitality, it is a matter of a visitation without an offer (Derrida 1997b). In Derrida, as in Lévinas, hospitality is understood as a gift [*a don*], and, in this sense, it bears a clear resemblance to Esposito's community, in which individuals are bound by the obligation of caring for others.

The challenge of Derridean hospitality is that it consists of welcoming the other, who arrives as an "absolute surprise" (2002b, 362; p. 381), in his or her irreducible singularity. His or her otherness needs to be respected, not colonized. And, for this very reason, hospitality can never be complete, since in trying to host the other entirely we would be assimilating the other to ourselves and reducing his or her singularity –by instance, by expecting him or her to speak our language (1997a, p. 21). In other words, there is only hospitality when the other arrives unexpectedly, but, precisely because of this lack of preparation to host him or her, he or she is host him precariously, not fully. That is, in order to be "successful", hospitality can only be "partial". There is only hospitality if the guest remains a foreigner (1997a, p. 67), but, then, it is a matter of a precarious hospitality. A certain degree of hostility always remains. In short: for Derrida, hospitality is an impossible practice. Its conditions of possibility coincide with its conditions of impossibility (2002b, p. 364). This is why he refers to it as "hostipitality".

The same logic seems to inform the interplay of another binomia that is central to Derrida's thought: justice and law. He extends a tradition of Jewish contemporary philosophy, in particular of Buber, Benjamin and Lévinas, who understand the law as a repressive barrier that separates us from others and harms us all, and justice as an ideal scenario of communion[17] once this separation has been overcome. This is why, for Derrida, justice can never be the mere application of laws (1989-1990, p. 961), but requires deciding "without rule and without guarantee on the edge of the abyss, above the abyss" (2002a, p. 218). In my view, the logic that informs the law could otherwise be called the logic of immunity, while the logic that informs justice could equally be labelled the logic of community.

Derrida's singularity lies in the fact that, unlike Buber, Benjamin and Lévinas, he does not believe in the possibility of truly overcoming the law, since, ultimately, law and justice cannot be clearly distinguished: law tries to incarnate justice since, in order to gain respect, law presents itself as justice, that is, as the ultimate self-evident truth, without genesis (1985, p. 109; p. 112). Justice, in turn, tends to acquire certain forms in order to be explainable. But then it is no longer justice, but rather law. In Derrida's words: law and justice fight to usurp each other's place (1989-1990). For Derrida, justice is always to come, it remains ungraspable.

In short, the way Derrida conceives the interplay between hospitality and hostility, and between justice and law, allow us to conclude that, for him, the logic of immunity tends to present itself as a strategy to make community possible, but in doing so also undermines it. Therefore, community remains a dream always to come, barred by the aporia that its conditions of possibility are, simultaneously, its conditions of impossibility.

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17 With nuances, in the case of Lévinas, since the alterity of the other needs always to be respected, not conquered.

This type of aporetic logic informs many of Derrida's concepts and reflections: for Derrida, the very arguments and elements that build a concept serve also to undermine it. This is precisely what autoimmunity is about, Vardoulakis (2018) holds when examining Derrida's though: autoimmunity "signifies the formalization of the inability of a source to define itself" (2019, p. 38). This "auto-immunitary aporia" (2003b, p. 42) boils down to Derrida's idea according to which the origin, the arché, or the beginning are conceptually impossible. The same idea can be found across Derrida's vast work starting in the 1950s, when he spoke about the "originary complication" (1990, p. 40), to his views on the 60s and 70s according to which signifiers refer back to other signifiers and there is never a first or last signified which releases their tension (Grammatologie, chapter 2)[18]. The same "auto-immunitary aporia" can also be found in his later works: for example, in his statements on the fact that all sentences begin with an implicit "Etcetera" (2005, pp. 7-9; p. 31; p. 55) and we have to "quote before beginning" (1995, p. 19). That is, the beginning needs always to have already begun. And, as a result, there is never a closure to the system –neither at the beginning nor at the end.[19] This is why Derrida writes against rationality understood, as in Kant, as an "architectonic organization" that is unifying (2003b, p. 12).[20]

What is, then, Derrida's proposal? As explained above, community and immunity do not exclude each other, but are interwoven in such a way that the first can only exist if the latter also does, and the latter, by its nature, undermines the first. Again, it is important to highlight that Derrida does not put it in these terms –community and immunity–, but this is the conclusion that can be drawn from many of his reflections.

His view is not optimistic: the knot cannot be undone; there is no way to get rid of hostility once and for all. But it is not pessimistic, either. His works on ethics and politics[21] are rather a sort of reminder that hostility is inscribed as a principle of ruin in any attempt to build a community, whether we like it or not.

But there is more to that. In Derrida's view, the impossibility of reaching a perfect justice needs to be celebrated, since it prevents the existence of a monolithic structure, an oppressive machine that would dictate at all moments what to do, and that would eliminate all voices of dissent and all traces of otherness. For Derrida, the distance that separates the current state of affairs from justice protects us all. Justice must remain always other.

5. Derrida, Agamben and Esposito in dialogue

Several similarities and differences between Agamben's, Esposito's and Derrida's views on community and immunity have already become apparent throughout the

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[18] This is why, in spite of the similarities between Derrida's proposal and negative theology, they differ in an important point: while negative theology seeks to overcome the name (1993b, p. 80)–that is, the signifier-, Derrida considers there is nothing beyond it; that there is no transcendental signified (1967).

[19] Meaning, Derrida writes, cannot be encapsulated in a closed book, but is always and unavoidably disseminated (1972, pp. 53-59).

[20] At a certain occasion, Derrida goes so far as to maintain that reason is informed by a sort of auto-immunitary logic. In his digression against Kantian architectonic rationality and à propos Husserl's views, he writes: "It is reason that throws reason into crisis, in an autonomous and quasi-auto-immunitary fashion" (2003b, p. 19).

[21] Specialists identify an "ethical turn" in the 1980s (Ferraris 2003).

paper. The purpose of this last section is to offer an exhaustive enumeration of them, to clarify some relevant details, and to propose what, in our view, constitutes the reason for their ultimate, irreconcilable difference. In what follows, then, we will examine comparatively their views on the logic of immunity, law, and community.

When it comes to the logic of immunity, the three authors agree on three fundamental aspects. First, they all regard it as negative, since they consider that it destroys community, even if it often presents itself as a means to protect it.

Second, in the work of all three we encounter immunity in the two senses of the term –the exemption from certain obligations, on the one hand, and the violent attitude designed to protect ourselves and certain others from alien agents. Moreover, it is not the case that, at times, they use the term to refer to the first meaning and, at other times, to refer to the other meaning. In their work, the two meanings of the term are always interwoven. Perhaps Esposito is the one who poses it in the most explicit way: the *exemption* (first meaning) from the obligation to care for the others goes hand in hand with the tendency to *defend* (second meaning) against others.

Third, the logic of immunity is not triggered by the sudden appearance of an alien agent, but *preexists* the attack. Put differently, immunity is not a *reaction* to an ostensible danger; it is not born as a *device* to protect from certain dangers. It is prior to them. In Esposito's words, "the immunitary antibody is not determined by the introduction of the antigen but rather preexists it" (2008, p. 42). In the case of Derrida, as highlighted before, there is only community when immunity is at work. When it comes to Agamben, as long as he claims that the state of exception is the core of the political space, it can be stated that he also believes that the logic of immunity is at work before any danger shows up. Or, returning to his own terms, the state of exception is not exceptional, but is the phenomenon at work in the foundation of democracy. For him, liberal democracy rests on this knot: community requires immunity.

In short, for Esposito, Derrida, and Agamben, within liberal democracy, communities contain a seed of the logic of immunity that can be activated at any moment. And, when it does, democracy attacks itself –the logic of immunity leads to autoimmunity. As a result, democracy might lead to totalitarianism. This similarity between Derrida and Esposito is no coincidence: Esposito's inquiry into the notion of autoimmunity is explicitly indebted to Derrida's inquiry in *Faith and Knowledge* (Esposito 2002/2011, pp. 52-53) and, as Lewis puts it, Esposito "takes up the problem where Derrida left off" (2015, p. 217). A significant point of disagreement between Derrida's and Esposito's view on autoimmunity needs to be mentioned, though: for the first, autoimmunity is *structural*, since all concepts and phenomena are dismantled from within; for the latter, it is a possibility that actualizes at certain *historical* moments.

Beyond all these similarities, these three authors' views on the logic of immunity differ on a fundamental point. For Agamben, the logic of immunity could be left behind and it should be. The force of law can be cancelled and, with it, the violence inherent to communities. This is possible and necessary, as it is the only way to avoid a global civil war. By way of contrast, for Esposito and Derrida, the logic of immunity cannot be cancelled or erased. For better or for worse, its force remains. But these two thinkers also differ in an important aspect: for Esposito, immunization does not necessarily lead to a bad scenario, not always. For him, as explained above, immunization might also lead to a happy ending: it might protect us from too much

protection. Derrida, by contrast, does not have such an optimistic view: since each new order creates its own conditions of possibility, that is, *every order must justify itself in order to sustain itself, and therefore, is immune to itself*, each order and each foundation can ultimately be deconstructed. Since this permanent instability makes it impossible to distinguish once and for all between good from evil, an ideal, harmonious order can never be reached. Hence Derrida's critique (1983) of the "apocalyptic tone" adopted by certain philosophical discourses, since, as he wrote elsewhere, the messiah will never show up (1993c, pp. 68-69; p. 102, pp. 111-112). At this point, it is worth highlighting again that the impossibility of a harmonious order is not necessarily negative, for Derrida. His dozens of works precisely emphasize the fact that the inexistence of permanent and undesconstructable structures is liberating.

Let's now turn to the way Esposito, Agamben, and Derrida conceive of law: they regard law as negative, since they believe it is the instrument par excellence of the logic of immunity. Consequently, communities which are ruled by laws are no longer communities. Agamben's view on the law, manifestly indebted to Benjamin's antinomism, is straightforward: law is an obstacle and needs to be knocked down (1999c). In a similar vein, Esposito writes, regarding laws: "Law corrodes, undermines, undoes our subjectivity. Law comes from the outside, and it leads us outside ourselves" (Esposito 2008/2013, p. 22).

They all write against a widespread belief according to which law protects communities by containing and repressing violence. Esposito and Agamben believe that law fails at reducing violence. In Esposito's words, law often "seems to produce more violence than it is able to reduce" (2008/2013, p. 132).

For Agamben and Esposito, this phenomenon is made evident in the increasing importance that the state of exception is acquiring. But while Esposito considers that the declaration of the state of exception is just one example among others of this phenomenon (2008/2013, p. 75), for Agamben it constitutes its paradigm, hence the central role it plays in his work[22].

Is there a way out of the path of the law, for them? Agamben advocates for a type of communities in which both the law and the force of law will no longer be at work; for him, an a-legal state can be reached. It is important to underline that Agamben is not proposing a return to an a-legal origin. In a messianic tone, he holds that redemption will not imply a return to a happy ending, since he does not believe in the purity of an origin, but will instead *add* something new. Esposito, as explained in section 1, also aspires to a community in which laws, and, with it, distinctions and classifications, will have been blurred away.

Derrida detaches from this point of view. Doubtless, he offers a similar critique of the law: law is inherently violent not only because it needs to be *enforced* (1989-1990), but also because, first and foremost, its instauration is ineludibly violent (1986) and, second, as long as it separates, it discriminates. This is why he underlines that justice cannot be the mere application of laws, but something else, something more. Yet, unlike Esposito and Agamben, he does not believe in the possibility of leaving the law behind. He holds that law cannot be escaped. For Derrida, we live in a permanent tension between the law, which rules our lives and which we should try to overcome, and justice, which we should reach but is always deferred. For this reason, it could be said that Derrida is a liberal democrat with bad conscience.

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[22] The topic is central to Agamben's work, in particular in *Homo Sacer I* (1995/1998) and *State of Exception* (2003/2005).

In the last place, we will examine comparatively the notion of community employed by Esposito, Agamben, and Derrida. First, as above mentioned, they do not regard community and immunity as mutually exclusive. They all conceive immunity a sort of principle of ruin that destabilizes community from within. In a certain way, they align, then, with anthropologists such as Mary Douglas (1966) and historian René Girard (1972), who studied how communities rest on violence and sacrifices that need to be not questioned in order for communities to last.

However, the way Agamben, Derrida, and Esposito believe immunity and community are interwoven differs in at least one important point. For Esposito, it is a matter of a *continuity*. As explained above, the logic of immunity might lead to community as long as it can end up protecting from too much protection. By way of contrast, for Derrida and Agamben, community and immunity interact in the following way: one is rather the condition of possibility of the other. And, as highlighted before, for Derrida this logic of autoimmunity not only affects democracy, but also affects any order and any concept –and thus, makes all types of self-referentiality impossible.

Second, they all regard community as positive and desirable, although difficult to attain, if possible. In this sense, Agamben is the most optimistic: he believes that community can be realized (in the autoaffection of language, as explained above). Esposito is less optimistic: as he sees it, the degree of violence can diminish and kinder communities can emerge. Nevertheless, no community can be fully realized, since what we have in common is precisely the impossibility of realizing a community. Derrida shares with Esposito the belief in the impossibility of fully realizing a community, but for slightly different reasons. Indebted to Lévinas' view on the relationship to others, Derrida holds that an unbreachable abyss always separates us from others. But he does not regard this abyss with frustration. On the contrary: trying to erase such a distance would imply assimilating the other and, ultimately, destroying him or her.

Third, in contrast to American neocommunitarianism and organicistic German sociology's proposals for community, for the three authors that are the object of study of the present paper, community does not have to do with "belonging". Who or what is to blame for this impossibility of fully belonging? Is it the entity to which one tries to belong, because it can never properly *host*? Or, rather, is this impossibility due to the limitations of the subject itself, of the individual itself? In our view, behind the impossibility of "fully belonging" lies a certain view on the subject, which is particularly explicit in Esposito and Derrida, and more diffused in Agamben: they all write against a notion of the subject understood as autonomous, that is, as sovereign of himself or herself. For Derrida, there is never such a thing as a clear-cut identity –we are all traversed and constituted by others' specters and also by our own specters and, ultimately, it is impossible to distinguish the former from the latter. Taken to its logical consequences, the idea of a personal free will, responsible for his or her actions, flounders. For the three authors, then, there is never such a thing as a monadic subject. Esposito complements this idea arguing that, within a community, the subject is even less monadic. In his words: community "loosens, or breaks, the boundaries that ensure the stability and subsistence of individual identity" (Esposito 2008/2013, p. 49).

In short, the subject in community imagined by these thinkers is a subject opened to others, but this opening to others must function in a particular way: the others

are not regarded as a *complement* to what he or she is already, but as *constituent* of what he or she is. This notion of the subject has far-reaching ethical and political implications: as long as this type of subject finds it impossible to distinguish between what is one's own and what is the other's, he or she is no longer interested in protecting him or herself from others.

Within a community, how is the relationship to the other conceived, then? Community is, fundamentally, a relationship based on care. As explained above, Esposito claims explicitly that community has to do with *care* rather than with *interest*: instead of protecting individual interest against the interests of others, the members of a community take care of each other (2008/2013, p. 25). And, following Heidegger, Esposito states that the duty of the community is to protect care "as the sole thing that renders community possible" (p. 26). When it comes to Derrida, although he does not refer to community explicitly in terms of care, it is undeniable that care also lies at the basis of his view of community. However, it is a care of a particular sort: related to distance rather than to proximity. That is, Derrida, expanding a line of thought particularly developed by Lévinas, considers that the other must not be grasped, domesticated or appropriated, but rather that the distance that separates us from the other must always remain. These thinkers' emphasis on care –rather than interest– as the glue of any community clearly distinguishes them from a number of contemporary political philosophers who claim that the wellbeing of a community depends on the capacity of its members of reaching a consensus that meets the important needs and interests of all the involved agents.

When it comes to Agamben, it is harder, if even possible, to figure out what role care plays in his work. However, he makes it explicit that, within a community, differences should not matter, and that relationships should not be mediated by law –hence his defense of so-called *bare life*, a life beyond law.

6. Final remarks

At this point, it is time to ask whether the differences between Agamben's, Derrida's and Esposito's thought are subtle, slight, minor differences, as they seem to be, or, on the contrary, whether they express and reflect disagreements at a deeper level. After our analysis, we believe we can conclude that these differences respond to fundamental differences at the epistemological level and, ultimately, the ontological level. In few words: in our view, Agamben's thought is *antinomic*, while Derrida's is *aporetic*, and Esposito's is rather *dialectic*. Let's see this idea in more detail.

Agamben's thought is clearly antinomic as long as he claims that law needs to be knocked down.[23] Hence his defense of forms of communal life that, to his mind, escape the clutches of the law.[24] Derrida, by contrast, does not write against the law –he cannot, since he has deprived himself of the means to do that. As explained

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[23] This is why he has been grouped together with the antinomic messianic thinkers, such as Taubes, Badiou, and Benjamin, as opposed to messianic thinkers in favor of the nomos, as Lévinas and Rosenzweig. See Bielik-Robson (2009) and Rosàs (2014).

[24] See Agamben's (2011/2013) defense of the Franciscan *regula*, which, despite prescribing a number or rules, he considers non-juridical and, therefore, a-legal. Agamben highlights that the Franciscan regula itself warns the monks not to regard the rules as a "legal apparatus" –within it, monks are not called to live under the rule of law, but under love and grace, as Augustine and Pachomius, in a Pauline manner, recommended.

above, he holds that a decision is just only when it escapes the law, that is, when it is not its mere application. But his line of reasoning leads him to conclude that law is, ultimately, inescapable, since justice is forever differed. At this point, it is worth noting that the reason why justice –as community, as complete hospitality– are impossible practices is not because they are regulative ideas in the Kantian sense, but because they are barred by internal contradictions (Derrida 1996c, p. 131). In Derrida's words: their conditions of possibility are, simultaneously, their conditions of impossibility. As Derrida himself argues in *Aporias* (1996c), "aporia" is the name for this type of passage: it is a passage that is simultaneously *impossible* and *necessary* (p. 46). This is why, as he poses it, he talks about *aporia* rather that *antinomia* (p. 37).

The reasons why Esposito considers that community is desirable but inaccessible are fairly similar, but they present subtle differences. For both Esposito and Derrida, community is an inaccessible practice, and not because they regard it as a regulative idea. For Derrida, this is because the *passage* to the idea of a community –and of justice– is barred; for Esposito, in turn, it is because the *transcendental idea of community itself presents a lack*: "a fully actualized and complete community of free and equal beings is unthinkable even as an idea," since "there is no fullness there that could or could not be transferred to the empirical world" (Prozorov 2014).

Yet Derrida and Esposito differ on a relevant point: namely, which path *or way forward towards attaining a* "better" community. For Derrida, it is a matter of trying to *distance* from law, even if such attempt is never totally successful. A certain antinomic spirit penetrates Derrida's view, therefore. Esposito, by contrast, maintains that an *intensification* of the logic of immunitas –and all the legal devices associated with it– can lead to communitas: it might protect us from too much protection. He does not deny law, then, but proposes to traverse it in what, in our opinion, constitutes a dialectical negation of the law: something of it is absorbed, preserved, in the outcome. In his words: "[t]he route to be taken can only pass through the same object that it intends to deconstruct; not by negating it, but rather by deepening the internal contradiction" (Esposito 2002/2011, p. 16).

This characterization of Agamben's, Derrida's and Esposito's thought as, respectively, antinomic, aporetic and dialectic requires three clarifications. First, Esposito's is clearly not a classical, Hegelian dialectic. It is rather a matter of a truncated or frustrated dialectic –in that community is never reached.

Second, it is worth noting that, at certain moments, Esposito describes his logic of immunitas as "aporetic" (2002/2011, p. 23). However, what distinguishes his view from Derrida's is that, for Esposito, it is specifically immunitas that is informed by an aporetic logic while, for Derrida, immunitas as well as hospitality, and indeed every concept is comprised by internal contradictions, or is traversed by an aporetic logic that he figures as a foreclosed passage.

Third, we can note that Agamben's antinomism is of a dialectical type: it does not deny law, but rather performs a dialectical negation of the law. This mechanism is made particularly explicit in Agamben's digression on the meaning of the Greek verb *katargéo* as it appears in the well-known 31st versicle of chapter 3 of the letter to the Romans by Paul. In it, Paul describes the operation effectuated by the law in messianic time: "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we *uphold* the law" (Rom. 3.31).

This verb is often translated as "to render inoperative" or "to deactivate" (2000/2005, pp. 92-93), but, according to Agamben, in this context this verb refers

simultaneously "to preserve" and "to abolish". That is, in messianic time, law is not completely abolished, but something of it remains and is even fulfilled. As Rosàs (2014, p. 357) puts it: in Agamben's reading of Paul's letter:

> while the law is in act, it cannot reach its plenitude. It is only when it is deactivated – thus returning to a state of potentiality – that it is fulfilled. In short, in the messianic time the law will be suspended in order for a non-normative aspect of the law to be realized (Agamben, 2000/2005, p. 91).

Agamben draws the attention to the fact that Luther translated the verb *katargéo* as *aufheben*, a verb that would later become one of the central terms in Hegelian dialectics to precisely designate a *negation* (of the law) that *does not oppose* law. This dialectical negation of the law that Agamben sees at work in Paul is the operation that Agamben claims must be performed to reach a community.

In the end, then, it turns out that, while the conclusions reached by Esposito and Derrida are closer than the conclusion reached by Agamben –since the first two do not believe that community can be fully realized– the reasons underlying said conclusions are more similar in Esposito and Agamben –since they both think of law in dialectical terms and, therefore, they envisage the possibility of a resolution or a synthesis. The far-reaching political implications of these fundamental differences and similarities remain to be examined.

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