

DIVINE MANAGEMENT OF WORLDLY MATTERS: AGAMBEN'S THEOLOGICAL GENEALOGY OF ECONOMY AS A POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF PRAXIS

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to provide an interpretation of Agamben's theological genealogy of economy that will show its significance for investigations in the field of political economy. The only way to connect the discourses of economic theology and political economy is to show that the former is not concerned with questions proper to the sphere of economics, but rather deals with a more general problem – the problem of human praxis. I will show that what is at stake in Agamben's endeavors is a critique of theological, that is metaphysical, presuppositions about the concept of human praxis, a critique which can only be carried out on the basis of a theological genealogy, in particular of the Trinitarian *oikonomia*. The text will focus on the notion of liturgy in Agamben's genealogical investigations as a theological paradigm for the capitalist management of human life (i.e. praxis) and will close with some initial remarks on the possible application of Agamben's theological genealogy of economy to a Marxist critique of political economy, especially to a critique of the distinction between productive and unproductive labor.

Keywords: economic theology, political theology, economy, glory, liturgy, praxis, labor, effectiveness, productivity, Giorgio Agamben, Karl Marx

The aim of this paper is to provide an interpretation of Agamben's theological genealogy of economy that will show its significance for investigations in the field of political economy. The only way to connect the discourses of economic theology and political economy is to show that the former is not concerned with the production and circulation of use value (goods) or exchange value (money) or with the peculiar commodity that is labor, but rather deals with a more general problem – the problem of human praxis. I will show that what is at stake in Agamben's endeavors is a critique of theological, that is metaphysical, presuppositions about the concept of human praxis, a critique which can only be carried out on the basis of a theological genealogy, in particular of the Trinitarian *oikonomia*. The text will focus on the notion of liturgy in Agamben's genealogical investigations as a theological paradigm for the capitalist management of human life (i.e. praxis) and will close with some initial remarks on the possible application of Agamben's theological genealogy of economy to a Marxist critique of political economy, especially to a critique of the distinction between productive and unproductive labor. Its aim is to show the need for a political philosophy of human praxis, which itself must be confronted with its theological roots in order to provide any critique of political economy. Agamben's theological genealogy of economy can help in elaborating a more philosophical background for a Marxist critique of political economy, first of all because of its focus on the problem of potentiality, which was also essential for Marx in his preparatory studies for *Capital*. Therefore I will link Agamben's genealogy of liturgy (both the liturgy of the monastic life and the liturgy of the ecclesiastical office) to *Results of the Immediate Production Process*, the unpublished sixth chapter of the first volume of *Capital*, in which Marx develops his understanding of the subsumption of labor under capital. It is my view that in Agamben's work we can find a broader paradigm of a *liturgical subsumption of praxis* that might prove useful for a research into the subsumption of life in the contemporary capitalist economy.

In a preface to his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* Marx wrote, with a wit familiar to his readers, that anyone “who tries to hide his complete ignorance and intellectual poverty [...] has yet to furnish the first proof that besides his theological family affairs he has anything to contribute to a discussion of *worldly* matters” (Marx 1988, 14–15). The contemporary discourses on economic theology try nevertheless to show that the discussion of the worldly matters must at some point come to grips with the theological family affairs¹.

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Economic theology and political economy

The initial inspiration for this text came from a young Italian politician and philosopher², who formulated a thesis that the contemporary revival of economic theology in Italy is a form of conceptual smokescreen, or even an intellectual diversion, that allows for theoretical research into the problems of political economy – meaning of course Marxist political economy – without taking up the discourse of political economy itself. Although the thesis looks at first glance like a valid one, bearing some heuristic value, it provokes the question: why would such a smokescreen even be necessary? Leaving aside the problem of an ideological climate in contemporary Europe which might prevent a discourse based on Marxist economics from gaining recognition, the proliferation of academic analyses in the field of economic theology makes pressing a more general question: what is the relationship between a critique of economic theology, or a theological genealogy of economy, and political economy? Are they just two different discourses explicating the same problems from different perspectives, or is an analysis or genealogy of economic theology really able to deliver a theoretical insight into political economy that the latter is – at least to a certain extent – unable to provide on its own? The latest books on the subject by Roberto Esposito (2013) and Elettra Stimilli (2011; 2015) have shown that the economic-theological paradigm makes possible a very productive coupling of discourses which links contemporary governance by debt with the questions of the formation of subjectivity and contemporary forms of governmentality. One might argue about whether they really offer any theoretical added value to the research carried out by, among others, Maurizio Lazzarato (2012; 2015), but it is especially the critique of the dispositive of the person in Esposito's *Due* which proves that analysis of the paradigm of political and economic theology can widen the genealogy of contemporary subjectivity and refer it to the general context of the theory of law and politics. The question of subjectivity and praxis is central also to Stimilli's *Il debito del vivente* (2011), where the praxis of ascesis is being explored precisely in its *inoperational* character, which can be opposed to the operative character of both capitalism and religion.

Therefore, economic theology doesn't provide a simple smokescreen for Marxist research into political economy. Although one might refer to the famous "theological niceties" that appear at the end of the first chapter of *Capital* (Marx 1990, 163), the dialectic method used by Marx deals rather with the common dialectical roots of theological and economic thinking, than with a call for a theological genealogy with its own method or presuppositions. A theological genealogy of economy doesn't give us insight into the nature of value, the mode of capitalist production or the essence of money, but into a concept of

2 It was Michele Fiorillo from the Possibile party at the conference "Immunity and Modernity" held in 2015 in Leuven.

subjectivity and a notion of praxis that provide the core of modern forms of governance of capitalist societies. Therefore, as a genealogy and simultaneously a critique of the notion of human praxis, it constitutes a suitable conceptual tool with which to confront (neo)liberal economics, focused first of all on the rationality and action of human beings³. This is most evident in Giorgio Agamben's famous *Il regno e la gloria*, a second segment of the second volume (II.2) of the *Homo sacer* series⁴, which Agamben himself declares is a theological genealogy not of Marx's critique of political economy, but of Foucault's investigations into the governmentality of modern societies (Agamben 2011, xi). Foucault's late work constitutes the main point of reference for practically all attempts at a critique of economic theology in contemporary Italian political philosophy (Gentili 2015), as may be evidenced by the central role that is played in those endeavors by the notion of the *dispositif* (Agamben 2009; Esposito 2013, 4)⁵. Agamben not only traces the roots of the Latin term *dispositio* in the Greek *oikonomia*, but also translates it using Heidegger's notion of *Ge-stell* (Agamben 2011, 252)⁶, thus situating his theological genealogy of economy not only in the field of the archeology of power and the hermeneutics of the subject, but also in a horizon of the critique and dismantling of metaphysics. In *Opus Dei*, the last segment of the second volume of the series, dealing with the archeology of the office, Agamben develops further the significance of his investigations into economic theology for a "history of being":

One can ask to what extent this reconstruction of the determinate influence of Christian theology on the history of being is indebted to the privilege accorded to the creationist paradigm. It is by virtue of this model that Heidegger could think the essence of technology as production and disposition and the *Gestell* as the securing of the real in the mode of availability. But precisely for this reason he was not able to see

3 It is clearly visible in the overriding role praxeology plays in the classical works of neoliberal theory, especially in Ludwig von Mises' *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (von Mises 1949). The prevalence of the notions of subjectivity and action in neoliberalism is also present in Foucault's reconstruction of neoliberal biopolitics (Foucault 2010).

4 I put so much emphasis on the classification of *Il regno e la gloria* in Agamben's "sacred man" series since the numeration of volumes and segments is not a chronological, but a logical one. There exists, in my opinion, an organizing principle that explains not only the *dispositio* of the books in the series but also why only the second and the fourth volumes are divided into segments. To put it briefly: the first volume introduces the general problem of the series – the relation of life to power and the question of the division (e.g. between *dzoe* and *bios*) that accompanies the concept of power and politics in Western philosophy and political theory. The second volume deals with different dispositives of power (state of exception, glory, sacrament, oath, office, etc.), which explains its division into segments. The third volume (Agamben 2002) presents the most radical effect of the diagrammatic division of life into *bios* and *dzoe* in Western politics and therefore constitutes a sort of passage to the fourth volume, which tries to conceptualize a form-of-life, life beyond the division introduced by the dispositives of power.

5 For a critique of Agamben's use of the concept of *dispositif*, see Pasquinelli 2015.

6 Esposito performs the same conceptual operation, although from a different genealogical perspective (Esposito 2013, 20).

what has today become perfectly obvious, and that is that one cannot understand the metaphysics of technology if one understands it only in the form of production. It is just as much and above all governance and *oikonomia*, which in the last analysis can even provisionally put casual production between parentheses in the name of a more refined and diffuse form of management of human beings and of things (Agamben 2013a, 61).

A theological genealogy of economy can therefore be understood as a critique of metaphysics: not metaphysics of production, i.e. of making entities into a resource for industrialized production, but rather metaphysics of governance – which also means *organization* of the production process, or rather organization and management of the production and reproduction of life (a management of life that reduces it to its own production and reproduction). It still remains an open question whether Agamben accepts the reactionary Heidegger's stance towards the possibilities of technological development, and it may be the case that the interpretation of the above paragraph from *Opus Dei* will become the criterion for distinguishing the conservative and progressive interpretations of Agamben's thought in the future, but it is clear that the problem Agamben himself declares to be the stake of his investigations into economic theology is the *analysis of the metaphysical foundations of modern governmentality*⁷. A corollary thesis would be that only a theological genealogy gives insight into the metaphysical foundations of governance. However, this still leaves us with no answer to the question: what is the relation between the theological genealogy of economy – a critique of metaphysics of governance – and political economy?

Foucault's genealogical approach to power and subjectivity and Heidegger-inspired dismantling of metaphysics constitute the proper conceptual horizon for Agamben's theological genealogy of economy, since the Italian philosopher is first of all interested in the question of human praxis. Technically one should say that the proper stake is the notion of life which Agamben tries to free from the fundamental distinction between *dzōe* and *bios* (Agamben 1998), *vita* and *regula* (Agamben 2013b) or, finally, between *dynamis* and *energeia* (Agamben 2014). But this doesn't change the fact that every investigation Agamben has undertaken in the field of political philosophy, political theology and the theory of power was carried out from the perspective of the problem of human praxis. To put it briefly: the key to understanding the contemporary mechanisms of power, including forms of economic power,

⁷ Just as his whole philosophical project can be summarized as a genealogical investigation into the metaphysical presuppositions of politics: "ontology and politics correspond perfectly with each other" (Agamben 2014, 173).

lies, according to Agamben, in a properly philosophical research into the concept of human praxis⁸, which requires also an economical-theological genealogy.

This may also help us to understand why Agamben's investigations into the genealogy of economy have often been misinterpreted as applying directly to economic questions. A short review of some of these (mis)interpretations may also facilitate a further elaboration of the relation between economic theology and political economy, since they show exactly what is *not* the true problem of Agamben's work. The reference to the term "biopolitics" and Foucault's genealogy of biopower has placed his investigations in the context of research into contemporary forms of the (re)production of life which came to be defined as "biopolitical": that is, productive of *bios* itself (languages, affects, ideas, signs, information, relations, etc.)⁹. Hardt and Negri, the main theorists of biopolitical labor, have underlined the unproductive character of Agamben's concept of biopolitics: "Agamben transposes biopolitics in a theological-political key, claiming that the only possibility of rupture with biopower resides in 'inoperative' activity [...] completely incapable of constructing an alternative" (Hardt and Negri 2009, 58)¹⁰. Agamben's later work on economic theology has only strengthened his emphasis on the *inoperativity* of human life, making it clear that it is not the biopolitical labor, the productivity of life which exceeds any imposed capitalist measure or value form, but exactly the *unproductive* aspect of life that is the stake in his genealogy of *oikonomia*. The sphere of production, i.e. productivity of social life, and labor, cannot therefore be an object of his interest.

The question of labor is nevertheless closely related to the problem of praxis. Foucault, Hardt and Negri have pointed out that labor in Marx is first of all a production of man by man (Hardt and Negri 2009, 136), i.e. the praxis of man's self-production. Agamben targets this topic directly in *Il regno e la gloria*, where he writes:

When Marx [...] thinks the being of man as praxis, and praxis as the self-production of man, he is after all secularizing the theological idea of the being of creatures as divine operation. After having conceived of being as praxis, if we take God away and

8 There's no place in this text to compare Agamben's and Esposito's critiques of economic theology, but it might suffice as an initial contribution to such a comparison to state that, while Agamben focuses on the problem of human praxis as unfounded and unrelated metaphysically to the mechanisms of power, Esposito tries to formulate an ontology of *communitas* of living subjects. That is, while Agamben explicates life with the help of a notion of praxis (to be precise: use, *chresis*; see Agamben 2014), Esposito explicates social practices and structures through a notion of communal life, *communitas*.

9 Therefore the coupling of production and reproduction – biopolitical labor removes the distinction between the production and the reproduction of society; however, it does not cancel the distinction between the production and reproduction of capital as a social relation, since the latter is founded on the distinction between use and exchange value.

10 The unproductive character of Agamben's notion of biopolitics has been underlined earlier, also in reference to more orthodox interpretations of Foucault; see Lemke 2005.

put man in his place, we will consequently obtain the result that the essence of man is nothing other than praxis through which he incessantly produces himself (Agamben 2011, 91).

According to Agamben the concept of human subjectivity that constantly produces itself is a secularized concept of God whose *oikonomia*, i.e. activity and praxis, is completely separated from its being to the extent that God's economy constitutes his very being. But it nevertheless remains a *productive* practice that is aimed at a certain result, this result being in an extreme case its very self-production (in contrast to the inoperative contemplation and experiencing of man's own potentiality; see Agamben 2011, 250–251). Jessica Whyte has meticulously criticized Agamben's account of early Marx, focusing on the difference between a specific *capitalist* subsumption of labor that is the object of Marx's critique and a despotic domination over the slave's labor that was characteristic of the Aristotelian *oikos* (Whyte 2014, 180). Agamben's error, a result of his deconstruction of the Christian theology of will, supposedly consists in mistakenly taking the master-slave relation for a paradigm that can help us understand the situation of the capitalist laborer (Whyte 2014, 192). I don't think Whyte is right in her critique of Agamben, but what she manages to show is that we have to abandon the terrain of labor – in a manner similar to the one she proposes by referring to Althusser and his critique of the humanist notion of labor in early Marx (Althusser 2003) – and move to a more general sphere of praxis that cannot be reduced to any form of labor. Agamben's genealogy of economic theology, and liturgy in particular, has given us a more general diagram of the subsumption of praxis, one that might also be applicable to Marxist political economy.

A strong critique of Agamben's work on economic theology has been formulated by Alberto Toscano (2011). His argument is particularly important for the question of the relation between economic theology and political economy, since Toscano doesn't focus on Agamben's inability to explain contemporary changes in the labor and production processes, but instead shifts his critique towards the problems of division and distribution, i.e. the fundamental question of accumulation. Assuming an orthodox Marxist stance, Toscano claims that a theological genealogy of governance is incapable of explaining the unstable nature of capitalism which is the result of unlimited accumulation, a truly "anarchic" process, yet constitutive of the capitalistic organization of economy. Therefore Toscano stresses that it is not the problem of a genealogy of management, but of *chrematistics*, i.e. a science of the unlimited accumulation of money, that we have to undertake in order to carry out a critique of political economy (Toscano 2011, 130–131). Showing the importance of chrematistics both for Aristotle and for Marx, Toscano states that "Agamben's theological genealogy is incapable of providing much insight into the (value) forms that determine (dis)order of the

contemporary economy” (Toscano 2011, 132), or into the problem of the communist idea of the administration of things (Toscano 2011, 133).

Toscano is right that Agamben’s work is of no use when it comes to the absolutely fundamental question of Marxist political economy, that is, the value form. And although some of his remarks concerning Agamben’s method can be seen as simply malicious, his paper shows that it is also not to the sphere of distribution (or circulation) that we can relate a theological genealogy of economy. Although Agamben links the concept of a spontaneous order and the “invisible hand” of the market to the question of divine economy and providential machine (Agamben 2011, 261–287), his insight doesn’t get us nearer to the genealogy of the (neo)liberal concept of market than the works of, i.a., Foucault (2009; 2010), Harvey (2007) or Mirowski (2013).

It is then neither the analysis of production and reproduction, nor that of labor, nor that of distribution and circulation, and finally: nor that of the form of value to which the genealogy of economic theology can contribute. But it is the problem of praxis and the theological genealogy of the governance of human life, the *management of the effectiveness of human praxis*, that constitutes Agamben’s proper interest and is able to offer a contribution to a wider, philosophical research, extending to the field of contemporary political economy. The problem of the “divine management”, to use the formulation from the title of Toscano’s paper, remains therefore an important or even pressing one, but only if we consider it to be a management of “worldly matters”, that is, a theological genealogy not of divine management of the world or God’s *oikonomia*, but of a liturgical management of human praxis.

A theological genealogy

But why a *theological* genealogy? Why does the problem of human praxis require a philosophical explication within a conceptual horizon of the theology of Trinitarian economy and the theological question of divine providence? Agamben’s focus on theology, a result of his earlier investigations into the history of metaphysics, has found its fulfillment in the epilogue to the *Homo sacer* series with the introduction of the concept of *destituent power*. What in *State of Exception* Agamben described with reference to Benjamin’s concept of “studying” (Agamben 2005, 64), the result of which would be the deactivation of law, in the last volume of the series takes on the form of a power that “is capable of deposing every time the ontological-political relations by revealing the connection between their elements” (Agamben 2014, 344). Those elements, e.g. life and language, bare life and law, or constituent and constituted power, are related to each other by the logic of a metaphysical *arche*

that constitutes itself by splitting the factual experience [l'esperienza fattizia] and removing at the origin – that is excluding – one half that will later be rearticulated with the other one, included as the fundament. This is the way the city finds itself on the division of life between bare life and political life, human being defines itself on the basis of the exclusion-inclusion of the animal, the law on the basis of the *exceptio* of the anomaly, the government on the basis of the exclusion of the inoperativity and its capture in the form of glory (Agamben 2014, 336).

The same logical structure gives foundation both to the metaphysical discourse that relates human life to language, and the political philosophy that relates human life to law and economy:

Just as the tradition of metaphysics has always thought the human being in a form of an articulation of two elements (nature and *logos*, body and soul, animality and humanity), the occidental political philosophy has always thought the political in a figure of a relation between two figures that it was supposed to tie together: bare life and power, the house and the city, violence and the instituted order, anomaly (anarchy) and law, the multitude and the people (Agamben 2014, 344).

What makes theology (political and economic) a privileged field of investigation into both the metaphysical and the political *arche* is the fact that theology is a rational, philosophical discourse on the phenomenon of *revelation*. Agamben's early works on language and metaphysics deal precisely with the notion that the metaphysical presupposition of being as a sphere separated from individual entities, or the "world" as a sphere separated from worldly beings, is an effect of the revelation of language detached from the individual acts of linguistic utterance (Agamben 2006, 26). Language is the only being that always presupposes itself in every single enunciation, which makes it a logical model of the concept of God. In one of his earlier texts on language Agamben refers, probably for the first time, to the Trinitarian dogma in order to explicate this self-presupposing, metaphysical power of language:

From this perspective, the construction of Trinitarian theology appears as the most rigorous and coherent way to consider the paradox of the word's primordial status, which the prologue to the Gospel of John expresses in stating, *en arche ēn ho logos*, "In the beginning was the Word." The Trinitarian movement of God that has become familiar to us through the Nicene Creed [...] says nothing about worldly reality; it has no ontic context. Instead, it registers the new experience of the word that Christianity brought to the world. To use Wittgenstein's terms, it says nothing about *how* the world is, but rather reveals *that* the world is, that language exists. The word that is absolutely in the beginning, that is therefore the absolute presupposition, presupposes nothing if

not itself [...]; its Trinitarian structure is nothing other than the movement of its own self-revelation (Agamben 1999, 40–41).

God triune is the ultimate foundation of power, not because it's assumed to be all-powerful (which is a classically self-contradictory concept), but because it's a foundation that presupposes only itself¹¹. If political philosophy had always operated on the basis of the fundamental split, relating two elements by designating one the foundation of the other (e.g. bare life the foundation of the political life, anomy the foundation of the power of law), it was from the very beginning a political theology, i.e. a reflection on the foundation of praxis of the political animal endowed with language, a reflection, in the final instance, on the metaphysical self-foundation of language, i.e. the absolute divine power. The critique of metaphysics is at the same time a critique of political theology and a political philosophy of the animal that has language, whose praxis is always determined by the mode of its “having” of language¹².

It also means that a theological genealogy of power enables an investigation based on basic binary oppositions¹³. But while political philosophy is founded either on simple or dialectical oppositions (e.g. private/public, individual/general, civil/stately), the oppositions with which a theological genealogy of politics and economy is concerned are always subsumed to the above reconstructed logic of the division of the factual experience of praxis into two concepts, one subordinated to the other. The paradigmatic opposition is the one between *potestas* and *auctoritas* (Agamben 2005, 78–79): *potestas* is not an autonomous power, capable of acting on its own; it must be given legitimization by whomever or whatever is endowed with *auctoritas*. The *auctor* is the one who approves, affirms and ratifies the actions of the subject. The factual experience of one's *dynamis* is divided between pure potentiality on one hand and an external instance that allows for *energeia*, the actualization of the potentiality, on the other.

The relation between *auctoritas* and *potestas* assumes different political and institutional forms, from the ancient power of the *senatus* through the institutions of *iustitium*, *interregnum*, *hostis iudicatio*, *auctoritas principis* declared by Augustus, up to *Führertum* in which *auctoritas* assumed the form of an identity between the leader and the people (Agamben 2005, 84). The *auctoritas-potestas* division constitutes the internal logic of the governmental machine

11 Stefano Oliva (2015) summarizes this basic idea of Agamben's philosophy with the notion of the “presupposing apparatus”. I agree with him that the logic of metaphysical or theological presupposition is the key problem of the whole *Homo sacer* project.

12 One might argue that the main problem of Agamben's early works, especially *Il linguaggio e la morte*, is the destruction or deconstruction of metaphysics by explicating the meaning of the *echon* in Aristotle's definition of the human being. What does it mean to “have” language, Agamben asks, and answers: it is not language (logos) that we have, but “simply the trite words” (Agamben 2006, 94; see also Ratajczak 2013).

13 Which Agamben himself calls for explicitly in a reference to Hölderlin (Agamben 1998, 32–33).

that divides, captures and governs the praxis of men and women. In *Il regno e la gloria* Agamben writes that

[t]he double structure of the governmental machine, which in *State of Exception* appeared in the correlation between *auctoritas* and *potestas* here takes the form of the articulation between Kingdom and Government and, ultimately, interrogates the very relation – which initially was not considered – between *oikonomia* and Glory, between power as government and effective management, and power as ceremonial and liturgical regality (Agamben 2011, xi–xii).

The division between the power of acting (*potestas*) and the power that authorizes the action (*auctoritas*) is supplemented in the theological genealogy of economy with the division between Kingdom and Government and ultimately, which will interest us further, between economy and Glory. In order to explicate Agamben's philosophy of praxis we have to reconstruct the logic of *arche* that lays the metaphysical and theological fundamentals for the theology of economy which we will find in the theology of liturgy.

Oikonomia and Glory

The problem of the divine *oikonomia* of Trinitarian theology, in its political aspect, consists not in its opposition to “political theology”, as proclaimed by Carl Schmitt, but in its supplementation of it with another paradigm, that of governance. Although Agamben opens his book with the reconstruction of Erik Peterson's famous argument that political theology is possible only in pagan religions and in Judaism (especially in the latter since it is built on the idea of one God and one chosen nation), but not in Christian Trinitarian monotheism (Agamben 2011, 10), his meticulous reconstruction of Patristic debates on the Trinitarian dogma shows that the doctrine of the divine *oikonomia* opposes God's being and his actions (his *economy*) only to the extent that it subordinates the economy to the instance that regulates God's “pragmatics”. After the term *oikonomia* became *terminus technicus* in the writings of Hippolytus and Tertulian, it was conceived as a form of arrangement and disposition, being translated later in Latin as *dispositio*¹⁴. In order to make “economy” into a technical term, both Hippolytus and Tertulian reversed the Pauline phrase “the economy of the mystery”, signifying the unveiling of God's plan in the secular world, into the “mystery of the

14 And also *dispensatio*, that is, a suspension of canonical law that relieves one of law because of the *exceptio*, that is, the effect of the mysterious divine action (Agamben 2011, 49). Agamben formulates it even more strongly: “The paradigm of government and of the state of exception coincide in the idea of an *oikonomia*, an administrative praxis that governs the course of things, adapting at each turn, in its salvific intent, to the nature of the concrete situation against which it has to measure itself” (Agamben 2011, 50).

economy”; this now came to signify the true *mysterion* and *oikonomias sacramentum*, “which confers on economy all the semantic richness and ambiguity that means, at the same time, oath, consecration, and mystery” (Agamben 2011, 40). The “mysterious” aspect of God’s economy lies precisely in the very stake of the Patristic discourse on the Trinitarian dogma and its opposition to Gnosticism, that is, the reconciliation of God with the world. Therefore it shouldn’t be at all surprising that for Tertullian “divine monarchy now constitutively entails an economy, a governmental apparatus, which articulates and, at the same time, reveals its mystery” (Agamben 2011, 43)¹⁵. The true *mysterion* (or *arcanum imperii*) of every political (or economic) theology consists of articulating the two elements that were initially separated. When in *State of Exception* Agamben focused on the “empty space” of the state of exception that binds together law and violence, here he focuses on an activity “as such truly mysterious that articulates the divine being into a trinity and, at the same time, preserves and ‘harmonizes’ it into a unity” (Agamben 2011, 39).

In the Trinitarian dogma, therefore, its theological basis finds the doctrine of the *raison d’état*, a secular concept that articulated the governmental apparatus with the higher instance determining the aim and goal of the art of government (Foucault 2008). But it is also a theological formulation of the metaphysical division between substance and praxis (Agamben 2011, 53). According to the doctrine of *oikonomia*, God’s praxis, his economy, is not grounded on his being. Theology and ontology are separated from economy and pragmatics, which makes God’s will truly *anarchic*. It is not only, according to Agamben, the initial formulation of the metaphysics of will, which will resurface later in Schelling and Nietzsche and will be traced by Heidegger throughout Western philosophy. The separation of being and *oikonomia* (action) requires a distinction within the very concept of praxis. Peterson’s contribution to political theology lies precisely in formulating the theological counterpart of the liberal separation between Kingdom and Government, which takes on the form of the distinction between God’s *dynamis* (*Macht*) and God’s *arche* (*Gewalt*) (Agamben 2011, 73). *Le roi règne, mais il ne gouverne pas* is a political formulation of the theological paradigm that separates Kingdom (*arche, Gewalt*) and Government (*dynamis, Macht*), positing the latter as free (anarchic) praxis that must be nevertheless subordinated to the instance of power. This very separation, as Agamben underlines it, opens up “the possibility and necessity of government” (Agamben 2011, 66). The Kingdom-Government opposition therefore mirrors that of *auctoritas-potestas* – in each case praxis is always divided into the possibility of acting or action itself, and the instance that enables the action or governs it.

15 All the more emphatically does Agamben underline his astonishment at Peterson’s thesis on the impossibility of any political theology proper to Christian monotheism, even accusing him of conscious repression of the problem of monarchy in Patristic texts (Agamben 2011, 14).

The logic of economical “mystery”, that is, the articulation of transcendence and immanence, God and world, Kingdom and Government, is best seen in the metaphysical concept of order, *taxis*. Medieval ontology took this Aristotelian notion and transformed it according to the doctrine of the divine economy. The very concept of order in its Aristotelian formulation joined in itself the substance with its presentation in the world, which made it an aporetic articulation of substance and relation (measure, number etc.). If now the being of God is only his *oikonomia*, that is *ordinatio* and *dispositio*, “praxis of government and activity that arranges according to measure, number and weight” (Agamben 2011, 89), then the order of the world becomes the effect of God’s constant creative activity that arranges things in relations. The world is the effect of the praxis of government, but it is also God who becomes this very praxis, who “is no longer only substance or thought, but also and in the same measure *dispositio*, praxis” (Agamben 2011, 90).

The philosophical formulation of the distinction between Kingdom and Government is to be found in Aquinas’ concept of causes. In *Il regno e la gloria* Agamben reconstructs his theory of primal and secondary causes, which not only explicates the Aristotelian notion of *taxis* in the new Christian conceptual horizon, but also gives theoretical fundamentals to the doctrine of providence. The relations between things, elements of the world, are only secondary causes, according to Aquinas. Every secondary cause is also determined (we should probably say “overdetermined”) by the primal cause, which refers the worldly relations to the *order* of the divine *dispositio*. The problem that interests Agamben is “the way in which the first cause governs created things while remaining transcendent with regard to them” (Agamben 2011, 95). The distinction between primal causes and secondary causes enables the distinction between general providence and special providence (Agamben 2011, 94–95) and represents the scholastic attempt to articulate transcendence with immanence, the general with the particular. The praxis of governance is possible because it is separated from the Kingdom and at the same time subordinated to it, which amounts to the necessary articulation of the general providence (understood also as the history of salvation) with special providence (relations in the world), or in Foucault’s terms – *omnes et singulatim* (Agamben 2011, 114).

In *Opus Dei* Agamben returns to Aquinas’ philosophy of causes but approaches it from a different angle – from the point of view of the genealogy of sacramental effectiveness. In order to explicate the efficacy of the sacrament, Aquinas adds a fifth type of cause to the Aristotelian doctrine of four causes: the instrumental cause (Agamben 2013a, 52). An action is efficacious instrumentally only when it acts according to its nature *and* is moved by the principal agent (like the ax that is an instrument of the lumberjack cutting down a tree). Therefore the sacrament is effective not only because of the actions performed by the priest, but also because he acts as an instrument of God’s will. The concept of sacramental

effectiveness coincides with that of divine *oikonomia* and divine providence: the realization of God's economy within the world and history is subordinated to the immanent economy of the Trinity (which turns the two economies into one), the secondary causes constituting the special providence are subordinated to the general providence, and, according to the same logic, the actions of people in the world are truly effective only when considered as instruments of God (actions realizing the divine economy in the world).

The theological notion of *oikonomia* presents therefore an aporetic concept of praxis that is both unfounded *and* subordinated. The separation of God's being from his action – the separation of theology from economy and ontology from pragmatics – discloses the lack of a proper fundament for praxis, life and language, but at the same time captures them in the division between the special/immanent and general/transcendent, articulating the two dimensions in a manner unattainable for the subject of praxis. It is therefore the very logic of this articulation that constitutes the basis and grounding of praxis¹⁶. The articulation constitutes the proper *oikonomias sacramentum*, the sacramental and mysterious character of the concept of the unfounded, and hence free, praxis bequeathed to Western philosophy by the Trinitarian dogma. The political problem of divine *oikonomia* now consists precisely of envisioning a form of *worldly* praxis of men and women which would be the structural counterpart of God's *oikonomia*, subordinating the free actions to the divine economy.

The theological dispositive that articulates worldly actions with God's economy, subsuming therefore human praxis under the split between Kingdom and Government (but also between *auctoritas/potestas*), is Glory. The theology of Glory, i.e. *doxology*, is preoccupied with the problem of the rearticulation of the division, both between the persons within the immanent economy (Father-Son-Holy Spirit) and between God and the world. Glory is the term that signifies the basic, fundamental relation between transcendence and immanence:

As we have already seen with regard to the term "order", which means as much a transcendent relation with God (*ordo ad Deum*) as a property immanent in creatures (*ordo ad invicem*), so glory is at once an essential attribute of God and something that creatures owe to him and that expresses their relation to him. Moreover, in the same way that the dual meaning of the term "order" ultimately ends up befitting the very essence of God, so the ambiguity of the term "glory" makes of it the name that defines God's most intimate nature (Agamben 2011, 214).

16 This figure of articulation as (metaphysical) grounding appears for the first time in *Il linguaggio e la morte* (Agamben 2006) in the figure of mute Voice, which presents the negative grounding of the human disposition to speak.

The proper problem of economic theology, according to Agamben, is not so much Glory as glorification, the praxis of praising God and his economy. The difference between Glory as an attribute of God and glorification as a praxis of the creation is nevertheless inherent in the very theological concept of Glory, which reproduces the aporetic articulation present in the notion of divine *oikonomia*. Glory denotes a mode of God's existence and a mode of participation in God's existence, joining the two aspects to the extent that it comes to conceptualize the existence of God as dependent on the activity of glorification (Agamben 2011, 221). God exists only because the world he created praises him – and the world praises him because it was created by God. Glorification is at the same time concerned with ontology (“to be”) and ethics, understood here as having-to-be¹⁷: God has to be praised in order to be; the worldly creatures were created in order to uphold God in his existence through praise.

It becomes clear why Agamben analyzes Glory as a theological dispositive that captures the inoperative character of human praxis (Agamben 2011, 245). The distinctive character of human life is the absence of any work or task the fulfillment of which should be the aim and goal of politics or ethics proper to the animal that has language (Agamben 2007). The theological paradigm of divine economy is a paradigm of praxis that is free, ungrounded, but at the same time directed towards the realization of an abstract, empty task of glorifying the divine praxis of governing the world, i.e. God's economy. The distinction between Kingdom and Government isn't only a theological formulation of the liberal paradigm of governance, but is itself based on the idea of *oikonomia*, praxis that is free only insofar as it realizes and fulfills the *a priori* principle (general providence, immanent economy of the Trinity, history of salvation etc.).

The analogy with the liberal concept of the market is striking. The principle of Smith's “invisible hand” reproduces the articulation between “immanence” and “transcendence” that we have seen in the case of the concepts of order and providence. The theological genealogy of economy allowed Agamben to deconstruct the apparent opposition between “naturalism” and “providentialism” (an order based on the needs of the “stomach” in the first case and an order envisioned previously in God's “brain”) which drove discussions among supporters of the free market in the 18th century, and to relate the *natural order* of the market back to the governmental machine founded on the distinction between Kingdom and Government:

If it is probable that the Smithian image of the invisible hand is to be understood, in this sense, as the action of an immanent principle, our reconstruction of the bipolar machine of the theological *oikonomia* has shown that there is no conflict between

¹⁷ Agamben analyses this aporetic link between “to be” and “having-to-be” more precisely in *Opus Dei* (Agamben 2013, 118–125).

“providentialism” and “naturalism” within it, because the machine functions precisely by correlating a transcendent principle with an immanent order. Just as with the Kingdom and the Government, the intradivine trinity and the economic trinity, so the “brain” and the “stomach” are nothing but two sides of the same apparatus, of the same *oikonomia*, within which one of the two poles can, at each turn, dominate the other (Agamben 2011, 284–285)¹⁸.

But the deconstruction of the natural “order” of the market isn’t the only contribution that Agamben’s theological genealogy of economy can make to political economy¹⁹. The concept of *taxis*, “order”, is founded on the separation between Kingdom and Government, which we have already seen is a different formulation – in a theological-economical conceptual key – of the *potestas-auctoritas* division, between power to act and power that enables and legitimizes the act. We can say that this separation of *dynamis* from *arche* (or *Macht* from *Gewalt*) founds the very possibility of governing and managing the lives of men and women, the human praxis in all its forms – including labor. If so, capitalism as an economic regime that governs and regulates the labor of men and women in order to valorize capital – the true God of modern times – must be founded on its own version of this division – and the articulation of the divided elements: which constitutes its own logic of conditioning the effectiveness and legitimization of praxis. A change of perspective is necessary. In order to relate the theological genealogy of economy to political economy, we need to go beyond the concept of market and investigate the form of praxis that market presupposes. We already know that it is a free and subordinated praxis – but how is this subordination to be understood? What are the metaphysical conditions of the capitalist governance of labor and, generally speaking, life? In order to give preliminary responses to these questions, we have to include in our investigations the political theology of liturgy.

18 This passage from *Il regno e la gloria* is one of the most important of Agamben’s contributions to the genealogy of modern liberalism and its “biopolitics”. The spontaneity of the market is “natural” only insofar as the actions of the participants in the market follow one principle, which makes market a “governable” sphere of praxis. See also notes by Foucault: “If we take things up a bit further, if we see them up at their origin, you can see that what characterizes this new art of government I have spoken about would be much more a naturalism than liberalism, inasmuch as the freedom that the physiocrats and Adam Smith talk about is much more the spontaneity, the internal and intrinsic mechanics of economic processes than a juridical freedom of the individual recognized as such” (Foucault 2010, 61).

19 And it is also not the most important one. Investigations into the theological roots of Smith’s concept of the “invisible hand” have been an important field of research at least since the publication of the famous article by Jacob Viner *Adam Smith and laissez faire* (Viner 1927; see also Oslington 2012). Many researches (including also those of Benjamin M. Friedman, Peter Harrison and Emma Rothschild) have pointed towards stoicism, Scottish Calvinism, British Scientific Natural Theology and the concept of the Natural Law as possible theological influences on Smith’s thinking (see Oslington 2011, Rothschild 2002). Agamben’s contribution to these debates may nevertheless consist of referring Smith’s concept of natural order to the Trinitarian theology and also of a deeply philosophical reading of this theological tradition.

Liturgy and office

According to Peterson, liturgy is the proper Christian form of politics. In opposition to Schmitt, for whom political theology must be based on the power of Christian *imperium*, Peterson separates Augustine's two Kingdoms, leaving it up to the Church to join the celestial and worldly forms of power: "the cult of the celestial Church and, therefore, also the liturgy of the earthly Church that is bound to the celestial, have an originary relation with the world of politics" (Peterson 1994, 202; see also Agamben 2011, 145). This "originary relation" is theologically grounded on the doctrine of Glory: liturgy is a form of worldly, organized praxis aimed at the glorification of God. The political significance of liturgy consists of participating through the glorification of the creator in his Glory, thus creating a worldly public sphere for the members of the Church as a sphere of the communal praise. *Leitourgia*, after all, means a "work" (*ergon*), a service performed for the people (*laos*). The separation of Kingdom from Government excludes the possibility of any political theology in Schmitt's sense – of a direct, "miraculous", sovereign intervention in the realm of worldly politics. But it is the praise of the Kingdom, the principle of the general providence, that is in itself political, since it affirms the "order" in the world – but only the order that aims at the subordination of worldly relations (effects of the "free" will of people) to the divine economy (history of salvation). By exhorting *heis theos* [one God], the Church as a community submits to the transcendent instance and creates its own public sphere in the form of a ceremony (Agamben 2011, 168). The genealogy of the ceremonial aspect of power constitutes a significant part of Agamben's investigations into economic theology (see Agamben 2011, 167–196). Nevertheless, the aspect of liturgical action that interests us here is not so much ceremony as effectiveness:

The mystery of the liturgy is, in this sense, the mystery of effectiveness, and only if one understands this arcane secret is it possible to understand the enormous influence that this praxis, which is only apparently separate, has exercised on the way in which modernity has thought both its ontology and its ethics, its politics and its economy (Agamben 2013a, xii).

The "mystery" of the liturgy corresponds to the mystery of the divine economy, i.e. the articulation of the transcendent principle, presupposed as the aim and goal that enables the governance of the *taxis*, with the immanent order. An "effective" action in this sense is an action that joins the worldly order to the general principle of that order. The "effectiveness" of liturgy was thus perfect in the person of Jesus Christ – a worldly incarnation of God and simultaneously an element of the immanent economy of the Trinity – who, as the highest priest, was the subject of actions that were all perfectly effective. The mystery of Christ's

economical effectiveness was later transformed into the doctrine of the “ministry” of liturgy. With the translation of the Greek *mysterion* into Latin as *sacrament*, the effectiveness of liturgical practice, that is the subsumption of praxis of every member of the Church under the principle of God’s Kingdom, came to be formulated in the doctrine of sacramental effectiveness (Agamben 2013a, 16). In order to be effective, the liturgical action must articulate praxis *in* the world with the general instance *of* the worldly order.

The form of this liturgical “originary relation”, which we could also term “liturgical subsumption of praxis”, isn’t limited, according to Agamben, to the Church’s doctrine of the sacrament or praise (exhorting *heis theos* or singing hymns to the Glory of God). To put it otherwise, if the state of exception reduced any form of life to bare life, to the biological foundation of political or ethical life, the political theology of liturgy gives birth to many different forms of life, all nevertheless subordinated to participation in God’s Glory. In *Altissima povertà* Agamben traces the liturgical subsumption of praxis to the concept of *regula vitae* of the monastic life, according to which the monks were to “construct their life as a total and unceasing liturgy or Divine Office” (Agamben 2013b, xii). The separation of *regula* and *vita*, in the same manner as *auctoritas* was separated from *potestas* and Kingdom from Government, introduced a new concept of the governance of life, one based on the subsumption of life under the *a priori* formulated rule of conduct that encompasses all aspects of life in its entirety. Probably the best example of the liturgical subsumption of praxis in monastic life was the imperative of the incessant study of the text of the *regula* itself. The monk should spend as much time as possible in reading the text of the monastic rules or, should that be impossible, in meditating on the text and reciting it from memory (Agamben 2013b, 77–78). The reading or recitation of the text of the *regula*, which itself prescribes its own reading or recitation by the monk, is a form of perfectly self-referential and thus absolutely effective liturgical practice: just as with the aporetic articulation of “being” and “having-to-be” in the concept of Glory, the liturgy of monastic life is perfectly realized in a praxis of following the rule that prescribes only obedience to itself. The self-referential character of the rule that one must recite and read the rule is the most abstract form of the monastic praxis that illustrates the general structure of the liturgical subsumption of praxis under the *regula vitae*: the idea of making every moment of life and every form of action a realization of a rule and hence of liturgy:

As *meditatio* renders *lectio* potentially continuous, so every gesture of the monk, all the most humble manual activities become a spiritual work and acquire the liturgical status of an *opus Dei*. And precisely this continuous liturgy is the challenge and novelty of monasticism, which the Church was not slow to pick up on, seeking to introduce, albeit within certain limits, the totalitarian demand proper to the monastic cult into cathedral worship as well (Agamben 2013b, 83).

Hence the detailed rules concerning the monk's diet, clothing, and daily schedule; generally speaking: his habit, *habitus*. But it is precisely this liturgization of life and vivification of liturgy (Agamben 2013b, 82) that makes the monastic form of liturgy specific and different from the liturgy of the Church, although the latter had incessantly sought to reconcile the “two liturgies” – the liturgy of monastic life and the liturgy of the priestly ministry. Because of this difference Agamben penetrates the archives of *regulae vitae*, especially the Franciscan one, underlining the distinction between the two liturgies in order to delineate a possible concept of a *form-of-life*, a form of practice that would elude the liturgical subsumption of praxis. But in order to do that – and also in order to reconstruct his political philosophy of praxis – it isn't sufficient to just reverse somewhat the relation between *regula* and *vita*. It is also necessary to reconstruct the liturgical structure of effectiveness and move beyond the presupposed structures conditioning the effectiveness of human praxis.

The liturgical effectiveness of monastic life consisted in subordinating every aspect of the monk's life, every form of worldly action, to the rule that prescribed a specific way in which this action should be carried out. The action realized the liturgy of monastic life because it was carried out in a specific manner, according to the rule, and the rule existed only in the actions performed according to the rule. The monk who doesn't live according to a specific form of life is not a monk. By contrast, the priest realizes the ministry whose effectiveness is independent of the way he leads his life (Agamben 2013b, 84). The sacrament granted by the priest is effective because of the priestly *office*, because the priest is the *instrument* of God's will, i.e. his economy. According to the doctrine of the sacrament, the priest's action is divided into *opus operantis*, i.e. the very *worldly* action of the subject with its physical characteristics, and *opus operatum*, i.e. the effective, liturgical reality of the sacrament (Agamben 2013a, 21). Sacrament is the *mystical* (i.e. *sacramental*) unity of these two aspects of priestly action. In the ecclesiastic liturgy of the office, the division between *regula* and *vita*, the metaphysical basis for the liturgy of the monastic life, takes the form of the division between *opus operantis* and *opus operatum*. An action is effective only insofar as it is *also opus operatum*, that is, as it realizes God's economy in the world. The principle of the action's effectiveness is not an element of the subject's action and – as we have seen before in case of other oppositions traced by Agamben in his theological genealogy – the *mystical* articulation of *opus operantis* and *opus operatum* is unattainable for the subject of the action. The articulation of the two elements lies beyond the sphere of the subject's action, but still constitutes the fundament of its effectiveness.

The two liturgies present two different forms of the liturgical subsumption of praxis. The first form, the liturgy of the monastic life, concerns the way the action is carried out: it makes a certain form of praxis effective only insofar as it is performed according to the rule. It is a disciplinary form of governance of life, molding an individual's form of life in every

possible aspect. Today we can see this form of governance active in corporations or in books advocating the “entrepreneurship of the self” (Bröckling 2007) and issuing an endless list of rules of conduct in order to perform the liturgy of modern enterprise. The second form, the liturgy of the office, is not interested in the form of the action, that is, in the way it is performed, but subsumes praxis *as it is*, as *opera operantis*, under the principle that grants it effectiveness or confirms its effective character. It is not the question of the conduct, of *life*, but of the instance that grants life sacramental effectiveness. In the first liturgy the ethical and even physical aspects of the subject are taken into account in determining the effective character of monastic life. In the second liturgy the subject is just a carrier of the action, the effective character of which is decided according to the office.

The management of effectiveness and productivity

Emanuel Alloa stresses the fact that economic theology is first of all interested in the problem of diversity – and the management of this diversity (Alloa 2015, 300). The economy of the flow of glory between the persons in the Trinity (immanent economy) and between the Trinity and the world would set the paradigm of the management of life (in theological terms: the creation) and the *taxis* of the world. Our focus on the concept of liturgy is intended to show that it is not only the flow of glory, the *economy of glory*, but far more the liturgy, or as we call it “the liturgical subsumption of praxis”, that constitutes the theological paradigm for the management of the living. In the genealogy of the liturgical praxis – the praise of God’s name, the monastic *regula* or the ecclesiastic office – Agamben was able to reconstruct the paradigm of *effectiveness* that enables the management of the praxis of men and women. For how is it possible to manage the praxis of the multitude? The aim is not so much to govern all area of worldly praxis by taking into account the intentions of the subjects of praxis or their effects *in* the world alone, as to set an instance determining the effectiveness of the praxis independently of the actions themselves. What counts in the liturgical subsumption of praxis is the function of a given action in the service of God, i.e. as a realization of his *oikonomia* (Agamben 2013a, 25). The liturgical reality of praxis is, according to the Church’s doctrine of sacraments, its *effective reality*, its *Wirklichkeit*, a reality that is effective and that effectuates. For this reason Agamben states that the liturgy sets the paradigm for the ontology of effectiveness, in which “being is inseparable from its effects; it names being insofar as it is effective, produces certain effects, and at the same time is determined by them” (Agamben 2013a, 41).

But liturgy is not only an ontological paradigm; it is also a paradigm of praxis, including a model of the subject of praxis. Just as, according to the doctrine of glory, God is only his *oikonomia*, so the subject of liturgical praxis is only this praxis as *opus operatum*. But at

the same time, just as the concept of God's economy entails an aporetic relation between God and creation – in which the worldly creatures were created in order to praise God, that exists only because of this glorification – so the liturgical subsumption of praxis entails an aporetic articulation between *being* and *duty* (*having-to-be*) that “institutes a circular relation between *being* and *praxis*, by which the priest's *being* defines his *praxis* and his *praxis*, in turn, defines his *being*” (Agamben 2013a, 81). It is not a paradigm of praxis defining being (*existentia* that determines *essentia*), but a circular and aporetic articulation of praxis that realizes a being with a being that exists only as effectuated by a certain form of praxis. This is why the liturgical subsumption of praxis coincides with the notion of *taxis*, but also sets the paradigm for a market subjectivity: the subject of liturgical praxis is at the same time *being* and *relation*. Although this definition of the subject (as at the same time a being in relation and the relation itself) is generally true for the human being as the subject of language (Virno 2011, 33), in the case of the liturgical subsumption the subject of praxis is related, *in its being*, to a divine economy (the principle of order or the “invisible hand of the market”); that is, to the *instance of the worldly order and not to the world* or worldly beings. This is precisely the reason why the theological doctrine of economy and liturgy establishes the paradigm for the management of the living: by introducing the paradigm of effectiveness, it defines the multitude as beings that need to be effectuated by their praxis, the effectiveness of which is determined by an instance (in the case of the ecclesiastic liturgy – the Church)²⁰ that remains transcendent to this praxis. The liturgical subsumption includes the praxis (*life*) of men and women only to the extent that it excludes it (that is, includes it as an animate instrument of God's economy, but excludes it as a simple, worldly praxis).

This aporetic concept of liturgical effectiveness constitutes the most important difference between the monastic and ecclesiastical liturgies. The monastic liturgy, the vivification of liturgy in the monastic *regula*, reduces the effectiveness of praxis to the realization of the monastic rule. The aporetic articulation of being and having-to-be is in this case reduced to the introduction of the highest rule that prescribes the *lectio* or *meditatio* aimed at repeating (out loud or in the monk's head) the text of the *regula*. Just as the absolute performative, i.e. the sentence “I speak”, is always a felicitous performative (Virno 2015, 49), since it refers solely to its own linguistic reality, so does the reading and repeating of the text of the *regula* represent the maximum of liturgical effectiveness, since the aim of the monastic liturgy is to uphold the *regula* constituting the monastic *koinos bios*. In the terminology of

20 We might pose a question here about the extent to which Agamben's genealogy of liturgy contributes to the famous thesis by Max Weber that capitalism developed out of the protestant work ethic (Weber 2013), namely: to what extent was the development of the protestant work ethic only an institutional transformation of the paradigm of the liturgical subsumption of praxis – that is, a renunciation of the Church as the instance determining the effectiveness of praxis, but without the renunciation of the concept of liturgy as a proper form of Christian ethics and politics?

speech acts one can differentiate between the two liturgies on the basis of the possibility of felicity, i.e. effectiveness: while the monastic liturgy enables the felicity of the liturgical praxis – a realization, although not a *fulfillment*, of the rule, the liturgy of the sacrament is founded on the office of the priest, in which “the *opus operantis* can coincide with the *opus operatum* only on condition of being distinguished from it and can be distinguished from it only on condition of disappearing into it”: which means that “its felicity is its infelicity and its infelicity is its felicity” (Agamben 2013a, 25). In other words, the action of the priest can never be considered effective on its own merit alone. The self-referential character of the monastic *regula* (that prevents fulfillment but enables realization of the rule) is transposed here into an aporetic structure of the ecclesiastical office and the subjectivity of the priest. It is now because of the office – of a metaphysical quality or disposition of the subject – that praxis can be effective. In the concept of the priestly office, the Aristotelian separation of *dynamis* and *energeia* ceases to denote two different modes of being and becomes a diagram of effectiveness (Agamben 2013a, 91–92), whereby a certain disposition, a certain *dynamis*, determines that the actions of the priest are effective, but this very *dynamis* exists only insofar as it is being effectuated. It is therefore the ecclesiastical liturgy of the sacrament that sets the proper paradigm for the management of the living, subordinating the free praxis of the multitude to an instance that determines the effectiveness, i.e. felicity of its praxis. Which also means that it determines the political character of the life of the multitude.

Agamben’s genealogy of liturgy therefore prepares the ground for a truly political philosophy of praxis which should consist not only of analyzing different forms of praxis (e.g. communicative praxis, exchange, manual labor, care for others), but also of exploring the structural, institutional and metaphysical mechanisms determining these forms of praxis as belonging to a certain sphere (economy, politics, ethics, etc.) or as realizing certain processes aimed at producing certain effects. The liturgical subsumption of praxis sets, according to Agamben, a general paradigm of the “effectiveness” of praxis independently of the material qualities of the actions of the subjects of praxis. It is now becoming clear why Agamben has made the proper task of his philosophy to think the *inoperativity* of human life. For it is precisely this *inoperativity* that escapes the liturgical subsumption, and it is the inoperativity that constitutes a paradigm of a perfectly *worldly praxis*, not aimed at realizing any task, any work; or rather, not being effectuated *in order to fulfill a certain task*.

The question of a determination of praxis by a transcendent instance through effectuation is precisely the point at which Agamben’s political philosophy crosses paths with political economy. The theological genealogy of economy deals with the problem of metaphysical presuppositions of the management of praxis. These metaphysical presuppositions operate, as we’ve shown earlier, by dividing the factual praxis into two elements and setting one as the fundament for the other. The very engine of this

metaphysical operation was language, because of its pre-suppositional character which is paradigmatic for any concept of political theology and metaphysics (ontology). But there is an additional presupposing force in the modern world, no less divine than language – capital. The famous unpublished sixth chapter of the first volume of *Capital*, known more widely as *Results of the Direct Production Process*, is one of the best examples of Marx's deconstruction of the metaphysical fundamentals of capitalist societies (Marx 2009). Marx deals here not so much with the metaphysical appearance of commodity exchange, as with the metaphysical determination of labor as *productive* and *unproductive*. He describes, with perfect clarity, the self-presupposing power of capital, whereby the capitalist relationships of production not only result in the commodity form of the products, but presuppose the commodity form of all elements of the production process, and the wage relation as the only possible labor relation (Marx 2009, 22)²¹. Here is the very “mythic violence” (Benjamin 1996) of capital. And, in the same metaphysical manner, capitalist relations are founded on the fundamental division and the rearticulation of the divided elements: it is not only the commodity that is a sensible unity of the use and exchange value, but it is also the process of labor that is a unity of the process of labor (producing use value) and valorization (producing exchange value, valorizing capital) (Marx 2009, 70). The presupposing power of capital not only transforms all elements of the production process and the effects of previous labor (dead labor) into capital, establishing the process of circulation of commodities as the source of all being, but also makes the process of valorization into the *opus operatum* for every form of labor. The fundamental logic of the liturgical subsumption of praxis, i.e. the division between *opus operantis* and *opus operatum*, is reproduced in capitalism, as Marx presents it, in the division between *productive* and *unproductive labor*²². Marx introduces the discussion on the productivity of labor just after he finishes the analysis of the real subsumption of labor, i.e. the development of the *properly capitalistic* form of production, which has as one of its effects the tendency to transform all forms of labor into *productive labor*. A labor is productive *only insofar as it is an element of the process of valorization*. Marx formulates it bluntly in a manner that replicates the logic of the effectiveness of the liturgical praxis:

21 This metaphysical presupposing power of capital is probably best analyzed by different theorists working with the notion of primitive accumulation. The very violence, the “secret” of primitive accumulation is a necessary element in introducing the capitalist relations of production, since capital, according to its defining notion, has no beginning; it presupposes itself as its own source; see e.g. De Angelis 2001.

22 Marx discusses the concept of productivity of labor in a more historical manner in *Theories of the surplus value*, but it is first of all the texts of the *Results...* that present his understanding of the division between productive and unproductive labor in the wider, more systematic context of the development of capitalistic relations of production and the subsumption of labor under capital.

Only this worker is productive, whose process of labor is – to the productive process of the consumption of his potential to work [Arbeitsvermögens] – the bearer of this work [der Träger dieser Arbeit] – by the capital or a capitalist (Marx 2009, 123).

One of the effects of the subsumption of labor under capital is the transformation of the worker into a “bearer of work”, or better – the installment in his subjectivity of the disposition, the potentiality to work²³ (Ratajczak 2014). But he is only this bearer insofar as this capacity to work is effectuated *productively*, i.e. according to the *oikonomia* of capital (valorization of value) by the capitalist, the owner of the means of production or of financial capital. Marx stresses the fact that the *productive* character of labor is independent of its form, content, or even the wage relation (Marx 2009, 124–125): a worker can receive a wage for e.g. educating the children of the capitalist, but then he is not considered a *productive* worker, i.e. he is not directly valorizing capital. To put it otherwise, the productive labor is a (mystical) unity of *opus operantis* and *opus operatum*, a process of labor and a process of valorization. The instance that determines this mystical union is capital or a capitalist that uses, *actualizes* the worker’s potential. What follows is that only those workers have the capacity to work whose capacity can be effectuated productively by capital.

Productive labor and *productive laborer* are aporetic concepts, repeating almost without distinction the aporetic logic of the divine *oikonomia* and the liturgy of *officium*: the productive laborer must be effectuated by capital in order to be productive, and capital exists only because there are forms of praxis that can valorize it. A productive laborer has the potential to work productively, but only if it is effectuated *by capital* – he is therefore this abstract potential, but he also has to actualize it in order to be this potential. He is what he is, but also is the extent to which he is the relation between his potential (his being) and capital. The divine self-presupposing power of capital changes the multiple forms of social praxis in order to effectuate them productively: in order to become *productive*, a form of praxis must be made into a *potential to be actualized*, which also means measured, coded, compared, etc. and separated from other forms of praxis. It is precisely this installment of the relation to *actualize the capacity to work*, together with the appropriation of the means of work and subsistence, that constitutes the proper political power of capital as social relation. It sets the process of valorization as the fundament, as *opus operatum*, against which the forms of praxis are measured and determined. This political power becomes all the more evident with the development of cognitive and finance-driven capitalism, in which the accumulation of value is conducted *outside of the production process*, on the basis of the processes of circulation and

23 The word *Arbeitsvermögen* is of course a common noun in the German language, used by Marx as a synonym for *Arbeitskraft*, work force. But it shouldn’t be treated as a merely lexical question, since *Vermögen* means precisely capacity or even disposition. What’s more, in *Results...* Marx uses the classical philosophical distinction between *dynamis* and *energeia* abundantly to describe the properly capitalistic relations of production.

social reproduction (Marazzi 2011, 48), and of an increasing number of *dispositifs* to intercept the value created by social labor without transforming it into productive labor (which would mean, apart from other things, some form of income for the productive activity). It is a specific, economic state of exception, which operates on the *labor/valorization* division and defines the paradigmatic form of praxis as *productive labor* (unity of the process of labor and the process of valorization), but simultaneously excludes a growing portion of activities as *unproductive* (as simply labor, or rather simply *life*) – a matter of the *private* lives of the individuals (e.g. biological reproduction) or *public* matter (e.g. cultural or academic production) and creates new forms of life (e.g. the entrepreneurs of the self) on the basis of their potential to *actualize their productive potential*.

The unity of *labor* and the *valorization process* is becoming more and more questionable in contemporary capitalism, which creates processes of valorization independent of labor (e.g. high-frequency trading) and deprives more and more forms of labor of the quality of being “productive”. But the violence of capitalism, an effect of its divine, presupposing power, consists of maintaining its general framework despite the social and technological changes that make it dysfunctional. It is in this sense metaphysical, or even theological, since it is based on the paradigm of effectiveness that we have inherited from metaphysics and theology. Contemporary investigations into economic theology can therefore presuppose the grounds for thinking beyond the concept of subjectivity and praxis that are still present in the way we envision social relations in capitalist societies – the relation of debt, the productivity of labor, the ownership of oneself and one’s body, the development of “human capital”, etc. It is then not a matter of replacing political economy with economic theology, nor even of correcting research in the field of political economy from a theological point of view, but of rethinking the problem of praxis and subjectivity which is also present at the heart of political economy.

Agamben’s theological genealogy of economy can thus be perceived not only as a theological genealogy of the concept of market, but far more in terms of its elaboration of the political aspect of liturgy, as a theological genealogy of the concept of *productive labor*. It is a theological-economic concept (appearing already in the first concepts of modern political economy: in the physiocrats, Smith and Ricardo) that joins a certain form of praxis (certain forms of labor) with capital in a manner elaborated in the liturgical notion of the office, which joins the worldly praxis with God’s *oikonomia*. Capital is not only an accumulation of value, it is also an *actualization of productive labor* – which also means *the force that makes social labor productive* (“productive” in the sense analyzed and criticized by Marx). And productive labor is a form of praxis that valorizes capital – which also means a form of praxis that upholds the existence of capital, that requires capital in order to be effectuated, to exist. *Productive labor cannot exist without capital and capital cannot exist without productive labor* – both notions presuppose

each other in the aporetic and circular manner that we have seen operating in the concept of the liturgical subsumption of praxis. The “productive” character of labor is as much an issue of “economics” as an effect of social struggles (like the struggle for wages for housework; see Federici 2012) and a metaphysical problem of the “effectiveness” of being. The critique of “productivity” of labor should become the object not only of the contemporary critique of political economy and social transformation, as we can see it e.g. in Guy Standing’s critique of the distinction between (productive) labor and (unproductive) work (Standing 2014), but also of a philosophical critique of praxis, ethics and politics. The “productivity” of labor (or *life*, for that matter) in capitalism is just as much a metaphysical notion of a “form” of labor, as the value form is a metaphysical notion of wealth (or of the common), and should be criticized through notions and investigations that go beyond the vocabulary of political economy towards the critique of the metaphysical residue present in economic notions. Economic theology therefore constitutes a preliminary research field for a political philosophy of praxis that will be able to introduce a non-capitalistic form of praxis, one that goes beyond the “productive” (or “effective”) character of human – and also not human – life.

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TYTUŁ: Boskie zarządzanie świeckimi sprawami. Agambenowska teologiczna genealogia ekonomii jako polityczna filozofia praktyki

ABSTRAKT: Celem tego artykułu jest przedstawienie takiej interpretacji Agambenowskiej teologicznej genealogii ekonomii, która ukáže jej znaczenie dla badań w obszarze ekonomii politycznej. Jedynym sposobem na powiązanie dyskursów teologii ekonomicznej i ekonomii politycznej jest pokazanie, że teologia ekonomiczna nie zajmuje się kwestiami przynależnymi do sfery ekonomii, lecz podejmuje dużo bardziej ogólny problem – problem ludzkiej praktyki. Postaram się udowodnić, że stawką Agambenowskiej filozofii jest krytyka teologicznych, a więc metafizycznych, założeń koncepcji ludzkiej praktyki, którą to krytykę można przeprowadzić za pomocą teologicznej genealogii, w szczególności trynitarniej ekonomii. Artykuł skupia się na pojęciu liturgii i jego roli w Agambenowskich badaniach genealogicznych jako teologicznym paradygmacie kapitalistycznego zarządzania ludzkim życiem (czyli praktyką) i kończy się rozważaniami nad możliwą aplikacją Agambenowskiej teologicznej genealogii ekonomii do marksistowskiej krytyki ekonomii politycznej, przede wszystkim do krytyki podziału na pracę produkcyjną i nieprodukcyjną.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: teologia ekonomiczna, teologia polityczna, ekonomia, chwała, liturgia, praktyka, praca, efektywność, produktywność, Giorgio Agamben, Karol Marks