

Review-Essay  
Roberto Esposito, *Da Fuori: Una filosofia per l'Europa*  
(Turin: Einaudi, 2016)  
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I

Crises within history never cease – no sooner has one ended than another begins. This circular return within capitalistic life, the capitalistic world, and simply human history as a whole, has come to seem more and more inevitable. Today, the European Union, along with certain European countries, are involved in a crisis with respect to their very existence. Roberto Esposito's recent book, *Da Fuori: Una filosofia per l'Europa (From Outside: A Philosophy for Europe)*,<sup>1</sup> takes as its point of departure this fundamental problem within Europe so as to discuss it *philosophically*.<sup>2</sup> Or more precisely, within a philosophical investigation Esposito tries to suggest a *political* solution that would rescue Europe from its crisis. Above all, perhaps, the question that the book tries to answer is what Europe is. According to Esposito, the concept of Europe does not refer only to a history, or a geography, but is rather an intrinsically philosophical concept.<sup>3</sup> Europe is the place in which Philosophy was born and where the latter continues to create new perspectives.

Esposito considers the roots of the European crises not from a political or economic perspective but from the standpoint of Europe's *philosophical* stance. He believes that this philosophical and intellectual stance begins to change at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the deterritorialisation of European philosophy or thought towards its *outside (fuori)* – Europe, particularly after the Second World War, starts to lose its domination and hegemony in terms of philosophy. Therefore, the centre of power has shifted from Europe to the outside of (*fuori di*) Europe, or towards North America. The deterritorialisation which seems to lead to the decline of European philosophy is however perceived by Esposito as a potential resource for its *recreation* – as a philosophy for Europe (*una filosofia per l'Europa*).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The book has now appeared in an English translation by Zakiya Hanafi, under the title of *A Philosophy for Europe: From the Outside* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018). Esposito's latest book, at the time of writing, is entitled *Politica e negazione. Per una filosofia affermativa (Politics and Negation. For a Philosophy of Affirmation)* (Turin: Einaudi, 2018) and represents an ongoing discussion that is also taking place in *Da Fuori*.

<sup>2</sup> Roberto Esposito lectures at the Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa. For information, I have included a full list of his works in both Italian and English translation at the end of this review.

<sup>3</sup> Roberto Esposito, *Da fuori. Una filosofia per l'Europa* (Turin: Einaudi: 2016), p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 50.

On this point, we can observe certain analogies between Esposito and Bertrando Spaventa, an idealist, neo-Hegelian philosopher who spoke of the ‘nationality’ of philosophy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the preamble to his lecture at the University of Bologna in April 1860, ‘Carattere e Sviluppo della Filosofia Italiana dal Secolo XVI sino al Nostro Tempo’. Spaventa discusses the circulation of Italian philosophy throughout European philosophy and tries to create a ‘dialogue’<sup>5</sup> between Italian and European thought. As a contemporary Italian philosopher, Esposito begins to speak of a similar subject matter in his discussion of a ‘philosophy for Europe’. He refers to Italian philosophy with the English expression, ‘*Italian Thought*’.

At the beginning of the book, *Da fuori*, Esposito invokes Hegel in order to explain why Europe needs philosophy for its existence. Hegel writes in one of his early texts, *The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy*: ‘When the might of union vanishes from the life of men and the antitheses have lost their living connection and reciprocity and gain independence, the need of philosophy arises’.<sup>6</sup> When the power of unity cuts itself off from life – specifically, human life – and when oppositions lose the dynamism of their dialectical relation, philosophy for Europe will not be possible. By these means, Esposito gives an answer to the fundamental question posed by his book at the very beginning of it. He tries to explain this impossibility by indicating the risk of the European Union’s dissolution: if the intersecting oppositions are not able to establish or achieve a significant and substantive relation, then this union will become unavailable. This is also true when it comes to the possibility of a philosophy for Europe. How will philosophy be possible? Philosophy is possible only when opposed moments attain a significant unity, but this unity is possible only if it has a vivid and dynamic relationship with human life.

## II. The Solution to Save Europe

Esposito’s basic question about the existence of Europe is as follows: Will Europe remain a political subject that can decide and act according to its principles or will it become just a simple geographical reference point like any other place in the world, without having any especial significance?<sup>7</sup> His answer to this question is in the affirmative because, according to him, Europe can and must be a political subject capable of making economic, political, and even cultural decisions.

The author argues that (one of) the fundamental errors of Europe is that, within its structures, the economy interferes with politics but not the other way

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<sup>5</sup> This expression I owe to Dr. Paolo Vanini from the University of Trento. I would like to thank him for his critique of my work on Spaventa. I must also thank Sophia Catalano and Mirela Balasoiu for their contributions to this article in the form of comments and criticisms.

<sup>6</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy*, trans. H. S. Harris and Walter Cerf (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), p. 91.

<sup>7</sup> Esposito, Lecture on *Da fuori*.

around. It should be politics that intervenes in the economy. The 'economic Europe' took precedence over the 'political Europe'. 'Europe' is united primarily by economic interests and actions. It should be politics that decides with respect to economy. Esposito writes that, 'only a political vision of a high profile – as Nietzsche defines it, "great politics" – responds to the economic, social, military challenges that we face'.<sup>8</sup>

The unification of Europe around the economy creates more problems than it does solutions and resources. Since economy has no border, it can be global and not merely confined within a single continent. Economy or the market has a universal and global power, rather than remaining a continental or governmental power. This fundamental problem creates a political one because wealth is concentrated in the hands of a small number of capitalistic institutions which are not democratic because they are not legitimated by any election.<sup>9</sup> As a result, economy is not the most appropriate motivation for European unification, as Esposito insistently emphasises.

For the author, there is another important aspect of the united Europe: 'if Europe had become a federal state, it would have a constitution', and this would be a 'great container in which the legal limit of powers could be established'. Europe has never had a constitution, even though it was suggested in the 1980s by France and Germany, before being rejected by a referendum held in Holland and France. For Esposito, this refusal of a European constitution was partly a result of the fact that there was not a real European 'people'. According to him, a European people can be created, but it needs a common language, a media, public opinion. However, there was not a European people – it was not created by public opinion. These, for Esposito, constitute the original crisis of Europe. Then, in 1980s, there appeared other dramatic events: mass migrations and terrorism. These events exacerbated the crisis, which showed itself to be, therefore, a biopolitical crisis. What does 'biopolitical' mean? More than the distribution of wealth, more than the distribution of power, the line divides death from life because the ruling class had to make a dramatic choice regarding the immigrations. They had to choose whether they should leave those migrating to live or die.

In any case, the reason for the failure of a European constitution to materialise, according to Esposito, is the lack of a united European people or the unity of a people, which is necessary in order for a constitution to be adopted, and this does not exist in Europe because of the common yet different histories of various European countries based on tradition, culture, and war.<sup>10</sup>

Esposito describes our current situation in the transition from national state to nationalist state. The idea of a 'nation' is important because it endows political

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<sup>8</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori: Una filosofia per l'Europa* (Einaudi: Torino, 2016), p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Esposito, Lecture on *Da fuori*.

<sup>10</sup> Esposito, Lecture on *Da fuori*.

states and peoples with ‘spirit’.<sup>11</sup> For Spaventa, ‘the nations [...] each have their own spirit [...]’. These national spirits are as sacred and inviolable as an individual’s spirit. He presents national spirit and consciousness as a creation of a unity.<sup>12</sup> Esposito holds that the idea of the nation leads to the creation of a state. The difference between Spaventa and Esposito is that, for Esposito, the unity of a nation is due to a certain *theory*.

Theoretical thought or ‘thinking’ (*il pensiero*) includes not only philosophical thought (‘professional thinking’) but also the thought or thinking which has a *constituent* function or plays a crucial role in constituting Europe.<sup>13</sup> It is very important to observe that the function and role which Esposito gives to thought was given by Spaventa to *philosophy*. Spaventa talks about this function in his article, *La rivoluzione e l’Italia*, published in 1851 in *Il Progresso*. He writes that philosophers create and transform the mood of a people into a thought. This thought is a sort of mirror in which they can see their nature, needs and themselves:

When the political and social conditions of a people’s life do not correspond to the new principle that has developed in the world of intelligence; when the fact is in contradiction with the idea; the revolution already exists as a germ in national consciousness [*coscienza nazionale*]. But then in the people the revolutionary idea is a vague, obscure, indeterminate feeling. Philosophers transform this feeling into a certain thought; this thought is like a mirror in which the people recognise themselves, their new instincts, their new needs; in which people find the contradiction between what is and what it should be.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> ‘Per l’unità spirituale della nazione italiana’, in *Unificazione nazionale ed egemonia culturale*, ed. Giuseppe Vacca, (Laterza: Bari, 1969), p. 195.

<sup>12</sup> Spaventa, ‘La rivoluzione e l’Italia’, *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana*, ed. Giovanni Gentile, (Messina: Principato, 1963), p. 69.

<sup>13</sup> Esposito, Lecture on *Da fuori*.

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Quando le condizioni politiche e sociali della vita d’un popolo non corrispondono al nuovo principio che si è sviluppato nel mondo dell’intelligenza; quando il fatto è in contraddizione con l’idea; la rivoluzione già esiste come germe nella coscienza nazionale. Ma allora ne’ popoli l’idea rivoluzionaria è un sentimento vago, oscuro, indeterminato. I filosofi trasformano questo sentimento in un pensiero determinato; questo pensiero è come uno specchio nel quale il popolo riconosce se medesimo, i suoi istinti nuovi, i suoi novelli bisogni; nel quale egli trova risolta la contraddizione tra ciò che è e ciò che dovrebbe essere’. (Spaventa, ‘Rivoluzione e utopia’. *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana*, established by Gentile [Florence: Sansani Editore, 1963], p. 69).

Spaventa published his articles in the journal, *Il Progresso*, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> June 1851 as ‘*La rivoluzione e l’Italia*’ and, on the 31<sup>st</sup> August and the 11<sup>th</sup> October as ‘*Le Utopie*’. He then added another article, ‘*Rousseau, Hegel, Gioberti*’ on the 26<sup>th</sup> December 1851. See Italo Cubeddu, ‘*Rivoluzione e Utopia: Articoli di Bertrando Spaventa su “Il Progresso”*’, *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana*, ed. Giovanni Gentile, (Messina: Principato, 1963).

Philosophy, thought, or thinking, assumes the responsibility for supporting the unity of Europe. Philosophy can save Europe, which means that *theoria* takes precedence over *praxis*. Philosophers, or as Esposito described them, those who profess philosophy, are adepts when it comes to changing their perspective and interpretation: in this regard they are much swifter than economics or politics.<sup>15</sup> Only philosophy is capable of combining theory and praxis when there is a transformation which all are undergoing. Speed is important when it is a matter of resolving the problem of how to save Europe, because, according to the author, there is no more time to lose.

### III. Biopolitical Crisis

Esposito's book concentrates on the basic questions of philosophy: what is the role of philosophy today? How can we combine philosophy with politics? Esposito tries to respond to these questions in light of the existing political situation of Europe.

In Europe, according to Esposito, the perpetual state of crisis has been exacerbated by two things: 1) mass migration and 2) terrorism. And it is here that he finds it necessary to invoke his own conception of biopolitics: the position taken by the governments of European countries in the face of mass migration can be explained, for him, primarily by means of the concept of biopolitics, for these political decisions concerned nothing less than the biological life and death of those about whom the decision was made. It might be the first time since the Second World War that the governments of Europe find themselves in the extraordinary situation of being faced with the fact that politics stands in direct relation with the life of millions of human beings.<sup>16</sup> Esposito describes mass migration and terrorism as part of a biopolitical crisis. For him, these appeared in the 1980s.

In terrorism, a biopolitical game is played between life and death, in which the terrorist decides to choose whether s/he lives or dies. It is a game between biological life and politics. On the one side, there is life; on the other side, there is political purpose.

However, for this crisis, he suggests some tragic and alarming political solutions: creating a European police and European military to defend Europe's borders in addition to the integration of investigative information.<sup>17</sup> The question is: would the taking up of arms constitute a real solution? Or does it create merely a temporary peace? Is the security of Europe a unique problem? Esposito has as yet given no answers to these questions.

However, Esposito's solution is the advocacy of *both* a European identity and its constitutive differences. To ensure its continued existence, Europe must defend its identity and also its differences – and this means the differences between

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<sup>15</sup> Roberto Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> Esposito, Lecture on *Da fuori*.

Europe and those others who remain *outside* of Europe. Esposito adopts the Hegelian position according to which identity and difference are mutually dependent upon one another. But what kind of identity are we talking about? Is it an identity based on the concept and which demands certain human rights and liberties? These are questions which the book attempts to answer.

#### IV. What is *il fuori* (outside)?

Esposito compares some philosophers, like Adorno, Derrida, Foucault and Deleuze with other contemporary Italian philosophers. In European philosophy of the twentieth century, Esposito hopes to find a new philosophy for Europe, and in particular somewhere within the tense relationships between ‘critical theory’, ‘the philosophy of difference’, and ‘biopolitics’.

The purpose of the book, as Esposito defines it, is to relate European philosophy or the philosophy of Europe to its *outside*. The philosophers of continental Europe of the past century have in some sense produced their philosophies somewhere other than their origin, – as in the case of Adorno, who was compelled to flee his native Germany. The relationship of thought with its exteriority constitutes the theoretical frame of Esposito’s book. He aims explicitly to re-establish a philosophy for Europe along with the creation of a ‘new spirit’ of Europe, constituting a break with its bloody past of war, violence, and exclusion. But it seems that Europe, instead of learning the lessons of the past, prefers to re-establish it. Europe never confronts or even seems willing to confront its colonial past. If it had done so, it might be able to find a permanent solution to the problem of mass enforced migration.

Esposito speaks of two transitions to the ‘outside’:

- 1) the exile of Frankfurt School Critical Theory to North America;
- 2) French Theory in North America. Esposito subtitles his book in a way that is intended to echo and yet at the same time distinguish itself from German Philosophy, French Theory, and Italian thought: European Philosophy – *Una filosofia per l’Europa* (A Philosophy for Europe). Speaking of German philosophy, French theory and Italian thought, he is referring to philosophy after the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For Esposito, the adjectives ‘German’, ‘French’, and ‘Italian’ do not describe particular nationalities, but are rather ‘conceptual expressions’ (*espressivi [piuttosto di un certo stile] concettuale*).<sup>18</sup> And yet the book does not perhaps give a truly decisive and *positive* account of what ‘conceptual expressions’ actually are.

To provide the rudiments of such an account, let us turn to Esposito’s notion of biopolitics. This will help us to understand precisely what Esposito means by ‘European’ and by a certain non-nationalistic understanding of nationality, and indeed what he understands specifically by ‘thought’. The category of biopolitics originates from Foucault’s research. Esposito states that Foucault finds its origin in

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<sup>18</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 157.

Nietzsche. One finds a confluence of different nationalities entering into the formation of a single concept. Italian thought is not independent from French and German philosophy. Italian thought has merely developed in a different direction and with a distinct style, and this alone is perhaps what bestows upon it its originality. Besides, the original root of Italian thought may be traced back to 1960s.<sup>19</sup> Esposito differentiates between the concept of 'thought' and the terms 'philosophy' and 'theory'. He shows that the term 'thought' stands in intimate relation with political praxis; that is, Italian thought finds its essence in praxis, in political action, and in particular the *Operaismo* of the 1960s. The term 'thought', instead of preceding praxis, derives from praxis and thus distinguishes itself from the autonomy of 'philosophy' and the neutrality of 'theory'.<sup>20</sup> The concept of 'thought' is characterised as being always in action, active and actual (*attivo e attuale*).<sup>21</sup> 'Thought', unlike theory and philosophy, is related to a collective process that transgresses the limits of the latter.

While German Philosophy, which Esposito takes in the guise of Critical Theory (the Frankfurt School) was forced to emigrate by certain traumatic events, French Theory lacks such a 'tragic resonance' (*risonanze tragiche*).<sup>22</sup> French philosophers like Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze, Lyotard, Baudrillard are invited to North America to teach and to speak: this is their 'exile'. Esposito expands upon this situation using Deleuze's concept of 'deterritorialisation' (*deterritorializzazione*), through which European thought manages to disseminate itself throughout the globe.

Esposito here makes a claim similar to that of Spaventa who speaks of the circulation of Italian philosophy within Europe; here Esposito speaks of the circulation of European philosophy or European *thought* throughout the world. According to Spaventa, after relating to other philosophies and becoming a part of these philosophies, Italian philosophy or 'Italian thought' returns to itself by means of a deterritorialisation of European philosophy, including Cartesian and Hegelian thought. For Esposito, Italian philosophy deterritorialises itself by means of French Theory, which refers to deconstruction, and by means of German Philosophy, which refers to the philosophy of the Frankfurt School. Thus, Italian thought ceases to be merely national and disseminates itself throughout Europe, precisely by learning from French and German Philosophy.

## V. What is the Main Characteristic of these Philosophies?

According to Esposito, German Philosophy is based on the concept of negation (*negazione*); French Theory on neutralisation (*neutralizzazione*); and Italian thought on affirmation, or 'affirmative thought' (*pensiero afirmativo*) which alludes

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<sup>19</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 157.

<sup>20</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 158.

<sup>21</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 158.

<sup>22</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 10.

to ‘thinking in action’ (*pensiero in atto*).<sup>23</sup> Italian thought is related to praxis and politics – for this reason, the outside (*il fuori*) of Italian thought is ‘politics’ (*politico*); for German philosophy, the outside is ‘the social’ (*il sociale*), and for French theory, it is ‘writing’ (*scrittura*).<sup>24</sup>

Let us examine Italian thought in particular in more depth: Italian thought is active (*attivo*) but not reactive (*reattivo*). Italian thought was characterised by ‘workerism’ (*operaismo*) in the 1960s and has more recently become involved in developing the category of biopolitics (*biopolitica*). Italian thought develops according to three bipolarities between the 1960s and the 1990s:

1) In 1966, Mario Tronti writes for the *Quaderni rossi* (1961–66) and *Classe Operaia* (1964–67), and in these political journals he discusses the bipolarities between capitalist society (*la società del capitale*) and the proletarian party (*partito operaio*);

2) Antonio Negri’s *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State* (*Il potere costituente*) presents us with a conflictual bipolarity between the *constituent* power of liberal and democratic force and the *constituted* power of a central authority and a stable power;

3) Finally, we come to the bipolarity between *communitas* and *immunitas* urged by Esposito in his books *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community* (1998) and *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life* (2002). These two concepts may be said to capture Esposito’s own unique take on the notion of biopolitics. It seems that *Communitas*, *Immunitas*, and the third book in this de facto trilogy, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, together with *Da fuori*, are four books which complete each other, and may be read in hindsight as a tetralogy composed with a view to the emancipation of Europe from its seemingly endemic crisis.

The author, as we know from his book, *Communitas*, attempts to reveal a different perspective on the notion of community, distinct from the classical conception, which means to ‘have something in common’, through a deep etymological analysis of the Latin term ‘*communitas*’.<sup>25</sup> Generally, this term is defined as the opposite of that which is *proper*. By contrast, Esposito examines the term *communitas* with the thought that it will be better understood if it is taken to be composed of the words ‘*cum*’ and ‘*munus*’, but he points out that contemporary and classical theories of community have laid stress on the *cum*<sup>26</sup> at the expense of *munus*.<sup>27</sup> The term *munus* originally signifies *dono* – duty or obligation (*dovere*, *obbligo*), and gift.<sup>28</sup> Esposito explains *munus* in terms of gift, or the gift that one

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<sup>23</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 13.

<sup>24</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 12.

<sup>25</sup> Esposito, *Communitas: Origine e destino della comunità* (Turin: Einaudi, 2006), p. IX–X.

<sup>26</sup> For Esposito, Jean-Luc Nancy’s analysis of community (in *La communauté désœuvrée* [*The Inoperative Community*]) is one example of this (p. 180).

<sup>27</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 180.

<sup>28</sup> Esposito, *Communitas*, p. x–xi.



gives but not the gift that one receives; in this sense, *munus* rests on the *act* of giving.<sup>29</sup> There is, therefore, a firm relationship between community and *munus* (*dono*) or gift, present. According to one etymology of ‘community’, the word derives from *communitas*, that is from *cum-munus*. *Cum-munus* means reciprocal or mutual gift (*dono* [*munus*] *reciproco*). *Munus* involves both gift and obligation (*obbligò*). But here the key word is ‘reciprocity’ (*reciprocità*). Esposito asks in what sense a gift (*dono*) is a duty. Should a gift not be a voluntary affair? *Munus*, for Esposito, is obligation – that is, a contract made with the other; *munus* demands to be released from this obligation. The giving consigns one to a commitment or task with respect to the other.

Esposito asks: what do the members of a community have in common? It is not wealth or property – but rather, it is a task, a burden. The community is bound together by a shared obligation, a duty or debt, by a limitation and by a lack. The ancient meaning of ‘*communis*’ must be one who shares a burden (*carico*) or a task (*incarico*). *Communitas* is not understood with regard to ‘property’. *Communitas* is the totality of a people united not by property but by an obligation (*dovere*) or a debt.<sup>30</sup>

In other words, it can be observed that *communitas* is a people united not by an addition, but by a subtraction (*meno*). In the community, subjects or individuals leave their proper (*proprio*), they depart from themselves. By giving a gift to someone, or by owing a debt to them, subjects or individuals become a part of the community by way of a lack, a limitation. The *munus* appearing in *communitas* is not a property or possession. It is a debt, a pledge (*pegno*), a gift that is to be given.<sup>31</sup> For this reason, a lack is established. For Esposito, the members of a community are united by an obligation. This obligation is established by the idea that ‘I owe you something’ but not ‘you owe me something’.

Esposito finds something more subjective, private, proper or more precisely privileged in the term ‘*munus*’ than is to be found in *cum*. From this discovery, he is then able to say something important and novel about the contrasting term, ‘immunity’ (*immunità*). *Immunitas* and *communitas* are opposites. *Immunitas* exonerates the members of the community from the duties and obligations (the *munus*) which they owe to one another. Community connects the individuals by way of a shared task, by the lack of an individual proper.

According to Esposito, the philosophical tradition was always aware of the relationship between community and death.<sup>32</sup> But only in the modern period has this fact appeared as a problem, and even a fundamental problem for political philosophy. Esposito explains the relation between *communitas* and death starting with the Middle Ages. In this regard, he writes that, ‘[i]f the community of sin from which we originate is marked by fear, no one can be secure in this life, which is

<sup>29</sup> Esposito, *Communitas*, p. xii.

<sup>30</sup> Esposito, *Communitas*, p. xii–iii.

<sup>31</sup> Esposito, *Communitas*, p. xiii.

<sup>32</sup> Esposito, *Communitas*, p. xvi.

literally besieged by death'.<sup>33</sup> Here, immunisation appears as the opposite of *communitas*. Esposito believes that this category, *immunity*, will explain the modern paradigm more adequately than the categories of secularisation, legitimation, and rationalisation. The main point of Esposito is the encounter of the subject with its 'nothing', its death or its end. While community breaches the putatively watertight boundaries of the individual and their identity, immunity establishes this identity in a defensive and offensive way, guarding against whatever threatens its existence from the outside – or at least that would be the traditional understanding of immunity; Esposito proposes another, not based upon the military analogy, but modelled rather upon a relation of hospitality.<sup>34</sup>

For Esposito, while immunity, despite everything, tends towards the protection of the individual, community opens the individual onto the other, breaching these supposed defences. It seems that community is not a place where we can establish a secure life but rather a place in which we are free to shed our very obsession with security (*ossessione securitaria*).<sup>35</sup> Community 'is always contemporary with immunity – not as its negative reverse-side but as its affirmative obverse'.<sup>36</sup>

## VI. Biopolitics in Italian Thought?

Esposito deploys his account of biopolitics to demonstrate the place of Italian thought in relation to European philosophy.

According to Esposito, the character of Italian thought may be demonstrated by the different inflections given to the notion of biopolitics by Italian thinkers in recent times:

1) Giorgio Agamben, contrary to Foucault, argues that biopolitics is not a characteristic of modernity but may rather be found in political thought and practices from Aristotle to Roman law, right up to the present day, by way of Auschwitz, in the shadow of which we still stand. Agamben defines and conceptualises the biological existence of human beings as a 'naked life' or 'bare life' (*nuda vita*). This life is incorporated into the political order by means of its very exclusion, and this establishes the sovereign ruler's political power over this life. The life of *homo sacer* determines also the field of sovereignty. In Roman law, the name of this figure of a life included by its very exclusion is *homo sacer*, the man, holy or damned.

2) Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri

3) Esposito in his book *Bios*.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Esposito, *Communitas*, p. xx. *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*, trans. Timothy Campbell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), p. 12.

<sup>34</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 181.

<sup>35</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 181.

<sup>36</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 182.

<sup>37</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 147.

## VII. Towards a European Philosophy?

It seems that, for Esposito, his own definition of European philosophy remains confined within the geographical territories of France, Germany and Italy. Nevertheless, as already stated, these territories are not to be understood simply as nations and nor are the territories themselves without a certain deterritorialisation: we have seen Esposito mention two that took place in the 1960s and 1970s:

1) German philosophy was deterritorialised and took up residence in France,<sup>38</sup> in the sense that – referring to Alain Badiou's account of the history of French thought – French philosophy can be considered as a continuation of the philosophy produced in German in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries: for example, Kojève's lectures on Hegel's *Phenomenology*; Husserl's philosophy is formative for Sartre and Merleau-Ponty; Heidegger's thought is radically reworked by Derrida; Nietzsche is perhaps the determinative influence for Foucault and Deleuze. 'When French thought is recognised as postmodern, it is necessarily also post-Hegelian'.<sup>39</sup>

Esposito underlines that in 1960s the philosophical trajectory changed from critical theory with the decline of Frankfurt School, especially the philosophy of Marcuse, towards the idea of the deconstruction (*decostruzione*).

2) The second deterritorialisation within European philosophy rests on a series of lectures on French philosophy – under the name of 'French theory' – given by French philosophers in America. Esposito calls it a 'new hegemony' (*una nuova egemonia*) created by French philosophy in the American universities after Critical Theory. On the one hand, there is the philosophy of a certain Enlightenment, represented and defended by Habermas who directed for a time certain extremely intemperate criticisms at his own distorted vision of French philosophy (under the heading of 'postmodernism', which for him comprised the works of Lyotard, Derrida, and Foucault, among others) understood as a kind of irrationalism. And yet, despite this critique, he was never led to approach *Italian* thinkers, and particularly not those who think politics according to Carl Schmitt's categories.

Esposito claims that even when he refers to his modern antecedents, such as Hegel, as opposed to a cosmopolitan Kant, or to his Italian-French heirs, Schmitt is the polemical idol of his recent production. Schmitt is, for Esposito, at the present time, the most crucial philosopher. In this respect, Habermas tries to establish an idea of politics which is different from Schmitt's understanding. According to Esposito, the confirmation of his attitude toward Schmitt can be seen in Habermas' distance from those authors in Germany, France and Italy who are influenced by him. Esposito writes that Habermas never directly deals with Italian

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<sup>38</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 100.

<sup>39</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 101.

*operaismo* because Mario Tronti, one of the founders of this school, discusses politics within Schmittian categories or in a polemic with his categories.<sup>40</sup>

On the other hand, French theory does indeed criticise certain elements of modern philosophy, particularly Hegel and his dialectic, most notably from the 1960s onwards.

Esposito finds the root of postmodern French theory in the heart of German thought.<sup>41</sup> He differentiates the thought of the Frankfurt School from French thought in that the former retains the contradiction between theory and reality through the critique of Hegelian ideology (understood in terms of Absolute Knowledge and a closed system rather than an open one), while French thought considers ideology by means of an anti-dialectical approach. The thinkers of the Frankfurt School criticise Hegel's dialectic but they still adopt something like it as their own method, while 'postmodern' French philosophers reject the dialectic as a method more or less altogether.<sup>42</sup>

### VIII. A Philosophy for Europe or a New Politics for Europe?

Esposito writes that 'the crisis of Europe in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century united the thought of Valéry and Husserl, of Heidegger and Benda, of Croce and Ortega', and similarly at the end of the century, the basic role of Europe was still to establish 'the point of intersection between views of different origins'.<sup>43</sup> For Esposito, compared to earlier debates, now a crisis was rearing its head in which Europe and philosophy were knotted together in the same destructive spiral.

Between 1930 and 1940 something begins to change. The ruins which war left behind were not just material, economic, and social, but also cultural: that is to say, the war engendered changes within *philosophy*. It led Europe to a thought which for Esposito was not able to 'establish a shelter against this deviation'.<sup>44</sup> This situation explains why European philosophy moved to its outside (*il fuori*). For Esposito, it is only outside of its borders that Europe may find the reason for this defeat. But when we ask what this outside is, a great problem regarding its delimitation still awaits us: 'outside' includes those places where we can find France and Germany. The question is as follows: does this idea or theory of the 'outside' enable 'dialogue' or exclude it? – A dialogue between different philosophies, philosophers, ideas or thoughts, between different cultures.

Esposito tries to reveal the role of Europe through different aspects of European thinkers such as Julien Benda, Stefan Zweig, and Albert Camus, who investigate the role of Europe in the constitution of a future. In the 1930s, Benda, in his *Discours à la nation européenne*, responded to Stefan Zweig's *Einigung*

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<sup>40</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 208.

<sup>41</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 104.

<sup>42</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 104.

<sup>43</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 196.

<sup>44</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 196.

*Europa* not only by evoking the necessity of the unification of Europe but by proposing to give to the task of bringing together the people of Europe the appropriate symbolic and mediatic significance.<sup>45</sup> Benda believed in the unifying force of a common language, the military uniform, the evocative power of the anthem and national flag. Esposito seems to agree with Benda's European project. According to Zweig, to create a European spirit or people, it would be necessary to receive people's support or win people's approval. For him, the realisation of this idea is possible only with such 'grassroots' support, because, in history, changes never appear only as a result of alterations within the intellectual sphere or by simple reflection.

Besides, there is another fundamental question that must be asked in order to determine the role of Europe in the future history of human beings: what was the role of Europe in history? What kind of role is being sought? The answer to this last question given by Alexandre Kojève at the end of 1945 is to found 'a sort of Latin empire',<sup>46</sup> which is able to stand up to both Soviet and Anglo-American power by resisting the economic hegemony of Germany. Esposito draws our attention once again to Kojève's now largely forgotten work, *L'empire latin. Esquisse d'une doctrine de la politique française*. Kojève theorises the opportunity to establish a sort of Latin empire, able to resist the other two world superpowers as well as German economic power.

According to Esposito, 'European philosophy from Machiavelli to Hegel, through Locke, Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Kant remains always an expression of a political project [*progettualità politica*]'.<sup>47</sup> He establishes his thesis on the role of Europe by basing it not on economy but on politics. In this regard, his main concern is: what is the response to the question asked by European philosophy with respect to the role of Europe? Different authors gave different answers. The particular aim of the book is to present a connection between politics and philosophy. It seems that both Esposito and Massimo Cacciari propose 'one multiplicity', 'the unity of distinct elements [...] which draws a common figure'.<sup>48</sup> Esposito affirms that Europe will always live with the tension between differences and diversities in a society. There will always be a threat that creates a violent attempt to eliminate one pole in favour of another.

Esposito suggests a political decision for the European Union against the economical. According to Esposito, the connection between unity and difference or dissimilarity (*differenza*) is the origin of the relationship between politics and philosophy.<sup>49</sup> Esposito emphasises that the economy is globalised and deterritorialised. This deterritorialised economy has always corresponded to politics. Esposito believes that the unification of European countries by way of the

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<sup>45</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 198.

<sup>46</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 199.

<sup>47</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 202.

<sup>48</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 204.

<sup>49</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 204.

economy or in terms of property does not work well. The main solution that we can find is politics itself. Esposito explicates this idea by means of the creation of a European Constitution, to save Europe from disintegration, because the European Union lacks legitimacy. For Esposito, even if the European Union is not a State, the idea that the Union is suitable to receive a constitution originates from the fact that the Union has a sovereign power over certain areas which are transferred to it by the State members. But Esposito marks the differences between a Constitution as a juridical basis for a State and a Treaty as an instrument for international relations. When Esposito considers a constitution for Europe, he has a European people in mind. This European people is understood not in the sense of the ethos of a community but rather as a political unity suited to taking and supporting decisions expressed by its majority.<sup>50</sup> However, Esposito is also aware of the lack of a united European people which might activate a constituent process.<sup>51</sup>

According to Esposito, the possibility of the existence of a European people in political life will not rest on treaties or conventions.<sup>52</sup> In other words, it will not result from mediations between governments. He stresses that the existence of a European people in political life should not be the product of existing political dynamics. Rather, Esposito attempts to imagine a Europe and a European Parliament in which different peoples in different economic conditions will find their political representations. It is a 'Europe of *peoples*'. The real or true Europe of peoples, or the political unification of Europe, for Esposito, will be the 'result of real political dialectics', and it will not be the result of agreement between those who command or dominate, the ruling class, those who have economic power – whom Esposito describes as the 'vertices' (*vertici*). The political unification of Europe will be achieved through the categories that Italian thought has 'handed over to European philosophy'.<sup>53</sup>

For Esposito, in France and in Germany, discussions of the nature of French and German philosophy is dominated by Derrida and Habermas, respectively. Derrida develops his idea of a 'thought from outside' (*pensiero del fuori*) in the *Other Heading: Reflection on Today's Europe* by identifying a certain continuity between Hölderlin, Nietzsche, and Patočka, and therefore, 'deconstructs the Eurocentric perspective of Hegel which both Husserl and Heidegger differently propose'.<sup>54</sup>

This is to say that French theory develops by means of a thought deriving from its outside (*pensiero del fuori*), which is to say, German philosophy. For Derrida, the outside refers to writing and, for Esposito, Derrida opposes writing to logos. Regarding Foucault, the outside addresses, on the one hand, the sphere of power and its relations, inherent within the whole of discourse, and on the other

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<sup>50</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 213.

<sup>51</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 212, 215.

<sup>52</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 238.

<sup>53</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 238.

<sup>54</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 216.

hand, biological life, over which human beings do not always hold dominion. The author develops the idea of Europe through Derrida's argument in *Today's Europe* in which he speaks of a Europe which loses its proper identity and becomes something more than itself. For Derrida, we have to be the guardians or protectors of an idea of Europe, of a difference of Europe, but this Europe should not be withdrawn from its identity and come forth towards what it is not.<sup>55</sup> He proposes that to think Europe means to think the world itself because Europe can share the decentralisation.<sup>56</sup> This seems contradictory if 'Europe' must refer to a geographical area, and hence to a certain 'centre'. After all these philosophical discussions of Europe, it can be said that 'Europe is no longer a privileged point of view on the world, but the world is the deterritorialised place to interpret Europe'.<sup>57</sup>

European philosophy, including German, French, and Italian philosophy, never severs all ties with *metaphysics*. When Esposito asks after a philosophy for Europe, he displays a philosophical panorama by means of the development and fracturing of European philosophy, its transplantation to North America – this produces a new beginning for metaphysics which stands beyond the boundaries of Europe (when understood geographically) and produces the philosophy of Europe.<sup>58</sup> This is to say that Esposito believes that philosophy began with the Greeks and that it remains a fundamentally European invention – Modern Europe was born at the intersection of Greece and Christianity.<sup>59</sup> But with the discovery of America and then the American Revolution, philosophy begins to lose its origin.

Esposito is convinced that, as in the history of Europe, also today, Continental thought is returning to question the destiny of Europe. Continental thought attempts to confront the problem in a peculiar way to which other disciplines, such as political science, law, and economics, have difficulty in providing an adequate solution. For Esposito, at that dramatic moment in the history of Europe, Europe directed itself to philosophy. As during the French Revolution, which Kant and Hegel considered to be a great philosophical movement, an event destined to change world history. Esposito defines Europe as 'constitutive' in the sense that Europe always tries to constitute new ideas, new forms of the State, philosophy, science, and so on and so forth. On this point, according to Esposito, we can imagine that philosophy is able to introduce a new perspective and a new idea – for our own time – in order to see things in a different manner. Philosophy, according to *Da Fuori*, is able to present a fresh new thought in order to comprehend the European situation or crisis. Considering most fundamentally the problem of European identity, Esposito in his book on the one hand tries to concentrate on European philosophies and on the other hand tries to discover and take up the possibility of a philosophy for Europe by elaborating its

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<sup>55</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 217.

<sup>56</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 218.

<sup>57</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 218.

<sup>58</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 65.

<sup>59</sup> Esposito, *Da fuori*, p. 24.

new dimension oriented to the *outside*. This *outside* leads to great discoveries in philosophy.

In *Da Fuori*, Esposito tries to analyse the history of European philosophy in the late twentieth century, which is identified with Critical Theory in Germany, post-structuralism in France, and Italian thought.

Critical Theory, or what he calls German Philosophy, is a great discovery emerging by means of its exile to America. French thought finds its outside in German philosophy – for Deleuze, for example, the outside might mean to be external to the dialectic. In Italian thought, in the case of Machiavelli, it can be found in the political – outside or external to the State. However, Italian thought also has a connection with its geographical outside, just like Germany and France and their thought and philosophy. Italian philosophers relate themselves to the Foucauldian biopolitical paradigm and represent and develop it in different manners. For Esposito, the Foucauldian paradigm concerning biological life and the relationship between biology and politics has both negative and positive aspects. Italian philosophers try to develop this paradigm in these two different dimensions.

The recent political and economic situation of Europe and the European Union, which seems for Esposito to have reached its final challenge, provides us with one of the reasons to turn to philosophy. The economic crisis, the crisis created by the increased flux of migration, and the crisis produced by Islamic terrorism, are both interpretable by the philosophical-political categories of ‘biopolitics’ and ‘immunisation’.

To conclude, Esposito attempts to demonstrate that the deterritorialisation of European philosophy creates new perspectives and allows philosophy to re-create itself. This re-creation assists politics, by suggesting a new perspective and approach to political problems. According to Esposito, philosophy may not be a solution but it presents or introduces a different view, and can change perspectives. In short, philosophy does not change the world but provides another type of help. These new perspectives combine philosophy and politics through the categories created by Italian thought, which means ‘being in act’ and placing philosophy in relation to praxis.

In the end, the problem addressed by this book is simply what the *identity* of Europe is – it asks how to *philosophise* it, and how to *politicise* it, and finally how a European identity might be re-established.

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