

Use as Form-of-Life. Agamben and the Stoics

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ABSTRACT

The paper analyzes Agamben's reading of the Stoics' theory of appropriation, so as to outline the specific notion of use as form-of-life developed in *The Use of Bodies*. The paper claims that the Stoics enable Agamben to rethink the meaning of life beyond the biopolitical paradigm, thereby offering an account of life in which the latter coincides with its modes of being lived, and is inseparable from its form. The paper argues that this notion of life involves the coincidence of modal ontology and ethics and embodies a way of living, whereby one becomes 'actively affected' by its form-of-life, in consonance with the medial form of the Greek verb *chresthai* (to use).

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I _ Introduction

The notion of use plays a pivotal role in Agamben's thought, since it offers the keystone to rethink the meaning of life beyond the ontological and biopolitical paradigm of the Western tradition. The notion of use translates the Greek verb *chresthai*. The latter does not refer to the activity of utilizing something which is carried out by a subject, as the modern meaning of the term suggests. Rather, the Greek verb involves a constitutive polysemy, «acquiring ever different meanings according to the context»¹. Above all, it is crucial to note that the verb *chresthai* is a middle voice. Hence, in con-

sonance with this verbal diathesis, the notion of use spells out a process which can be conceived neither as an activity which the subject performs (active diathesis), nor as a passive occurrence, which the subject undergoes (passive diathesis), since rather it is impossible to distinguish agent and patient, as well as subject and object². In the middle, subject and object constitute themselves within, and therefore coincide with, the very taking place of the verb and are therefore affected by it³. The middle voice expresses «the affection that one receives insofar as one is in relation with something»⁴. The expression '*chresthai te polei*', for example, literally: to make use of the city, means that both the person

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who makes use of the city and the city itself constitute themselves within this process of use, thereby being affected by it⁵. Hence, as a middle voice, the notion of use involves first of all ‘the use of oneself’: it spells out a primary form of care of the self, i.e. a way of living. Reporting Foucault’s words, Agamben argues that «it is a question of taking care of oneself as subject of *chresis* (with all that word’s polysemy: subject of actions, behavior, relationships, attitudes)»⁶. Accordingly, the notion of use points to a notion of life, which cannot be separated from its form, since *what* life is expresses and constitutes itself within *a way of living*. Agamben’s concept of use articulates precisely this inseparability of life from its form: a form-of-life, which points to a peculiar way of living.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze Agamben’s reading of the Stoics’ theory of appropriation (*oikeiosis*), by focusing specifically on the last work of the *Homo Sacer* project, namely *The Use of Bodies*, so as to outline the role that his reading of the Stoics plays in the development of the notion of use as form-of-life in this specific work⁷. I wish to argue that the Stoic notion of the use of the body and the theory of *oikeiosis* enable Agamben to rethink the meaning of life beyond the Aristotelian distinction between *bios* and *zoè*, i.e. political and natural life, thereby deactivating this very distinction, which characterizes the emergence of biopol-

itics in the Western tradition. For this purpose, I will develop my argumentation in three sections. In the first, I will sketch out Agamben’s notion of biopolitics, so as to present the *pars destruens* of his project. It is only in light of the notion of bare life – which characterizes the Western biopolitical paradigm – that the importance of Agamben’s reading of the Stoics becomes clear. Hence, Agamben aims to develop a notion of life which cannot be separated from its form, i.e. a form-of-life, which deactivates the mutual implication and distinction between *zoè* and *bios*. In the second section, I will focus more closely on Agamben’s reading of the notion of the use of body parts by animals developed by the Stoics, and in particular by Seneca. In this second section, I aim to underline that the Stoic theory of *oikeiosis*, according to which every living being is familiar with itself and its modes of living, enables Agamben to develop a notion of living being as use of oneself. In such a way, Agamben offers an account of life which is always and already qualified, since it spells out an immanent performative process, in which the living being constitutes itself, and therefore coincides with, its modes of living. In the third section, I will further explore the coincidence of ontology and ethics that Agamben’s conception of use entails and analyze the latter as a *way of living*, which points to a middle voice enactment.

2 _ Agamben's Understanding of Biopolitics

Agamben's entire philosophical project converges on his peculiar notion of biopolitics⁸, which is rooted in both the ontological and the political paradigm of the Western tradition.

The notion of biopolitics has been developed in his project *Homo Sacer* and describes the constellation of meaning in which life has been embedded since it was first framed within the Western political and ontological, i.e. metaphysical paradigm⁹. According to Agamben, biopolitics is a peculiar Western condition, which shapes at the same time life, language and politics, thereby showing their interrelation. As Agamben reports, the entire *Homo Sacer* project

started from the observation that the Greeks did not have a single term to express what we understand by the word life. They made use of two semantically and morphologically distinct terms: *zoè*, which expressed the simple fact of living common to all living things (animals, human beings, or gods), and *bios*, which signified the form or manner of life proper to an individual or group¹⁰.

This distinction between *bios* and *zoè* – which can be traced back to Aristotle – is actually the result of the mutual implication between the two terms. It is precisely their mutual implication that gives rise to something like 'bare life'¹¹. Hence, the relation and distinction between

the natural fact of living (*zoè*) and the qualified and political life (*bios*) takes the shape of an 'inclusive exclusion'. In other words: the political and qualified life (*bios*) constitutes itself through the exclusion of the natural fact of living; hence, the notion of "bare life" emerges. The latter is at the same time excluded from the political and qualified life and included within it as its *removed* foundation. This pivotal 'inclusive exclusion'¹², which lies at the core of Agamben's understanding of biopolitics, concerns the relation between the familiar sphere of the *oikos* and the political sphere of the *polis* as well. As Agamben claims, referring to the Aristotelian paradigms:

human lives participate in a community of *zoè* [but] are constitutively excluded from the political community. The slave, for example, lives in community of life (*koinonos zoès*; 1260a 40) with the master but not in a political community, and the same can be said for women. The family is the place that is inhabited by that life, [...] [and it is LG] constitutively excluded from political life (or, if you like, included through its exclusion)¹³.

Hence, bare life plays a peculiar role in the Western paradigm, since «bare life has the unique privilege in Western politics of being that on whose exclusion the city of men is founded»¹⁴. Moreover, it should be underlined that this inclusive exclusion dynamic first takes shape within the metaphysical, which is to say

ontological, paradigm of *logos*. It concerns an ontological operation – the very operation which is involved in the Aristotelian ontological definition of the human being as a *zoon logon echon*. What is at issue, therefore, is the ontological understanding of the human being as the animal who has language, which is to say how the articulation of *logos* has been conceived in the metaphysical tradition. In his early essay *Language and Death*, Agamben underlines that the articulation of language has been spelled out by metaphysical thought according to a double negativity, meaning a process of ‘inclusive exclusion’¹⁵. Hence, through the notion of ‘Voice’, or *gramma*, Agamben describes the removal of the natural *phoné*, which articulates the transition to the significant language (*logos*). In other words, he describes the inclusion of the natural voice within the *logos* as its negative and removed foundation¹⁶ – that is to say, its inclusion in the form of exclusion. This crucial point is made in the early essay *Language and Death*:

The Voice [...] is defined through [...] negativity. [...] It is in fact identified only as a removed voice, as a having-been of the natural *phoné*, and this removal constitutes the original articulation in which the passage from *phoné* to *logos* is carried out, from the living being to language¹⁷.

Therefore, I suggest that this removal, i.e. this pivotal dynamic of inclusive

exclusion, which is involved in the metaphysical account of *logos*, is further reflected in the relation between *bios* and *zoè* as well as that between *oikos* and *polis*.

In summary, it can be argued that Agamben’s notion of ‘bare life’ spells out the inclusion of the fact of living within political life in terms of its exclusion from it. In other words, bare life is already involved in political life, as the domestic sphere (*oikos*) is involved in the *polis*, thereby being separated and excluded from it as its removed foundation. Herein lies the deep connection between language, life and politics. As Agamben claims:

The question «How does the living being have language?» corresponds exactly to the question «in what way does bare life dwell in the *polis*?», The living being has *logos* by taking away and conserving its own voice in it, even as it dwells in the *polis*, by letting its own bare life be excluded, as an exception, within it¹⁸.

The attempt to develop a notion of life that makes it inseparable from its form responds precisely to the attempt to deactivate the ‘inclusive exclusion’ relation between *bios* and *zoè*, thereby offering a notion of life which is inseparable from its qualifications. This is what the expression ‘form-of-life’ aims to articulate through the unity and inseparability of the terms. Hence, «by the

term form-of-life [...] we understand a life that can never be separated from its form, a life in which it is never possible to isolate and keep distinct something like a bare life»¹⁹.

2 _ The Stoic Doctrine of *oikeiosis* and the Notion of Use

In this second section, I wish to analyze Agamben's reading of the Stoic theory of appropriation (*oikeiosis*) as well as the connection he draws between this theory and the notion of use. As already mentioned, an engagement with the Stoics enables Agamben to sketch out a meaning of life that makes it inseparable from its form: a notion of life which cannot be isolated from its modes of being lived. The Stoics' theory of *oikeiosis* spells out the familiarity of the living being to itself and to its own constitution, i.e. to its modes of being. Despite the fact that the Stoics seem to ascribe to the living being a pre-constituted nature, or innate knowledge, Agamben's reading seeks – on the contrary – to outline that the familiarity which every living being has with itself and its body is neither something substantial nor corresponds to a pre-established end, since it rather «coincides entirely with the use that the living being makes of itself and its body»²⁰. Hence, I wish to show that through his reading of the Stoics Agamben seeks to develop a notion of life, according to which life constitutes it-

self performatively in the very process of using itself and its body, thereby offering a concept of the natural fact of living as an always and already qualified process, which occurs within and therefore coincides with a mode of living.

To begin with, I would like to stress the difficulty of translating the Greek word *oikeiosis* – which does not correspond to any one term in English, Italian or German. Appropriation and orientation are the different translations adopted by scholars²¹. Agamben mostly uses 'familiarization' and related terms. The hypothesis – which Agamben intends to develop following the work of French scholar Thomas Bénatouil²² – is that the Stoic theory of *oikeiosis* must be understood as a doctrine of the use-of-oneself. Agamben starts by discussing the passage from Diogenes Laertius which transmits Chrysippus's thought about the doctrine of *oikeiosis*:

A living thing's first impulse [*hormè*] is toward self-preservation, because nature from the outset has rendered it familiar to itself [*oiekiouses autoi tes physeos ap'arches*], as Chrysippus affirms in the first book of his work *On Ends*; his own words are: «for every living being the first familiar thing [*proton oikeion*] is its own constitution [*systasin*] and its awareness [*syneidesin*] [...] of it»²³.

Agamben draws attention to the translation of the Greek term *syneidesin*, which has been usually translated

as ‘awareness’. He claims, following Pohlenz, that in the text of Chrysippus it should probably be read as *synaisthesin*, ‘con-sensation’ or ‘con-sentiment’²⁴. According to this suggestion, the *proton oikeion*, that which is most familiar to each living thing, is its own constitution and the con-sensation of it. According to Agamben, this familiarity with its own constitution, as well as the sensation thereof, lies precisely in the use of the body parts by the animal. For instance, winged animals use their wings by flying and have a sensation thereof. Agamben aims to rethink the Stoic theory of *oikeiosis* against and beyond both the providential character of nature and innatism, which are central tenets of Stoic philosophy. For this reason, he refers to Lucretius, who radicalizes the Epicurean critique of every form of teleologism. Agamben notes that, according to Lucretius,

the living being does not make use of its body parts [...] for some one predetermined function, but by entering into relation with them, it so to speak gropingly finds and invents their use. The body parts precede their use, and use precedes and creates their function²⁵.

Furthermore, Agamben explores the connection between the theory of *oikeiosis* and the notion of use-of-oneself. In order to develop this connection, he focuses on Seneca’s *Moral Letter to Lucilius*. In particular, he analyzes Letter 121. What emerges here is the relation

between familiarity, self-sensation and the use of the self. In this letter, Seneca aims to answer the question “whether all living beings have sensation of their constitution” (*constitutionis suae sensus*). According to Seneca, the sensation of their constitution (*constitutionis suae sensus*) belongs to all living beings, and it is attested by the confidence, agility and expertise which animals show in the use of their bodies. Seneca compares the agility of the animal in using its limbs to the skillfulness of the workman or the painter²⁶. As Bénatouïl argues, in the Stoic context ‘use’ spells out the very familiarity of the animal with itself. Therefore, Seneca neither understands the meaning of use according to a poetical paradigm of utilization, nor establishes a hierarchical control of the soul over the body²⁷. Let us consider the passage by Seneca to which Agamben refers:

So all living things have a sensation of their own constitution [*constitutionis suae sensus*], and for that reason can manage their limbs as readily as they do [*membrorum tam expedita tractatio*]; nor have we any better proof that they come into being equipped with this knowledge [*notitia*] than the fact that no animal is clumsy in the use of itself [*nullum animal ad usum sui rude est*]²⁸.

According to Agamben, the use of the body by the animal is not the proof of any form of innate knowledge. Rather, he underlines above all the constitutive

connection between the ‘use of itself’ (*usus sui*) and the ‘sensation of one’s own constitution’ (*constitutionis suae sensus*). Agamben claims that the living being constitutes itself as such in the very process of using itself and its body. The winged animal, for example, makes use of the wings and therefore constitutes itself in, and coincides with, this mode of living (i.e. flying). The function of the body parts is no longer a pre-determined and fixed *telos*, since it rather occurs – together with the living being which makes use of it – in the very process of using. From this perspective, it may be argued that the living being spells out a performative process, since it constitutes itself, occurs and coincides with a mode of living. As Agamben puts this point:

[The] self—despite the fact that the Stoics seem at times to preconstitute it in a nature or an innate knowledge—is therefore not something substantial or a pre-established end but coincides entirely with the use that the living being makes of it (*usus sui*—which Seneca also defines as care-of-oneself, *cura mei*)²⁹.

In summary, it can be argued that Agamben’s critical appropriation of the Stoic theory of *oikeiosis* brings out a concept of living being that constitutes itself performatively, since it occurs in, and coincides with, its modes of living. From this perspective, the connection between the Stoic theory of *oikeiosis* and

the notion of use offers an account of life which is inseparable from its form, i.e. from its mode of being lived. Through this reading, Agamben outlines an alternative paradigm, one which stands in contrast to the mutual implication and distinction between *bios* and *zoè*, thereby sketching out a notion of life which is inseparable from its form, «a life in which it is never possible [...] to keep distinct something like a bare life».³⁰

3 _ Use as a Way of Living

As witnessed by the connection just outlined between *usus sui* and *cura mei*, the notion of use spells out, above all, a form of care of the self: it embodies a way of living. In the notion of use ontology and ethics show their indiscernibility. Thus, if the living being constitutes itself and coincides with the use of itself, it is precisely in this way of living – that is, in this *ethos* – that ontology and ethics coincide. In this last section, I first of all wish to illustrate the indiscernibility of ontology and ethics belonging to the *modal* ontology of use; second, I aim to develop an account of use as the ongoing transformation of one’s way of living, whereby one learns – according to the diathesis of the middle voice – to become actively affected by one’s modes of living. What is at issue, therefore, is the ongoing task of experiencing within «the life that we live (*vita quam vivimus*)»³¹ – in our actual

conditions and in «the sum of events which constitute our biography»³² – «the life by means of which we live (*vita qua vivimus*), that which renders life livable and gives to it a sense and a form»³³.

As already outlined, Stoic philosophy offers an ontological account of the living being, which does not determine *what* life is, thereby pointing to an essence. Rather, according to the Stoics, a living being coincides with a *mode of living*. This account involves a radical shift that deeply transforms Aristotelian ontology. Thus, Agamben argues that:

once being is displaced onto the level of living, essence and existence, potential and act, material and form are indeterminated and now refer to one another as ‘living’ and ‘life’, [...] as [...] ‘living life’ [...]. [This paradigm L.G.] had found its first formulation among the Stoics: «For living is being; but being life is a certain mode». [...] And just as mode adds nothing to substance and is only a [...] manner of being, so life adds nothing to living; it is only the form that is generated in it by living: precisely form-of-life, in which living and life become indiscernible³⁴.

Paraphrasing Agamben’s reading of Heidegger, it may be argued that a living being that constitutes itself in the use of itself and coincides with it, does not possess an essence, which is indifferent to its existence or modes of being. Rather, this living being – as Agamben claims by referring to Heidegger’s concept of *Da-*

sein – «is always and already its mode of being»³⁵. Thus, within the concept of form-of-life, according to which life is generated by living and coincides with a mode of living, a modal ontology is involved³⁶. Also, it is crucial to notice that a modal ontology shows the constitutive co-belonging of ontology and ethics, since «the mode in which something is, the being thus of an entity is a category that belongs irreducibly to ontology and to ethics»³⁷. Furthermore, according to Agamben, the way of living in which ontology and ethics show their coincidence necessarily involves a «medial»³⁸ enactment, the very middle voice diathesis in which the verb *chresthai* is expressed in the old Greek. At issue here is a way of living the «life that we live (*vita quam vivimus*)», meanings, our biographic and effective conditions, in which we experience the affection that we receive by our modes of living, thereby becoming *actively affected* by it.

I would describe this way of living as a specific manner of relating to oneself and to one’s own modes of being. This way of living involves a transformation of the *relation* to one’s own works and effective conditions, whereby we are no longer their authors or subjects, and no longer passively undergo them. The notion of use as an art of living spells out what I would call a ‘medial’ performative enactment, which can neither be understood as an activity nor conceived as a passive undergoing. Rather, what is at

issue here is a performative enactment, which must be expressed in the middle voice. By analyzing the work of the French linguist Benveniste³⁹, Agamben underlines that the middle voice implies precisely the suspension of the distinction between subject and object as well as that between agent and patient. In the middle voice:

[o]n the one hand, the subject who achieves the action, by the very fact of achieving it, does not act transitively on an object but first of all implies and affects himself in the process; on the other hand, precisely for this reason, the process presupposes a singular topology, in which the subject does not stand over the action but is himself the place of its occurring⁴⁰.

The middle voice spells out a verbal occurrence and this means a mode of living – such as, for instance, speaking, growing, and enjoining, to quote Benveniste's examples of medial verbs⁴¹ – in which one is at the same time the agent and the place of their occurring, since «one achieves something which is being achieved in him»⁴². In the 'medial', «one constitutes oneself in the affection that one receives»⁴³, so as to become *actively affected* by one's mode of living⁴⁴. Hence, as in the case of playing the piano, the latter has no other object than the affection, which one receives from and within the enactment. Moreover, the player is not the agent or the subject of

the action of playing, but rather becomes confident and skillful, since she actively experiences the affection which she receives by the enactment, thereby «articulating a zone of non-consciousness»⁴⁵. It should be argued – with reference to the Stoic doctrine of *oikeiosis* – that one becomes a 'familiarized' player precisely the moment in which one no longer relates to oneself as the owner of the ability to play, but rather constitutes oneself in the affection which one receives by playing: when one is «in a relation of use with something to the point of being able to lose and forget oneself in it»⁴⁶. As Agamben claims by referring to the Stoic theory of *oikeiosis*:

[I]f the gestures and acts of the animal are agile and graceful («no animal is at a loss in the use of itself»), this is because for it no act, no gesture constitutes a "work" with respect to which it is posited as the responsible author and conscious creator. It is in this way that we must conceive of [...] the use-of-one-self. Every use is the articulation of a zone of non-consciousness⁴⁷.

The use of oneself as a way of living can be further clarified by considering other examples related to art and craftsmanship. As Agamben further writes:

just like the poet, so the carpenter, the flute player, [are not] transcendent title-holders of a capacity to act or make: rather, they are living beings that, in the use and only in the

use of their own body parts as of the world that surrounds them, have self-experience and constitute themselves as using (themselves and the world)⁴⁸.

The notion of use therefore spells out an art of living, which requires an ongoing transformation of our relation to ourselves and to the world. As Agamben claims, interpreting Paul's crucial notion of 'as not' (*hos me*): «a form-of-life is that which ceaselessly deactivates the conditions it finds itself living in, without negating them, but simply using them»⁴⁹. This deactivation does not mean negating the conditions we live in, and therefore the life that we live (*vita quam vivimus*). As in the case of the dancer, the player, or the carpenter, what is at issue is not a renunciation of the life that one lives, i.e. of the effective condition of being a dancer, or of the actual artefacts one produces as a carpenter⁵⁰. Rather, what it is at issue here is «the mode in which each person, in losing himself as subject, constitutes himself as form-of-life»⁵¹, thereby experiencing «the life by means of which we live (*vita qua vivimus*), which gives to [life] a sense and a form»⁵². The use of ourselves coincides with the never-ending task of experiencing within the life that we live (*vita quam vivimus*) the life by means of which we live (*vita qua vivimus*), so as to experience within the effective conditions we live in *how* we live them. In other words: «“My” form-of-life relates not to *what* I am, but

to *how* I am what I am»⁵³. The notion of use points to a transformation of one's way of living, whereby one becomes actively affected precisely by the medial character of the form-of-life. As Agamben claims, «[i]f every body is affected by its form-of-life, the ethical subject takes responsibility for the mode in which it is affected»⁵⁴, thereby taking actively care of the affection which one receives from one's mode of living. In conclusion, it may be argued that «the ontology of the *how* coincides with an ethics»⁵⁵ and that it «can be understood only as a medial ontology»⁵⁶.

_ NOTE

1 _ G. AGAMBEN, *L'uso dei corpi, Homo Sacer* IV, 2, Neri Pozza, Vicenza 2014, p. 48; *The Use of Bodies*, transl. by A. Kotsko, Stanford University Press, Stanford (Ca) 2015, p. 24.

2 _ See *ibidem*, p. 53; transl. p. 28.

3 _ On the middle voice, see the important study by R. ELBERFELD, *Sprache und Sprachen. Eine philosophische Grundorientierung*, Karl Alber, Freiburg 2012, in particular pp. 228-260.

4 _ G. AGAMBEN, *L'uso dei corpi*, cit., p. 53; transl. cit., p. 28.

5 _ See *ibidem*, p. 49; transl. cit., p. 25.

6 _ *Ibidem*, pp. 57-58; transl. cit., pp. 32.

7 _ The notion of form-of-life has been developed by Agamben in different works. A first enigmatic appearance of the concept is found in the conclusion to the first volume of the *Homo Sacer* project: see G. AGAMBEN, *Homo Sacer. Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita*, Einaudi, Torino

2005, p. 211; *Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Homo Sacer 1., transl. by D. Heller-Roanzen, Stanford University Press, Stanford (Ca) 1998, p. 188. The notion is further developed in G. AGAMBEN, *Mezzi senza fine. Note sulla politica*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 1996; *Means without Ends. Note on Politics*, transl. by V. Binetti, C. Casarino, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2000, Chap. 1, pp. 3-14. The concept is explored in depth by Agamben through his engagement with Franciscan life, see G. AGAMBEN, *Altissima povertà. Regole monastiche e forma di vita*, Homo Sacer IV, I, Neri Pozza, Vicenza 2001; *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*, transl. by A. Kotsko, Stanford University Press, Stanford (Ca) 2013. On the concept 'form-of-life' see, for instance, the entry by A. MURREY, *Form-of-life*, in *The Agamben Dictionary*, ed. by A. Murray and J. Whyte, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2011, pp. 71-73; as well as the reconstruction offered by C. SALZANI, *Introduzione a Giorgio Agamben*, Melangolo, Genova 2014, pp. 134-137. For an assessment of the concept in light of its tension with the notion of *opus*, as well as a critique of the failure to further develop the political implications of this concept in *The Use of Bodies*, see the important contribution by A. LUCCI, *L'opera, la vita, la forma. La filosofia delle forme-di-vita di Giorgio Agamben*, in *Giorgio Agamben. La vita delle forme*, ed. by A. Lucci, L. Vigliani, Melangolo, Genova 2016, pp. 69-94.

8 _ On the difference between Agamben's and Foucault's understanding of the notion of biopolitics, see for example S. PROZOROV, *Agamben and Politics: A Critical Introduction*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2014,

pp. 93-99; and N. HERRON, *Biopolitics*, in *The Agamben Dictionary*, cit., pp. 36-39. See also M. OJAKANGAS, *Impossible Dialogue on Bio-power. Agamben and Foucault*, «Foucault Studies» 2 (2005), pp. 5-28.

9 _ An important debate on the complex relation between metaphysics, and therefore deconstruction, and biopolitics – within and beyond Agamben's thought – is offered by the Italian Thought. See E. STIMILLI, *Decostruzione o Biopolitica?*, ed. by E. Stimilli, Quodlibet, Macerata 2017. For a comprehensive assessment of Italian Thought and its effects on both the broader philosophical debate and the political horizon, see E. LISCIANI-PETRINI, G. STRUMMIELLO, *Effetto Italian Thought*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2017.

10 _ G. AGAMBEN, *L'uso dei corpi*, cit., p. 264; transl. cit., p. 207. As it is well known, he is referring here to the introduction to the first work in the *Homo Sacer* project: G. AGAMBEN, *Homo Sacer. Potere Sovrano e nuda vita*, cit., p. 3; transl. cit., p. 1.

11 _ On the notion of bare life see, for example, the entrance by A. DE BOEVER, *Bare Life*, in *The Agamben Dictionary*, cit., pp. 30-31, and the contribution by D. GENTILI, *Il mistero della separazione*, in *Giorgio Agamben. La vita delle forme*, cit., pp. 51-68.

12 _ On the relation between this inclusive exclusion and sovereign power, see G. AGAMBEN, *Homo Sacer. Potere Sovrano e nuda vita*, cit., pp. 19-34; transl. cit., pp. 15-25.

13 _ G. AGAMBEN, *L'uso dei corpi*, cit., pp. 252-253; transl. cit., p. 198.

14 _ G. AGAMBEN, *Homo Sacer. Potere sovrano e nuda vita*, cit., p. 10; transl. cit., p. 7.

15 _ On the close relation between the notion of 'Voice' and that of 'bare life' according to this inclusive exclusion, see S. PROZOROV, *Agamben and Politics: A Critical Introduction*, cit., pp. 93 ff.

16 _ On the notion of 'Voice', see G. AGAMBEN, *Il linguaggio e la morte. Un seminario sul luogo della negatività*, Einaudi, Torino 1982; *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, transl. by K.E. Pinkus, M. Hardt, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2006. The notion of 'Voice' (capitalized) points to the negative foundation of language, which lies at the core of the metaphysical understanding of language, thereby marking metaphysical thought from Aristotle, through Hegel and Heidegger, to Wittgenstein's distinction between *Sagen* und *Zeigen*. This notion of 'Voice' spells out the pure intention of meaning and it is, therefore, neither natural voice (*phoné*) nor discourse (*logos*), thereby indicating the very taking place of language. This notion of 'Voice' expresses the *removed* natural voice (*phoné*): this removal articulates the passage from *phoné* to *logos*. From this perspective, the articulation of language coincides with a pure negativity. Cf. C. SALZANI, *Introduzione a Giorgio Agamben*, cit., p. 39.

17 _ G. AGAMBEN, *Il linguaggio e la morte*, cit., p. 104; transl. cit., p. 84.

18 _ G. AGAMBEN, *Homo sacer. Potere Sovrano e nuda vita*, cit., p. 11; transl. cit., p. 8.

19 _ G. AGAMBEN, *L'uso dei corpi*, cit., p. 264; transl. cit., p. 208.

20 _ *Ibidem*, p. 84; transl. cit., p. 54.

21 _ On the difficulty of translating the term and for an overview of the debate about the different translations adopted by scholars, see J. SELLARS, *The Art of Living: The Stoics on*

the Nature and Function of Philosophy, Bloomsbury, London 2009, Kindle-Version p. 167. On the notion of *oikeiosis* see S.G. PEMBROKE, *Oikeiōsis*, in *Problems in Stoicism*, ed. by A.A. Long, Athlone, London 1971, pp. 114-149. See also G. STRIKER, *The Role of Oikeiosis in Stoic Ethics*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy» 1 (1983); repr. in *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996, pp. 281-297; and T. ENGBERG-PEDERSEN, *The Stoic Theory of Oikeiosis, Moral Development and Social Interaction in the Early Stoic Philosophy*, Aarhus University Press, Aarhus 1990.

22 _ T. BÉNATOUÏL, *Faire usage: La pratique du stoïcisme*, Vrin, Paris 2006.

23 _ G. AGAMBEN, *L'uso dei corpi*, cit., p. 78; transl. cit., p. 49.

24 _ Cf. M. POHLENZ, *Grundfragen der stoischen Philosophie*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1940, p. 7, quoted in *Ibidem*.

25 _ G. AGAMBEN, *L'uso dei corpi*, cit., p. 81; transl. cit., p. 51.

26 _ SENECA, *Ad Lucilium epistulae morales*, 3 vol., transl. by R.M. Gummere, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Ma) 1962, vol. 3, pp. 399-401.

27 _ See T. BÉNATOUÏL, *Faire usage: La pratique du stoïcisme*, cit., pp. 24-25.

28 _ SENECA, *Ad Lucilium epistulae morales*, cit., p. 401, quoted in G. AGAMBEN, *L'uso dei corpi*, cit. p. 83; transl. cit., p. 53.

29 _ *Ibidem*, p. 84; transl. cit., p. 54.

30 _ *Ibidem*, p. 280; transl. cit., p. 207.

31 _ *Ibidem*, p. 288; transl. cit., p. 226.

32 _ *Ibidem*.

33 _ *Ibidem*.

34 _ *Ibidem*, p. 284; transl. cit., p. 222.

35 _ *Ibidem*, p. 227; transl. cit., p. 175. As it is well known, the reference here is to Heidegger's famous statement in *Sein und Zeit*: «Das "Wesen" des Daseins liegt in seiner Existenz. Die an diesem Seienden herausstellbaren Charaktere sind daher nicht vorhandene "Eigenschaften" [...] sondern je ihm mögliche Weisen zu sein» (M. HEIDEGGER, *Sein und Zeit*, Gesamtausgabe GA 2, ed. by F.W. von Hermann, Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M. 1977, pp. 56-57). Agamben claims that Heidegger did not make the modal character of his ontology explicit for the same reason he avoided engaging with Spinoza's philosophy: see G. AGAMBEN, *L'uso dei corpi*, cit., p. 227; transl. cit., p. 175. It is not possible in the context of this paper to consider more deeply the transformation of all the Aristotelian categories according to a modal ontology, as well as the relation between Heidegger's and Spinoza's ontology. My aim here is just to briefly sketch out the meaning of a modal ontology, by using Heidegger's account of *Dasein* and his redefinition of the relation between essence and existence, the very relation to which Agamben refers to.

36 _ See G. AGAMBEN, *L'uso dei corpi*, cit., pp. 192-227; transl. cit., pp. 146-175.

37 _ *Ibidem*, p. 226; transl. cit., p. 174.

38 _ Agamben states: «Modal ontology can be understood only as a medial ontology. In the first part of this book, we have called "use" a medial process of this kind» (*ibidem*, p. 215; transl. cit., p. 165).

39 _ E. BENVENISTE, *Active and Middle Voice in the Verb*, in *Problems in General Linguistics*, transl. by M.E. Meek, University of Miami Press, Coral Gables 1971, pp. 145-152.

40 _ G. AGAMBEN, *L'uso dei corpi*, cit., p. 53; transl. cit., p. 28.

41 _ E. BENVENISTE, op. cit., p. 148.

42 _ *Ibidem*, p. 149.

43 _ G. AGAMBEN, *L'uso dei corpi*, cit., p. 215; transl. cit., p. 165.

44 _ See *ibidem*, p. 55; transl. cit., p. 30.

45 _ *Ibidem*, p. 85; transl. cit., p. 64.

46 _ *Ibidem*, p. 123; transl. cit., p. 88.

47 _ *Ibidem*, pp. 94-95; transl. cit., p. 64.

48 _ *Ibidem*, p. 92; transl. cit., p. 62.

49 _ *Ibidem*, p. 347; transl. cit., p. 274. This crucial conception of transformation, which does not concern *what* we experience (i.e. our effective conditions,) but rather *how* we experience them, refers to Paul's notion of '*bos me*' and has been developed by Agamben in his reading of Paul's Epistles. As Agamben writes: «the *bos me* [...] does not only have a negative content; rather, for Paul, this is the only possible use of worldly situations. The messianic vocation is not a right, nor does it furnish an identity; rather, it is a generic potentiality [*potenza*] that can be used without ever being owned. To be messianic, to live in the Messiah, signifies the expropriation of each and every juridical-factual property (circumcised/uncircumcised; free/slave; man/woman) under the form of the *as not*. This expropriation does not, however, found a new identity; the "new creature" is none other than the use and messianic vocation of the old» (G. AGAMBEN, *Il Tempo che resta. Un commento alla Lettera ai Romani*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 2000, p. 31; *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, transl. by P. Dailey, Stanford University Press, Stanford [Ca] 2005, pp. 26-27). A very close notion of transformation as

an inversion (*Umwendung*) which concerns *how we enact* the relation to the factual conditions in which we live has been spelled out by Heidegger in his early lecture focused on Paul's notion of *hos me*: see M. HEIDEGGER, *Einleitung in die Phänomenologie der Religion* (Wintersemester 1920/21), ed. by M. Jung und T. Regehly, in *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens*, Gesamtausgabe 60, Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M. 2011.

50 _ Agamben's notion of use must be taken to refer to all modes of living and therefore both

to the Carpenter's activity of making (*poiesis*) and the praxis of playing (*praxis*) in Aristotelian terms. Thus, «the use of the body is, in Aristotelian terms, neither *poiesis* nor *praxis*» (G. AGAMBEN, *L'uso dei corpi*, cit., p. 42; transl. cit., p. 23).

51 _ *Ibidem*, p. 294; transl. cit., p. 231.

52 _ *Ibidem*, p. 288; transl. cit., p. 226.

53 _ *Ibidem*, p. 295; transl. cit., p. 231.

54 _ *Ibidem*.

55 _ *Ibidem*.

56 _ *Ibidem*, p. 215; transl. cit., p. 165.