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Esposito begins with a remark concerning method—yet this remark is not merely one made for purposes of organization, clarity or some other aspect of meta-discourse. Rather, Esposito’s choice to begin with his methodological intentions leads us straight to the heart of his text: immunization itself is an interpretive category that cuts across distinct discourses. We learn from this that not only should we expect to read in what lies ahead analyses of various discursive types, such as law, linguistics, medicine, war, computer science, and the like, but, indeed, the paradigm of immunity is an aspect of each discourse that holds them collectively in common (and it is furthermore the paradoxical relationship between the immune and the common that, too, in part renders the paradigm of immunity so useful). What he argues precisely is that each seemingly disparate discourse appeals to the function of responding to risk. This function is thus twofold. First, the presence of an identified risk suggests that each discourse has a self-evaluative mechanism, by which it is able to normalize its inherent being—something Esposito later takes issue with—and in turn then identify the potential of alteration in the face of a new presence. Second, each discourse introduces a response, and therefore each discourse becomes inherently tied to something external to it, to something outside itself, to something beyond itself with which it must engage. Esposito here takes as an example the paradigm of border-crossing: “Whether the danger that lies in wait is a disease threatening the individual body, a violent intrusion into the body politic, or a deviant message entering the body electronic, what remains constant is the place where the threat is located, always on the border between the inside and the outside, between the self and other, the individual and the common.” What each discourse holds in common, then, is the function of
striving to immunize itself from an external threat that is attempting to invade it, to literally enter into it. Immediately we recognize the permeability, and instability, of the borders Esposito mentions, and the dissolution of such binaries—not by successful invasion, but through a re-thinking of the structural concepts themselves—that occupies much of this text.

But perhaps one of the most interesting binaries Esposito wrestles with is that of immunity/community, which he engages from the start. Immunity initially appears to function as the withdrawal from the common. Certain strata of Roman society were, for example, immune from Roman law, yet this status of extra-合法性 rendered such people extra-social. Here, immunity functioned as a turning inwards, a removal from participation in the external. We might think of this as protection for the self. Yet Esposito shows that such inward coiling requires external force; in fact, it requires the incorporation of the external. Such examples of Roman immunity were, after all, a function of Roman law, and therefore, of Roman social organization. The turn inward was made possible by the external demarcation of that very possibility. The immune Roman, then, can be said to have incorporated that part of Roman civil society that established and defined the function and status of becoming extra-legal and extra-social. The very concept of immunity, in this example, would not be possible if it were not for the common that allowed it.

Immunity, then, in that it necessarily incorporates the common it purports to block or cast outside of itself, is always a reaction, and it is in its reactive nature that the seeming paradox resides—the very paradox that dissolves the binaries Esposito previously noted: “This means that the immunitary mechanism presupposes the existence of the ills it is meant to counter…It reproduces in a controlled form exactly what it is mean to protect us from…The body defeats the poison not by expelling it outside the organism but by making it somehow part of the body.” Esposito shows that immunity, as we know from the discourse of medical science, incorporates a small dose of the threat it intends to ward off—and by such incorporation, it takes an external threat and brings it inside, making the threat internal to itself, a part of itself, and thereby reorganizes, redefines, and rearticulates itself—and such action blurs our concept of self/other, inside/outside, individual/common. In fact, Esposito notes, law in general functions in this manner. Law, and the right defined by law, applies solely to the individual despite being applied commonly to all. The protection of such a right, then, must be applied by force, and thus law acts as the protection of the individual from the common; yet, again, it is nevertheless the common that provides for law as such.

Toward the end of his introduction, Esposito turns to what we might have expected after reading Bios: to biopolitics. The field of philosophical anthropology, he argues, determines that human life must artificially externalize itself by making the external internal. This act is necessary for the preservation of the species, for humanity does not have the gift of specialization as other animals have. As a result, rather than being able to directly, and naturally, appropriate the external for its own internal purposes, humanity, in order to sustain life, must first intentionally focus on projecting itself outwards. It must then, from the place of the common, cultivate the external so it can sustain the human condition, allowing humanity to then reap-
propriate this artificial exterior inward. Building from this philosophical anthropology narrative, Esposito argues that this artificial reordering is the domain of politics, and it is the human body, which alone establishes the border between self and other, that acts as the intermediary between the movement back and forth of internal/external, life/politics. Thus, if the goal of politics is life, its object must be the body. Here, Esposito acknowledges the routinely mentioned concept of the pharmakon: As the self externalizes itself into the domain of politics, it must secure itself from the extreme—the dissolution of the self into the common. To do this, it must bring some of the common back into the self, incorporating the external, following the immunitary paradigm, thereby preserving the concept of self, in part, through the common. At this point, politics has a hold on the self. Politics itself, however, makes the inverse move. In order to not collapse back into the self fully, it maintains a sense of selfhood at the level of the common, which we see explicitly in the enlightenment notion of the “body politic.” Politics acknowledges its constituent parts (which, as Esposito mentions, we find on the cover of Hobbes’ *Leviathan*), but it also establishes itself as a sense of self—the selfhood of the common, made manifest initially in the body of the King, and later in representative parliaments and legislative institutions. Structurally speaking, then, these entities act as the guarantors of both life and death, for they first, in their commonness, negate the self, and therefore life, but also negate this negation through the immunitary function, thereby sustaining life.

Yet Esposito indicates to us from the beginning that his project is not merely one of exposition; he wishes, also, to leave us with a question, one to which he later proposes a possible answer: “is there a point at which the dialectical circuit between the protection and negation of life can be interrupted, or at least problematized? Can life be preserved in some other form than that of its negative protection?” Donna Haraway and Alfed Tauber suggest an interesting possibility. In their work, Esposito finds that perhaps the immunitary paradigm is not of a stable structure, where a normalized self incorporates the other so as to remain the self. Perhaps, instead, the self is not actually normalized at all, but rather, it is part of a continuous exchange with the external, and thus its definition is as such never static. This would turn on its head the typical immunitary analogy of the self at war with the invader, attempting to preserve itself from overthrow or even influence. Perhaps instead, immunity would be characterized not as the enemy of the common, but as the compliment of the common.

In his first chapter, Esposito returns to the paradox of community/law. In order for the community to protect itself from violence, it requires a legal structure; yet this legal structure, in immunitary fashion, protects the community through its partial negation. Through examining the origins of the Roman concept of right, Esposito notes that law is fundamentally concerned with protecting that which is proper to the individual. The protection of the community upholds the common only insofar as it commonly upholds what is proper to all individuals. Yet “what is proper” to each individual is not necessarily the same, and thus this is not a concept of equality. Rather, law, functioning as the protection of right, is relegated to the protection of property—and property, Esposito shows, was initially accumulated through force, as appropriation. We thus find here the fundamental immunitary paradox for the
protection of the community: the common is deeply eroded by its own mechanism of sustainability, for this mechanism—law—is grounded in protecting the ends of force. It is thus that:

Rather than being limited to coming before or after law, violence actually accompanies it, or rather, violence constitutes law throughout its trajectory, in a pendular movement that swings from force to power and back again from power to force... In the final analysis, this is what law is: violence against violence in order to control violence.4

By attempting to protect the community from violence, law must uphold violence—both in its act and in what it ultimately condones through affirming right.

Esposito explores further the complementarity of preservation and negation in a chapter on religion. It is interesting, he notes, repeating Derrida, that etymologically, “sacrifice” is to make sacred, yet it generally means putting something to death. The complementarity becomes clear in the example of animal sacrifice: to make the animal into a sacred offering, it must be put at the threshold between universes, between the material and the immaterial, between the preservation of life and the production of death. It is the crossing over that completes the action; a sacrifice could not be such if it were already holy. It must, rather, participate in—and to be precise, not merely engage with—the other, its complement.

This is also more broadly the case in the Christian doctrine established by Paul, who, dismissing both the Roman and Hebrew juridical structures, established love as the intrinsic mode of navigating law. Yet love holds within it the promise of redemption, participating not only in navigating life on earth, but in promising the afterlife. And thus this promise is just that something to come, but not yet here. This concept is properly described, as Esposito explains, by the Pauline figure of the katechon. As the figure of future revelation, it acts as what Esposito calls a restrainer. Immunitary in structure, the restrainer holds within itself a certain degree of its negation or opposite. The katechon, as such, maintains the existence of sin in order to maintain the promise of redemption, for on the one hand, it cannot let sin out of its grasp, yet on the other it cannot destroy sin altogether—for in both, the promise would no longer be such, and the notion of futurity would vanish, negating the law it orients itself towards. Yet, Esposito notes, the maintenance of such futurity has another implication: the law structured by the katechon is one not of action, but one of inactivity. For the community of believers, the katechon calls them not to do, but to have faith. The immunitary character of the katechon, then, renders it a law of potentiality.

From here, Esposito is able to turn to political theology. Sovereignty, he describes, is the secular functioning of the katechon, for where else than in the body of the king is found more absolutely the law and its potentiality, the present and the future, the mortal and the immortal. The sovereign and the law engage in just this kind of immunitary paradigm. The sovereign presides over law, outside of it, yet incorporating it, just as the law establishes and codifies the rule of the sovereign. Yet Esposito moves quickly through his point to one at a larger scope: the religious and the secular not only inform each other, but function as complements—religion upholds “the
metaphysical,” but through incorporation of the secular, while the secular appeals to “the metaphysical,” grounded in religion, to uphold the law—all of which structures the community.

In the following chapter, Esposito returns to philosophical anthropology to articulate a modernized form of community. Indeed, it is the problem of evil, posed under the guise of theodicy that makes the move from religion to anthropology. As the mode of arguing that evil is a problem of the human, thereby freeing God of its responsibility, theodicy places emphasis on the human. The negation of evil and its surrounding context becomes a solely human enterprise, and it is here that philosophical anthropology picks up the slack of, or compensates for, to use Esposito’s language, religion. The question of anthropology thus becomes a concern not of what we are, but of what we are not—namely god and animal. Humanity is, then, in such modern rationalization, left to its own devices, so to speak, to deal with the problem of evil. For Esposito, the response is the negation of the negative in the state of nature—the move toward order. Yet, he argues, this compensation merely fills the void left by religion with a new, artificial void. Abandoning religion as the mode of immunization, humanity faced the threat of the one against the one. Under the new rule of order, humanity now faced a compensatory threat of the one against the king. Thus, order produced a new sense of community: a common—now collective, not individuated - threat.

Yet anthropology articulates another sense of modernized community, too. As order led to increased notions of freedom, institutions had to form to compensate for “excessive” freedom, as a way of protecting the individual from him or herself. Just as the threat of the king, then, institutions became a new sense of community, for they represented the shared alienation of the self—the community that acts as an immunitary protection of the self from the self’s own potential excess.

But, characteristic of the moves Esposito makes in Immunitas, he takes a moment to consider this at a larger scope. Gesturing toward his discussion in the last chapter, he abstracts the institution to the concept of “the artificial,” which he then connects with its immunitary relation to the natural. He writes, “The relationship between natural organs and artificial objects is not one of negation but rather of enhancement: there is no solution of continuity between them, only mutual reinforcement.” As with the complementary relationship between nature and order, or between the external institution and the internal self, perhaps the immunitary paradigm does more than articulate a model of appropriation; perhaps it, too, or rather instead, articulates a model of symbiosis.

But before finally turning to his longer discussion of this possibility, Esposito first engages directly with biopolitics, in a chapter of that name. As noted earlier, in order to prevent the dissolution of life into a pure politics, or community, politics and life must be oriented toward the body. The body, then, becomes the fundamental site of politics—yet in becoming such, it becomes a border, a liminal zone between life and death, where immunitary politics must be carried out. It is for this reason, Esposito argues, that in political theory from the Enlightenment forward, we find the complementary pair of organicism and mechanism when articulating a politics. As the paradigm outlines, if problems arise out of human error, and not from
natural circumstances, “the machinic,” or order, supplements humanity to protect its organicism, or life. Thus, as also previously discussed, so that the organicism of humanity can persist, it must incorporate some aspect of its opposite: a machinic order from the outside must be imposed upon the body itself in order to preserve it. This reaches a peak under what Esposito finds in Foucault: the movement from law to normalization. Here, appealing again to the notion of the pharmakon, Esposito writes, “If the cure against a poison is poison, then disease and health no longer lie along the axis of a frontal opposition, but in a dialectical relationship that naturally makes one the opposite of the other, but also and above all, the instrument of the other.” As instruments of the other, politics and medicine coalesce into the system of norms, which lead to the present phenomena of securitization—something Esposito likens to the over-immunization of the body, which makes it paradoxically more vulnerable to outside attack.

Yet what might be most interesting in this chapter is Esposito’s brief suggestion that the lexical category of the body be moved to one of “flesh.” It is in this category that the liminality of the body is most presented, for it is the flesh that acts as the border between the outside and the inside, as the gatekeeper allowing some things to pass while blocking others out; yet the flesh is also, as Esposito argues, both what separates individuals from each other, and the point of contact between them. The flesh, then, is something that calls forth the notions of inside and outside simultaneously, thereby making what is proper to the individual common in various ways.

Esposito addresses the potential of biopolitics in his final chapter, “The Implant.” This potential, he argues, is found beyond the paradigm of normalization articulated by Foucault; it lies in Haraway’s work, which describes the body’s dismantling and multiplication—something Esposito has been gesturing toward at the end of each preceding chapter. Haraway’s paradigm moves beyond the metaphor of “extension,” where the body works in conjunction with something external to it. Rather, it is a paradigm that dissolves the categories of inside and outside altogether, articulating instead, a network of flux, continuity, and organic flow. This, Esposito suggests, is a new system of meaning—perhaps a new epistemology—that seems to posit immunity and community as two sides of the same concept.

Yet Esposito still wishes to move away from immunity as the primary category of the conversation, and toward community. He suggests that this is outlined medically in the relation between auto-tolerance and autoimmunity. While the autoimmune system is designed to attack any outside threat, it can be turned against its own body, as in the case of AIDS. In other cases, though, what is known as auto-tolerance interrupts cases of “mistaken identity,” preventing the autoimmune system from misrecognizing necessary aspects of the body. As modeled here, and in conjunction with Haraway’s work, Esposito suggests, immunity is actually more—so a form of community, whereby what is proper participates in what is common by a constant negotiation, where, it seems, what is proper to one might be part of the common another participates in. Esposito notes that Plato already suggested this: that in order to know something, one must already have some knowledge of it. If it were completely foreign, it would not be recognized as something “to know.”

In some senses, then, it seems that what Esposito argues for is not a change in
what we know, but one in how we know—an epistemological change. *Immunitas* thus directs us toward an interesting body of knowledge, for it appeals to emergent models, but it also directs us back toward established models—though, perhaps, in a fashion newly articulated. The epistemological apparatus Esposito outlines, then, is not one imagined by him, but rather pointed out as an alternative to two previous paradigms of thought: inside/outside, and immunity. Certainly, the inside/outside, or self/other, paradigm is what has dominated much of Western thought, and Esposito’s text at first seems to have challenged it with his participation in a newer use of the immunity paradigm. Yet, as the text unfolds, we find that he challenges the dominant use of the immunity paradigm too, arguing it does not go far enough in unraveling the inside/outside paradigm, and that it still places too much importance on the self, or the proper. By first articulating immunity, and then reorientating the terms of the paradigm toward community, Esposito shows us that the self, or proper, is more fluid and permeable than previously conceived in such debates. But he also establishes a new place from which to think an alternative politics. Bridging the gap between *Communitas*, which came before *Immunitas*, and *Bios*, which came after, the 2011 translation of this work makes available to an Anglophone audience an important work connecting Esposito’s thought, but, perhaps more importantly, one increasingly apt for articulating and challenging our changing world-order.

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2 Ibid., 7-8.
3 Ibid., 16.
4 Ibid., 29.
5 Ibid., 109.
6 Ibid., 125.