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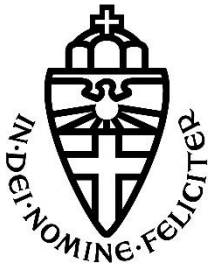

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The Ambiguity of the Slave's Body

Unveiling the Theologico-Political Paradigm of Instrumentality

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Abstract

This thesis examines how the paradigm of instrumentality is reflected in Giorgio Agamben's conceptualisation of the slave's body. Agamben's understanding of the slave's body is deeply rooted in the ancient ideas of Aristotle and forms the basis of his understanding of slavery and the conditions of the slave. The thesis aims to analyse the conceptual shift from the modern capitalist view of the body as a means of production to a new form of existence defined by utility. It argues that the paradigm of utility obscures the relationship between life, body, and personhood, perceiving life as a scientific fact. The thesis highlights the significance of the intertwined domains of law, politics, and religion in defining human existence.

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Disclaimer

Before diving into the topic of this thesis, a disclaimer is needed. When discussing the concept of the "slave" in this work, it is essential to address a significant issue. The term "slave" is a historically widespread term used to describe subjects that were legally deprived of their freedom, considered property, and at the service of their owner. As slaves, these individuals were subjected to forced labour, and vulnerable to degrading and violent acts under the rule of their owner or master. Their subjugation was commonly justified through the dehumanisation that viewed them in material terms reducing their existence to that of an instrument at constant service for their owner.

In recent years, there has been a conscious effort to acknowledge the power dynamics and oppressive nature that the term "slave" signals, by referring to these individuals as "enslaved."[1] Here are a few examples and areas which collectively reflect a broader societal recognition of the significance to address the historical and inhuman injustice against the "enslaved" individual through language. Museums and exhibitions such as the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC n.d.), actively devote their collections towards the documentation of the life of African Americans and their contribution to the history and culture in the United States (NMAAHC n.d.). As such, throughout their exhibitions and displays, they use the term "enslaved people" to provide a more precise and nuanced understanding of African American history. Academic journals and publication sources like *The Journal of African American History* and *Slavery & Abolitions* have adopted the difference between slave and "enslaved" when thematising the topics of slavery, colonialism, and African American history. Another example of the adoption of the term "enslaved" in recent media would be in the Netflix Documentary series *13th* in which the director Ava DuVernay with several experts ranging from commentators, politicians, activists, academics, writers, journalists, and consultants discuss the criminalisation of African Americans and the catastrophic state and reality of the American prison system (DuVernay 2016).

The reason for the change in language appears to be the acknowledgement of a singular axis in the narrative of the history of slavery. The history of the slave has

[1] Most of the examples that I named relate to the history of the United States. Slavery and colonisation are very prominent parts of its history and I think the US is one of the countries that has been doing its best to acknowledge this dark part of its history. The reason for their constant involvement with their past is the simple fact that their legacy stemming from colonialism and slavery is still very prominent in the present structure of the United States. Acknowledging this part of their histories is so important because it confronts them with all their histories and promotes a non-singular approach to storytelling, allowing them to open a space in their society that can be truly shared and discuss issues of inclusivity and justice. This is not an easy process, but it is a beginning.

been mainly told in terms of the dominant narrative. Consequently, the use of the term “slave” illuminates the unequal power dynamics present in the master-and-slave relationship of the hegemonic narrative, highlighting the oppressive nature of slavery. The term “enslaved,” on the other hand, has been used to signal the effort to acknowledge the humanity of the “enslaved” within the status of the slave. Thus, it recognises the involuntary life of bondage and servitude that defines their existence as slaves. It is the acknowledgement of a multi-axis view of history that acknowledges the different voices and stories in the mainstream line.

Nonetheless, the problem that I would like to highlight is the question of what word seems to be more appropriate to describe the condition of the slave in this thesis. While both terms have the right to exist, it is crucial to recognise the implications and ramifications that arise from using either of them. Both terms, at least in my opinion, communicate the same history, namely that of individuals that have fallen victim to the institution of slavery. However, what sets them apart is the lens employed to address this subject. The term “slave” designates a more instrumental understanding. It is encapsulated in a series of dehumanising and instrumentalising power dynamics that in effect often detach the notion of the slave from that of the human being. Whilst the term “enslaved,” on the other hand, highlights this relationship by focusing on the humanity that has been denied.

It is crucial to acknowledge that both terms are valid and should not be deemed as “better” or “worse” than the other. For practical reasons, this thesis will deploy the term “slave” as the central terminology since it predominantly engages with the aspect of the instrumentality of the “(en)slave(d) body.”

Introduction

Life is a fundamental concept that encompasses the characteristics, processes, and phenomena associated with living organisms. According to Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, the Greeks did not have a single word to describe what is commonly referred to as life, instead, they had two terms: "*zoē*" and "*bios*" (Agamben 2017, 5). The term "*zoē*" expresses "the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods)" (Agamben 2017, 5). In Agamben, this term refers to the biological existence of a living being and represents the characteristics that he terms under the notion of "natural life." As such, it refers to the simple fact that the living being is a breathing organism with the capacity to grow and is not a characteristic limited to humans but involves all forms of life from animals to microorganisms, and bacteria. The term "*bios*," on the other hand, indicates "the form or way of living proper to an individual or group" (Agamben 2017, 5). As such, *bios* refers to the human experience of political life (*bios politikos*) and is, unlike *zoē*, a purely human phenomenon and draws on concepts that are embedded in social, cultural, and political significance (Agamben 2017, 5). At its core, *bios* presupposes one's participation in a community and involves the engagement with the social institutions that organise and structure life within a society. Thus, it refers to a form of life that is defined by politics and culture. As such it is a conditional form of life that is not a given fact as is the case with *zoè*.

In Agamben, *bios* and *zoē* do not mark the only form of life, rather they mark the foundation for his exploration of their intersection and relevance in politics. Agamben introduces a third form of life, namely, bare life. Bare life refers to a condition in which the life of an individual has been reduced to its mere biological and physiological existence. This condition excludes an individual from the complex web of relationships, and legal and cultural contexts of their social existence (Agamben 2017, 70). At first, it appears to be similar to the form of life described in *zoē,* however, the crucial difference lies in the loss of social and political standing that ensures the protection of the individual and their rights under the sovereign. An individual reduced to bare life is linked to a stage of being devoid of legal protection, subjected to violence and control (Agamben 2017, 70). Bare life, therefore, must be understood as a politicised natural life in the sense that it conceptualises the extent to which life is exposed to the power of the sovereign.

An example of how Agamben conceptualises the notion of bare life as politicised life can be found in his conception of the *homo sacer* (sacred man). In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, the status of a criminal is defined as a person "*who may be killed and yet not sacrificed*" (Agamben 2017, 10). Originally the notion of the *homo sacer* is derived from Roman law and refers to a person that has been banned from their society. The *homo sacer* represents those whose bodies now reside outside of the responsibilities of the legislature of a

society but are still included by that very law (Agamben 2017, 27). The condition of the *homo sacer* as bare life is captured in the legislation often as "sanctity of human life." The sacredness or sanctity of life is commonly understood as a fundamental human right that finds its origins in the Judeo-Christian doctrine (Oxford reference n.d.). As such the *homo sacer* represents the capture of politicised life in law and the condition of exception which Agamben coins under the expression of "the state of exception." The state of exception is what Agamben defines as the relation that "binds and, at the same time, abandons the living being to law" (Agamben 2017, 167). The *homo sacer* as the embodiment of bare life represents the originary function of the sanctity of life, as "the production of bare life as originary political element and as the threshold of articulation between nature and culture, *zoē* and *bios*" which Agamben locates to be the "fundamental activity of the sovereign power" (Agamben 2017, 148). Essentially, for Agamben, the originary power of the sovereign lies precisely there, as the product of a political rule that through the authorization of law and state of exception decides on the legal status of bare life (Agamben 2017, 26). This must be understood as the sovereign's exception, which enables the sovereign to exercise its ban over its subject and declare through the means of law whose life is excluded from the biopolitical threshold of a community (Agamben 2017, 26).

The relationship between the body and life is intricate, as the body serves as the organic representation of life by binding it to reality (Esposito 2013, 317-318). Both *zoē* and *bios* are experienced and expressed through the body, which acts as their vehicle. As such, the body provides living beings with corporeal ability to interact with the world through a series of sensations and to participate in social and cultural life is the result of the uniquely human nature. The body can be understood as a twofold entity; on the one side, it is a biological entity that is susceptible to processes of development and growth, reproduction, and mortality. On the other side, the body is the location of subjective human experience and the location of identity formation, and agency. The body, therefore, represents an essential aspect of the human experience that builds the foundation through which the human navigates and interacts with the world.

The relationship between *zoē, bios,* and the body is an important one as it gives rise to the very different dimensions of life and the human condition. Especially in the sphere of politics, this relationship plays a significant role, as it introduces questions such as: "What role does the body play in politics?", or "In what way does bodily autonomy intersect with the notion of life in politics?", and "How does politics deal with issues related to bodily integrity?" However, one of the fundamental problems that can be encountered in Agamben's work is that the body remains an abstract notion. Throughout his work on the *homo sacer*, Agamben introduces the concept of the body but regardless of the number of

elaborations on the several bodies encountered, the body remains undefined and reduced to its role as a vessel for life.

Agamben's understanding of the body is channelled through the importance of the body as a vessel for life. His work mainly revolves around the notion of "bare life" whose presence he locates in the Aristotelian notion of *zoē*. He argues that "the entry of *zoē* into the sphere of the *polis* – the politicization of bare life as such – constitutes the decisive event of modernity and signals a radical transformation of the political-philosophical categories of classical thought" (Agamben 2017, 7). Moreover, it is the involvement of *zoē* within politics that provides the body with its relevance. The significance of the relationship between life, the body, and politics has been expressed by Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito under the notion of "bodily confinements" (Esposito 2013, 318). Bodily confinements are defined as "what act as lines of defense against whatever threatens to take life away from itself, expel it to its outside, or reverse it into its opposite. It is in the body and only in the body that life remains what it is and even grow, be strengthened, and reproduce" (Esposito 2013, 318). In its essence, the significance of the body for politics is based upon the political goal of administrating and organising life within the boundaries of the state. This is conveyed in terms of the body's mechanisms of self-sustainability and self-preservation that are adopted by the state to sustain the life they hold under the project of administrating and organising life.

The concept of administrating and organising life is a central topic within the philosophical framework and understanding of biopolitics. Esposito has argued that the bodily dimension of human existence in traditional political theory has been often neglected and overshadowed by abstract concepts such as sovereignty, power, and human rights (Esposito 2013, 317-318). He writes, "What appeared to be a relation between two terms – politics and life – must instead be interpreted as a more complex game that includes a third term upon which it depends: the bodily dimension is where life lends itself being preserved" (Esposito 2013, 317). The body therefore represents the intersection of life and politics and becomes the fundamental battlefield of human politics. This demands the recognition of the body as a political entity that is essential to the objects and conditions of politics surrounding the governmental administration of life.

This thesis aims to explore how Agamben's conceptualisation of the body is caught up in a paradigm of instrumentality. The research question of this thesis, therefore, will be "How does Agamben's conceptualisation of the slave's body exemplify a paradigm of instrumentality?"

Central to this topic will be the relationship between the body and life in politics, and more specifically the power structure embedded in this relationship. However, due to the lack of proper concepts of bodies in Agamben, the discussion will be

revolving around the Aristotelian slave since it is the most elaborated on body in his work *The Use of Bodies*. Essential to this analysis is the Aristotelian notion of "the use of the body" as the praxis of the slave and how it alters the conception of how power is exercised in the political sphere. It will be argued that the notion of "the use of the body" highlights the way that power operates through use and manipulation resulting in the objectification and dehumanisation of the slave as a mere tool. To further understand the relation between "the use of the body" and underlying power dynamics present in the slave's condition, this thesis will address the conditions of the *homo sacer*. This conceptualisation of the *homo sacer* – as a human life that is included only in judicial order – provides an essential focus point for the analysis to unveil the mysteries of "the sacred texts of sovereignty but also the very codes of political power" (Agamben 2017, 10-11). However, it is important to note here that the *homo sacer* will not be treated as a body, but rather a title that a body can hold.[2]

To answer this question, this thesis will be divided into three sections. The first section will serve as an introduction to Agamben's theoretical framework of use. Central to this section will be an interpretation of Agamben's usage of the Greek term "*chresthai*" as the basis for his understanding of "use." For Agamben, this term is integral to his conceptualisation of the slave's body in his work *The Use of Bodies*. The reason for that is that *chresthai*, for Agamben, marks the foundation for a new relationship between humans and their bodies that Agamben advocates for.

The second section is aimed at contextualising the notion of "*chresthai*" by introducing the body of the slave and the Aristotelian notion of "the use of the body." This section will provide an outline of the body of the slave and how the slave has been conceptualised by Agamben. It should be emphasised that Agamben's notion of the slave is heavily influenced by Aristotle, but this thesis will specifically deal with the aspects of Agamben's understanding of the slave. The slave plays a significant role in Agamben's theoretical framework of use because of the fundamental relationship of use located in the master-slave relationship present in the Aristotelian idea of slavery.

The third section specifically deals with the shortcomings of the Aristotelian slave and more specifically the political implications when dealing with the conditions of the slave. Central to this argument will be a critical assessment of the slave's condition and whether it is justified to equate them to the status of the *homo sacer*.

[2] The reason for why the *homo sacer* should be regarded as a title rather than an actual body is the fact that it is a figure of ancient Roman law referring to those who have lost their political rights (Agamben 2017, 10-11). As such, the concept of the *homo sacer* as a title signals the existence of bodies excluded from the regular articulations and conditions of law but are otherwise still included under the jurisdiction of the sovereign as bare life.

To adequately evaluate the conditions of the slave in Agamben, it is crucial to divide the discussion of the third section into three interconnected yet distinct parts. The first part will offer a critique of the Aristotelian slave, focusing predominantly on the subjugation of slaves through dehumanisation and instrumentalisation processes. The second part will attempt to contextualise the slave as a *homo sacer* by drawing examples from Cameroonian historian and philosopher Achille Mbembe whose input from his work *Necropolitics* will be instrumental when discussing Agamben. Central to this analysis will be the notion of social death, inspired by Mbembe's contribution to the importance of death in biopolitics. The third part specifically deals with the topic of instrumental violence as a shared experience that relates the condition of the slave to that of the *homo sacer*.

The fourth, and final section, will be centred around exploring an alternative relationship of use that Agamben has introduced, the sadomasochistic-master-slave dynamic. The focus of this section is to understand the power that the body holds within the framework of use. Here it will be argued that any form of relationship of use follows the same structure of power: namely, the notion of use as the performance of power.

Agamben's Theoretical Framework of Use

From Use to *Chresthai*: Agamben's Theoretical Framework of Use

The Use of Bodies marks the final volume in Agamben's philosophical investigation of the *Homo Sacer* series. This work is not intended to be read or understood as a conclusion but marks the conceptual switch away from the idea of concluding volumes as forms of declaration of completion. Following the modified words of French poet Paul Valéry by British-American poet W.H. Auden, Agamben writes, "like every work of poetry and of thought, cannot be concluded but only abandoned (and perhaps continued by others)" (Agamben 2017, 1019). In *The Use of Bodies*, the notion of abandonment becomes the central paradigm with which Agamben attempts to move away from the *Homo Sacer* series. This notion of abandonment "does not signal a rejection of the philosophical trajectory the previous volumes have described, nor an attempt to give definitive form to the body of work these present" (Layzelle 2018, 337). It simply functions as the radical acceptance of his text to exist as an incomplete and unactualized state that challenges the end-oriented and instrumental logic of the West (Layzelle 2018, 337).

One of the central topics that Agamben explores in *The Use of Bodies* is the framework of "use." Central to his elaboration on the notion of "use" is the ancient Greek verb *chresthai* (corresponding to the term "*chrēsis*") and the ambiguous modern translation to articulate a uniform meaning (Agamben 2017, 1030). However, for Agamben, the complexity and nuances of the original Greek term are not adequately captured by modern translations. As a result, Agamben critiques the insufficient translations of *chresthai*. Agamben begins his critique by drawing attention to Georges Redard's analysis of the different strategies employed by dictionaries and their incapability to fully grasp the essence of the Greek term "*chresthai*" (Agamben 2017, 1050). He writes, "What is most surprising when one first examines the ample lexical material collected by Redard is that the verb *chresthai* does not have proper meaning but acquires ever different meanings according to the context" (Agamben 2017, 1049). To provide an example, let us have a look at two of the listed sentences "*chresthai logoi*" and "*chresthai orgei*" that attempt to provide a translation for *chresthai*. In the first expression "*chresthai logoi*," (to use language) has in the language of the moderns acquired the meaning of "to speak" (Agamben 2017, 1049-1050). In this example, the meaning of the term "*chresthai*" as "use" is based on the relation to its accompanying object, namely, to speak by making use of language. The same goes for the second expression, as *chresthai* in "*chresthai orgei*" ("to use anger") is equated to "to be angry" and is also based on its accompanying term: anger (Agamben 2017, 1049-1050). In both examples, the meaning of *chresthai* is contextually situated and tied to its accompanying term. It does not signify a relationship of use but rather is a matter of the relation between the subject and

object. This relation is defined by a relationship of appropriation in the subject-object relationship that is expressed through the modern understanding of *chresthai* as "to make use of, to utilise something" (Agamben 2017, 1050). In this context, the relationship of appropriation refers to the dynamic in which the subject asserts ownership or control over the object. It signifies a level of engagement in which the subject not only uses the object but also claims it as their own (or part of the subject) implying a sense of authority or possession. As such, a relationship based on appropriation refers to the sense of entitlement or power exercised present in the action over the object. Thus, it implies a degree of control, manipulation, or domination. Or as in the words of Agamben, *chresthai* "is a matter of relationship with something, but the nature of this relationship is, at least in appearance, so indeterminate that it seems impossible to define a unitary sense of the term" (Agamben 2017, 1050).

Moreover, Agamben credits the subject-object relationship in the modern verb "to use" as the culprit for this insufficiency of modern attempts to grasp the meaning of *chresthai*. He writes, "It is probable that precisely the subject/object relation – so marked in the modern conception of the utilization of something on the part of someone – emerges as inadequate to grasp the meaning of the Greek verb. And yet an indication of this inadequacy is present precisely in the very form of the verb, which is neither active nor passive but in the diathesis that ancient grammarians called 'middle' (*mesotes*)" (Agamben 2017, 1052). What is central to the subject-object relation and its conception of "use" that Agamben is drawing attention to, is the middle voice (*mesotes)*. However, to understand the notion of the middle voice, it is helpful to have a look at the Greek language and more specifically at Greek grammar. The middle voice in Greek grammar expresses "the 'involvement' of the subject in the action – the fact that the agentive subject is also affected in some way by the action" (Barber 2014, 17). The phrase "I choose (take for my own benefit) a share" (*hair-oumai moiran*), for instance, signals the involvement of the subject in the action (Barber 2014, 18). What is central to this phrase is that it does not only express the performance of the action by the subject through its verb, but it also communicates the benefit that is received (Barber 2014, 18). The affection experienced by the subject through the performance of the action is the benefit that is received through the action. In the case of the example, the subject by the very act of choosing is receiving the benefit of being able to choose in their favour. As such, "the middle voice is signaling that what would otherwise be expressed as the indirect object is identical to the subject" (Barber 2014, 18).

It is the significance of the middle voice in the Greek language that prevents the moderns from grasping the essence of *chresthai*. Agamben, following the words of Redard and Benveniste, claims that the very projection of the modern meaning of "to use" signals a level of appropriation from the side of the subject over the

object (Agamben 2017, 1051). He writes, "As implicit in the name *mesotes*, the middle voice is situated in a zone of indetermination between subject and object (the agent is in some way also object and place of action) and between active and passive (the agent receives an affection from his own action)" (Agamben 2017, 1053). Considering this, not only is the modern understanding of "use" incapable of encapsulating the lexical ambiguity of *chresthai* but it is also incapable of accurately translating the presence of the middle voice in this verb. Thus, the verb *chresthai* loses its original meaning as a process that "does not pass from an active subject toward the object separated from his action but involves in itself the subject, to the same degree that this latter is implied on the object and 'gives himself' to it" (Agamben 2017, 1053).

Consequently, Agamben seeks to redefine the verb *chresthai* by focusing on the importance of the middle voice in the subject-object relationship present in *chresthai*. For Agamben, *chresthai* expresses the relation "*that one has with oneself, the affection that one receives insofar as one is in relation with a determinate being*" (Agamben 2017, 1053). The phrase "*somatos chresthai* (to use the body)" signals the mutual and affective relationship between bodies and highlights the reflective nature of relationships in which individuals or other entities always exist in relation to other bodies (Agamben 2017, 1053). Therefore, this new relationship of *chresthai* between the subject and object signals not only a "new" form of human activity but also demands a conceptual shift in human relations that acknowledges the reciprocal relationship between bodies. This new conceptual shift not only affects how individuals perceive themselves and their bodies but also how they view objects and other entities in their world. For Agamben, the "Human being and world are, in use, in a relationship of absolute and reciprocal immanence; in the using of something, it is the very being of the one using that is first of all at stake" (Agamben 2015, 30).

Moreover, this idea of *chresthai* signals an important difference between use and appropriation as dominant figures of human activity. One of the interesting aspects of Agamben's idea of *chresthai* is its attempt to create a new form-of-life. One that is distinct from the modern understanding of the relation between the human as subjects, and the other entities as objects that constitute their world. With the term "form-of-life" Agamben refers to a mode of existence where life's arrangement can never be separate from its form. It is a life in which isolating naked life is never possible (Agamben 2017, 1214). As such, "It defines a life – human life – in which singular modes, acts, and processes of living are never simply *facts* but always and above all *possibilities* of life, always and above all potential" (Agamben 2017, 1214).

What Agamben establishes with *chresthai*, as a new framework of human relation, is a new experience of "use" that can function as an alternative to human activity as willing and acting agents. For Agamben, the modern conceptualisation

of the term "use" signals a relationship of appropriation that is exercised by the (human) subject over the entities and other bodies (objects) that constitute their world (Agamben 2017, 1051). Appropriation, here, refers to the modern concept of the human as a (political) agent that has portrayed them as masters and possessors of nature.[3] This ideological conception of humans as "masters and possessors of nature" has allowed them to claim unwarranted ownership over the world and the entities and objects in the world. As a result, this phrase captures the ambiguous ideological link that creates and defines the human condition through its objectification of nature[4] and its objects as instruments for human consumption and modelling. Nature, in the modern sense, and the objects contained in this category are viewed as items that can be instrumentalised and subjugated through reason, creating the image of the political human subject that is not only capable of reason but is also characterised by the very capacity of action and having a will.

In the chapter "The Use of the World," Agamben illustrates the potential that a relational framework of use, or more specifically, *chresthai* yields for the way that humans relate to their surrounding world. Agamben begins his discussion on the relation between Heidegger's notion of being-in and Dasein to replace it with a framework of use. At the heart of Agamben's analysis of Heidegger's structure of Dasein lies the notion of "care" (*Besorgnis*) and handiness (being-ready-to-hand, *Zuhandenheit*) as the "familiarity that uses and handles" (Agamben 2017, 1063-1064). In Heidegger, care is *a priori* and functions as the primitive structural totality of reality and as such is always present in something other than care itself (Agamben 2017, 1063). This aspect of "being-in" is indirectly suggested in the definition of care's structure as already being in the world and being alongside (*Sich-vorweg-schon-Sein-in (der Welt) als Sein-bei*) (Agamben 2017, 1063).

Agamben continues this discussion by comparing the *a prio*ri of care to that of use based on the analysis of the German term "*Umgang*," by Hungarian scholar in classical philology Károly Kerényi. Kerényi's interest in this term lies in the fact that "The peculiarity of the term *Umgang* is that it entails both exchangeability between subject and object ('the object of familiarity must be able to change itself at any moment into the subject of that same familiarity; and we, who cultivate familiarity with it, must be able to become its object' […]) and immediacy ('the

[3] Originally, this phrase was introduced by French philosopher René Descartes "For by them I perceived it to be possible to arrive at knowledge highly useful in life; […] knowing the force an action of fire, water, air the stars, the heavens, and all the other bodies that surround us, as distinctly as we know the various crafts of our artisans, we might apply them in the same way to all the uses to which they are adapted, and thus render ourselves the lords and possessors of nature" (Descartes 1998, 34-35).

[4] In the modern context nature has been treated like a tool, or more specifically an instrument that can be mastered by those who can overcome it and prove themselves as worthy over the title of being an active subject through the use of language.

relationship between subject and object that stands at the basis of familiarity excludes every mediation on the part of a third' […])" (Agamben 2017, 1064). Moreover, Agamben connects Kerényi's "*Umgang*" to Heidegger's "familiarity that uses and handles." For Agamben, Heidegger's "familiarity that uses and handles" and Kerényi's "*Umgang*," both share the same immediate and originary structure that constitutes Dasein (Agamben 2017, 1064). The essence of Dasein is characterised by something so immediate and fundamental that it cannot be seen as a subject that occasionally forms a connection with the world (Agamben 2017, 1064). Rather, combined concepts of familiarity, handiness, and relevance describe the inherent structure of Dasein and its original relationship with the world (Agamben 2017, 1064).

Further, the implication of "*Umgang*" as a new form of "familiarity that uses and handles" provides Agamben with a new foundation that relates Dasein to a new form of being-in the world. This new connection qualifies the sphere of use as an alternative to the model of care. This relation provides a new perspective on familiarity as a "use of the world" in which the paradigm of handiness is rendered as equipment (Agamben 2017, 1065). In a sense, the notion of "familiarity with the world always necessarily has to do with a 'serviceability,' must 'subordinate itself to the 'serves-for'[*um-zu*] which is always constitutive for the instrumentality of the equipment" (Agamben 2017, 1088). Through familiarity with the world, we rediscover the diverse senses and forms of "ways of being" (*Weisen des Seins*), aware of the polysemy associated with the Greek term "*chrēsis*" (Agamben 2017, 1065). These "ways of being" encompass being involved, producing, attending to, utilising, letting go, undertaking, accomplishing, demonstrating, questioning, considering, discussing, and determining (Agamben 2018, 1065-1066).

In short, it is in the use-of-the-world that one encounters the originary structure of Dasein as the intersection of familiarity, handiness, and relevance. This makes the "use of the world," for Agamben, "the first and immediate relationship (*die nächste Art des Umganges* […]) of Dasein" (Agamben 2017, 1066).

The Use of the Slave's Body

Agamben's Interpretation of the Aristotelian Slave

In *The Use of Bodies*, the topics explore the nature of a life that is inseparable from its form, essentially addressing what such a life truly entails. For Agamben, the answer to this theme is encapsulated in the use (or appropriation) of the syntagma "the use of the body" (*tou somatos chrēsis*). The first part of *The Use of*

Bodies is dedicated to an elaborate analysis of the Aristotelian theory of slavery and more specifically the slave's body and the exploration of the relationship of use that has been located at the core of its existence. In the chapter "The Human Being without Work," Agamben, following the thought of Aristotle, defines the slave as "the being whose work is the use of the body" (Agamben 2017, 1030). In contrast, humans are defined as beings whose essence is delineated by their state of being-at-work (*energeia*), which lies not only in the possession of a soul but also in the activity of employing reason, *logos* (*ergon anthropou psyches energeia kata logon*). The term "being-at-work" in Aristotelian thought refers to the fact that for a thing to exist, it must exercise some kind of work (*ergon*). The notion of *ergon* in Aristotle is closer to that of being alive and is characterised by the functions and processes that define human and non-human activity. As such, it refers to the processes that each living being goes through to ensure their survival. It encompasses the various activities, functions, and efforts undertaken by individuals to meet their basic needs, sustain themselves, and navigate the challenges of existence.

In Agamben, the notion of *ergon* is closely related to the concept of *oikonomia* (administration of the house). *Ergon* must be understood in reference to the concept of the good life which depends upon the proper exercise of one's *ergon* (Agamben 2017, 387). It represents the individually assigned purpose of an individual "to act for an end and to form the material into enduring organized wholes" (Sachs n.d.). As a human activity, *ergon* is aimed towards the good life and is based upon one's function in society. An *ergon*, as a human activity, does not necessarily have to be human, and this is illuminated in the non-proper *ergon* of the slave (Agamben 2017, 1031). For instance, the Aristotelian slave, as a being lacking a soul, has their *ergon*, "the use of the body," reduced to their physicality but their *energeia* and thus inherent purpose remains to be essentially human (Agamben 2017, 1030-1031). What distinguishes the *ergon* of the slave from that of the free man is the appointed value to the type of work that both beings exercise. For Agamben the slave's *ergon* and *energeia* are human which he defends by stating that "the slave is and remains a human being is, for Aristotle, beyond question (*anthropos on*, 'while being a human being, […])' […] however, that there are some human beings whose *ergon* is not properly human or is different from that of other beings" (Agamben 2017, 1031).

It is important to note that Aristotle's idea of the slave's body and the emphasis on their physicality is based on their limited capacity of virtue and reason. The capacity of possessing virtue and reason, two traits reserved for the free man, is the fundamental element that separates the slave from the free man. For Aristotle, nature has created physical differences between the bodies of slaves and free men. Slaves are meant to be strong for manual labour and life in servitude, while free men should have an "upright" physique suited for citizenship (Aristotle 1932,

123). Moreover, Aristotle's obsession with the physicality of the slave's *ergon* becomes problematic in Agamben. The emphasis on the slave's *ergon* highlights the fact that without it, the body of the slave becomes indistinguishable from that of the free man. The slave in Agamben remains due to their *ergon* essentially being human, in terms of the slave being capable to exercise their *ergon* as their human activity. On the other hand, the free man, whose *ergon* is also essentially human, must be attributed an additional characteristic defined by the structuring of the soul through *logos*, which characteristically distinguishes him from the slave. Thus, the soul becomes a moral gauge, ranging from the pinnacle of humanness embodied by the free man to the opposing end represented by animals and their absence of a soul, forming a dialectical contrast. Agamben continues the same rhetoric that allows him to establish "The idea that the soul makes use of the body as an instrument" and results in the definition of the slave as "the being whose work is the use of the body" (Agamben 2017, 1030). Nonetheless, it limits Agamben's ability to further conceptualise and question the notion of being human in relation to the notion of *ergon*.

Ergon: what separates the slave from their master

The slave's *ergon* is defined by their capacity to use their own body turning them into a form of equipment. Central to this notion of the slave as a piece of equipment is the Greek term "*ktema*." Agamben argues that *ktema* is generally translated as "object of property," a translation that he considers rather misleading as it fails to acknowledge the sphere of use that in his reading of Aristotle is the point of focus (Agamben 2017, 1036). He writes,

> The fact that even in the definition of the slave as "the human being who is not of himself but of another," the opposition of *autou*/*allou* is not necessarily understood in terms of ownership is also proven – beyond the fact that "being the owner of oneself" would be meaningless – by the analogous formula that Aristotle uses in the Metaphysics, where it refers to the sphere of autonomy and not of that of ownership: "Just as we call the free person to exist for himself and not another [*ho autou heneke kai me allou on*], in the same way, that we say that wisdom is the only free science" (Agamben 2017, 1037).

What this reading suggests is that the notion of the slave as *ktema* marks a form of a relation between the master and the slave that takes place in the sphere of *chresthai*. For Agamben the slave's praxis represents "the emergence of a dimension of human beings in which the best work […] is not the being at work (*energeia*) of the soul according to the logos but something for which Aristotle can find no other denomination than 'the use of the body'" (Agamben 2017, 1031). As such, the usefulness of the slave to their master lies in their capacity of

being a tool for life (*bios*). Agamben compares the usefulness of the slave's *ergon* as "the use of the body" to the instrumentality of the use of a bed or clothing (Agamben 2017, 1037). For him, humans are "accustomed to thinking of use and instrumentality as a function of external an external goal that it is not easy for us to understand a dimension of use entirely independent of an end, such as suggested by Aristotle: for us, the bed serves for rest and clothing to protect us from the cold" (Agamben 2017, 1037). The connection that is made here of the slave as a tool or animate instrument and their capacities of making "use of their body" should not be understood in a productive way (*poiesis*), but rather in a non-productive and purely non-end-oriented sphere of use (Agamben 2017, 1038).

It is here, that one can find the first analogy of the relationship between the master and the slave being connected to that of the soul and the body. However, what is decisive here for Agamben is that the Aristotelian clarification of the domination of the soul over the body is not political (Agamben 2017, 1030). Instead, the relationship between the master and slave is commonly regarded as the "despotic" relationship and is one of the three relationships that define the household (*oikia*) (Agamben 2017, 1030). Moreover, the equation of the relationships between being-at-work (*energeia*) and *chrēsis* (use) to the soul (*psychè*) and the body (*soma*) further highlights the praxis of the slave being located in the sphere of use. To understand this, it is necessary to view the nature of the relationship of the slave to their master in terms of the Greek understanding of *organon* (organ). The slave as an *organon* "indicates both the instrument and the organ as a part of the body (in writing that the slave is an *organon praktikon kai choriston*, Aristotle is playing on the double sense of the term). The slave is part (of the body of the master, in the 'organic' and not simply instrumental sense of the term, to such an extent that Aristotle can speak of a 'community of life' between slave and master (*koinonos zoes* […])" (Agamben 2017, 1038-39).

The implication of the idea of the slave as a tool or animate instrument for life (*bios*) is the normalisation of the social relation between the slave and the free man. This idea results in the justification of one (of many) power dynamics that Aristotle locates in the sphere of the household (*oikos*). For Aristotle, the family in its purest form is constituted through the relationship between the slave and the free man (*ek doulon kai eleutheron*, the slave and the natural/free man) (Agamben 2017, 1029). Three types of relationship define the family and constitute their household with the despotic (*despotikè*) master/slave relationship being the most significant relationship. This relationship is followed by the matrimonial (*gamikè*) defining the relationship between husband and wife, and the last being the parental (*technopoietikè*) between father and children (Agamben 2017, 1029). All these relationships define the hierarchy present in the household that is established to sustain the harmony of the house. Although Agamben does not discuss the specific hierarchy of the relation between the slave and the other members of the

household. Aristotle's *Politics* provides an insight into how Aristotle envisions the dynamic between them. Given the fact that women and children constitute half of the free population, for Aristotle, their education significantly impacts the state's well-being (Aristotle 1932, 67). Thus, it is beneficial that the education of children and women should be shaped and aligned with the form of the constitution "For since every household is part of a state" (Aristotle 1932, 67).

What all these relationships share is one constantly reappearing figure, namely the male authority figure as the head of the household. This authority figure is expressed in terms of the father, the husband, or the master. The possible reason why the despotic relationship seems to be the most significant one appears to be because this relationship involves a certain use and *energeia* to create and maintain happiness as the collective goal within the household. For Aristotle, according to Agamben, "The formula, which is also found in the *Politics* [*estin eudaimonia aretes energeia kai chresis tis teleios*, 'happiness is a being-at-work and a certain perfect use of virtue' […]), shows that for Aristotle, the two terms are at once similar and distinct" (Agamben 2017, 1032). This can be related to his formula of the soul making use of the body and further indicates the nature of the relationship between the one who uses (free man) and the one who is put to use (the slave). This forms the very foundation for the structure of not only the household but also the *polis* (city). It is in this formula that Agamben's statement of the slave as equipment is giving its meaning, "The mode of life [*bios*] is a praxis and not a production, and therefore the slave is an assistant for things of praxis. Now 'equipment' has the same meaning as part [*morion*, 'piece,'] what belongs to an ensemble]; for the part is not only a part of something else [*allou*] but belongs to it [*holos* – some manuscripts have *haplos*, 'absolutely,' or with a still stronger expression, *haplos holos*, 'absolutely and totally']" (Agamben 2017, 1037).

Master/Slave relationship: a relationship of use, *somatos chresthai*

The slave's *ergon* as "the use of the body" is enabled through the dialectical relationship between the master and the slave. Agamben writes, "The assimilation of the slave to equipment or to an instrument is here developed by first of all distinguishing instruments into productive instruments of use (which produce nothing, except their use)" (Agamben 2017, 1037). Central to the master-slave relation is the distinction between the one who uses and the one that makes use of (*chraomai*, I use, I utilise (a tool or instrument)) (Agamben 2017, 1056). For Agamben, the distinction in the dialectic relationship between the subject who uses and the instrument or tool (object) that is being used is based upon the subject's power to act upon the object and utilise their body for a specific purpose or goal (Agamben 2017, 1056). The condition that qualifies the master as the subject is the deciding factor of the soul (*psychè*) with which the master rules over

its subject-object, the slave (Agamben 2017, 1056). As such, the master is the subject because they possess the soul that allows them to act or rule over the slave's body which puts them into the position of the object. This view of the subject-object relationship is supported by the idea that the subject carries out an action, whilst the object is acted upon.

Agamben further inquiries about the difference between the one who uses and the one who makes use of (something or someone). He writes, "If the one who uses and that of which one makes use are not the same thing, this then means that the human being (who 'uses his whole body,' *panti toi somatti chretai anthropos* […]) does not coincide with his body and therefore, in taking care of I, he is taking care of a 'thing that is his own' (*ta heautou*) but 'not of himself' (*ouk hauton*)" (Agamben 2017, 1056). Central to this statement is that it suggests that there is a distinction between the user (subject) and the thing being used (object). For Socrates the difference is simple, the object that takes care of the body by making use of it is the soul (Agamben 2017, 1056). Crucial to Socrates's question is that it suggests that when a human being takes care of their body, it does not necessarily imply that they are taking care of themselves.

If we apply this statement to the condition of the slave, who by nature does not belong to themselves but to another, caring for their body ultimately equates to caring for the one they belong to. It is not for their own well-being that they take care of themselves, but their care for their body ensures their availability to be used by their master. Moreover, given the fact that the master of the slave functions as the soul that governs the body of the slave by making use of it, any action that involves the slave's *ergon* is done to benefit the master. The difference in use here is that although the slave's *ergon* is "the use of the body," ultimately, they are being used by their master the very second they put their body to use. This is because not only their *ergon* but also their whole existence as a part depends on their master who forms the whole. According to Aristotle, the slave is "one who is a human being belonging by nature not to himself but to another, if being a man he is an article of property, and an article of property is an instrument for action separable from its owner" (Aristotle 1932, 19). Consequently, the slave is not the one utilising their body; rather, their body is being utilised by them. By attending to their body, the slave secures its future utility, serving their master's best interests.

However, the aspect that defines the slave as a being belonging to someone other than themselves, a characteristic of the slave's condition, is one that Agamben has left out. The reason for that can be explained by his interest in the relationship of use between master and slave and not property rights. Moreover, his reading of the Aristotelian slave should be regarded as an alternative to the way that humans interact with themselves, and the world detached from the notion of personhood and subjectivity. Agamben's framework represents a new form-of-life in which

"The living being uses-itself, in the sense that in its life and in its entering into a relationship with that what is other than the self, it has to do each time with its very self, feels the self and familiarizes itself with itself" (Agamben 2017, 1078). For Agamben, the self is characterised by the use-of-oneself. When Agamben states that "*The self is nothing other than use-of-oneself*," he is claiming that the essence of the self is rooted in the act of using or engaging with oneself (Agamben 2017, 1068). Agamben's understanding of the self adopts a relational and non-substantial understanding of the Stoic interpretation of the self, in which the self is defined by its relationships and interactions and not endowed with a predetermined purpose (*telos*) (Agamben 2017, 1077). It emphasises the very notion that one's identity and thereof its understanding is continuously shaped through the actions, choices, interactions, and relationships one encounters. When an individual is in a state of "use of oneself," they are actively employing their capacities, desires, and agency in relation to the world around them. This further implies that one's engagement with the world is not passive or detached but involves an active reciprocal relationship.

Thus, it can be said that to be in "use-of-oneself" means to be in relation with the world. This means to actively engage with the world and recognise the reciprocal relationship between the self and the external environment. It is based on the subject-object distinction that the relationship of "the use of the body" acquires its new ontological/ontic foundation in Agamben's understanding of *somatos chresthai*. He defines *somatos chresthai* as "*the affection that one receives insofar as one is in relation with one or more bodies*" (Agamben 2017, 1053). For Agamben, following French philosopher Michel Foucault, *chraomai* does not only refer to the statement "I use, I utilise (an instrument, a tool)" but it simultaneously "may designate a behaviour or attitude" of the type of relationship the subject has with other people or objects (Agamben 2017, 1056). This means the syntagma "the use of the body" as the *ergon* of the slave signals a one-sided relationship in which the slave's body is being put to use by the slave in favour of the master. Consequently, the slave and master enter through the slave's *ergon* a relationship of use. Or in short, the syntagma "*tou somatos chresis*," refers to the reciprocal relationship implied in the use of the body between the slave and their master (Agamben 2017, 1039). In enslaved individuals, "the body is in use just as, in the free human being, the soul is at work in accordance with reason" (Agamben 2017, 1039). As a result, in using their body, the body is simultaneously being in favour of and by their master.

The Slave as *Homo Sacer*

Criticism of the Agamben's Interpretation of the Aristotelian Slave

The main problem that will be thematised in this section is the fact that the body of the slave remains undiscussed in Agamben. Although he attempts to fix the Aristotelian characteristics that define the slave's activity of "the use of the body," the body of the slave remains seemingly undefined. The closest elaboration of the slave's body in Agamben is articulated in the second characteristic that reads as follows: "The use of the body defines a zone of indifference between one's own body and the body of another. The master, in using the body of the slave, uses his own body, and the slave, in using his own body, is used by the master" (Agamben 2017, 1047). This characteristic highlights how the existence of the slave is heavily dependent upon their master. It does not provide an insight into the body of the slave but rather the present power dynamic that highlights the interconnectedness and use of the slave by their master. When looking at the remaining characteristics which define "the use of the body" as an unproductive activity "comparable to the use of a bed or garment" that is viewed as neither *poiesis* nor praxis (Agamben 2017, 1047) they function to categorise the slave's *ergon* as *argos* (deprived of work) (Agamben 2017, 1042).

The characteristics listed by Agamben describe the conditions and characteristics that define the socially constituted context of the bodily activity of "the use of the body." What they signal is a zone of ambiguity. The ambiguity displayed in Agamben's discourse on the slave's body seems to serve a dual purpose in Agamben's analysis. The lack of definition of the slave's body allows him to avoid definitively addressing the question of the nature of the slave's corporeal existence. This enables him to focus on the social context surrounding the slave and their *ergon*, without fully acknowledging the slave's existence beyond its use of the body. However, this deliberate ambiguity also hinders Agamben from exploring the implications of rejecting the inquiry into the slave's nature provided by Aristotle. By emphasising the uncertain boundaries of the slave's body, Agamben eludes the ethical considerations associated with treating the slave's body as a mere tool or object. As a result, he avoids dealing with the ethical responsibilities tied to the treatment of the slave's body. In this manner, Agamben employs a paradigm of instrumentality using ambiguity to maintain a critical distance from the ethical implications of the slave's condition and the corresponding ethical obligations involved.

The most notable problem that can be identified in both thinkers, Agamben and Aristotle, is about the nature of the slave and more specifically the social context and relationships constituting their existence. Following Aristotle, Agamben argues that the slave finds their residence and relevance as an instrument for life in the household (*oikia*) (Agamben 2017, 1029). The slave as an instrument for life must be understood based on Aristotle's articulation of the different natures

that distinguish the slave from their master. He writes, “so also an article of property is a tool for the purpose of life, and property generally is a collection of tools, and a slave is a live article of property” (Aristotle 1932, 17).

The despotic relationship defines the foundational intersection between the city-state and the household. For Aristotle, according to Agamben, the slave represents a very important instrument in the structure of life as it is for their labour that the free man can enter the political arena of the *polis* (Agamben 2017, 1029). The despotic relationship should be viewed not only as a relationship of use between master and slave but also as a political relationship. As a political relationship, the utility of the slave enables the master to focus on their political life as a citizen of the *polis* and a form of tension relief system that ensures harmony in both the *oikos* and *polis*. Moreover, Agamben claims that for Aristotle, there exists a “clear distinction that separates the household (*oikia*) from the city (*polis*) in Aristotle’s thought – that the relationship soul/body (like master/slave) is an economic-domestic relationship and not a political one” (Agamben 2017, 1030) As argued by the Finnish political scientist Mika Ojakangas, in ancient Greece, the private sphere of the household as the realm of necessity was considered a sphere free of political interference (Ojakangas 2020, 405). This was not due to its perceived sacredness but, rather because such interventions would have undermined and obscured the political freedom enjoyed in the public sphere (Ojakangas 2020, 405).

Contrary to popular belief, the distinction between the household (*oikos*) and the city (*polis*) was not as separate as indicated by many scholars. According to Ojakangas, “the *oikos* and *polis* are not separate domains but ‘in a sense, constitute a unit’ […] and more precisely, they constitute a unit in which the polis is the determining entity, as households and citizens belong to the *polis* and not vice versa” (Ojakangas 2020, 407). This is further supported by Agamben’s understanding of Aristotle’s affirmation of the constitution of the city being “composed of families or households (*oikiai*)” (Agamben 2017, 1029). The slave in the household plays an integral role as their existence as an instrument for life is part of the perfect family formation which consists of the co-existence of slaves and free people (Agamben 2017, 1029). As such, the separation of the household from the *polis* must be rather understood in terms of their function. Namely, the household and therefore the family formation represents the basic social unit of the *polis* (Roy 1999, 1). The household as the basic unit of the *polis* is reflected in its foundational role in its broader context as the foundation for the functioning and stability of the broader political community (Roy 1991, 2). The significance of the family lies in its status as the primary social network to organise life in terms of the production and management of processes that “were restricted to the sphere of the *oikos*: things such as birth, death, procreation, health, sickness, longevity, even economy” (Ojakangas 2020, 405). As such the household was

concerned with organising the processes considered necessary to sustain life (Ojakangas 2020, 405).

The relationship between the household and the city viewed through an Aristotelian lens, therefore, highlights the necessity of the role of the slave as an instrument for life. The notion of the slave as an animate instrument poses an interesting question about the political status of the slave. The question that I would like to focus on is the role of the household in the condition of the slave and its implication for the Greek city-state. It is important to remember that the normalisation of slavery is an integral aspect of the formation of the household and serves the purpose of further installing the anthropological concept of the free man. The free man is created socially and politically, he is positioned as the head of the household that rules within the domain of his own walls that are separate from that of the *polis*. The reason for that might be the fact that the free man cannot rule over the body of an equal (another free man). As a result, the establishment of the hierarchies within the household provides the free man with the possibility to fully live out their nature as rational beings and exercise their *ergon* as souls that are directing the bodies within his household that are by nature incapable of doing so. Consequently, the separation of the structure of the *oikos* from that of the *polis* becomes essential to ensure harmony within the *polis*. Moreover, if a person "who failed to distinguish the *polis* from his own private household and presumed to treat citizens as if they were slaves became a tyrant by falling victim to his 'grandiose desire for power' and failing to maintain the boundary between public and private" (Brace 2022, 17).

To return to the image of the slave, their de-humanisation was a necessary step for their subjugation. This project can be observed through three analogies that Aristotle invokes to illustrate the socially constituted condition of the slave. These three analogies are the soul/body, craftsman/tool, and whole/part analogy. Each image serves as an analogy for Aristotle's attempt to justify slavery as a natural relationship within the private sphere of the household. The soul/body dichotomy becomes the prime example of the relationship between ruler and ruled. This relationship is present within the despotic relationship and claims the primacy of the soul (the master) over that of the body (the slave) (Gernsey 1996, 121). For Aristotle, a living being consists of a soul and a body. He describes their ideal state in terms of their best condition, in which the soul is naturally the governing factor and the body is subordinate to its rule (Aristotle 1932, 21). Cases of moral corruption or poor health, for instance, are examples of an unideal state as it is vice-ridden and displays a state in which the body dominates the soul (Aristotle 1932, 21).

The craftsman/tool analogy defines the belonging of the slave within the household being at the hand of their master, awaiting their master's next command. This analogy serves the purpose of highlighting the fact that "The

household needs property, and that is precisely the category in which this analogy will place the slave. A slave is property, one of the 'necessaries' of the household, a tool (*organon*) for living and for a good living" (Gernsey 1996, 122). This analogy is commonly used to illustrate the relationship between the craftsman and the tools that they make use of for their craft. The craftsman's tool is essential for the craft of the craftsman, as they allow the craftsman to participate in his craft by letting his tool exercise his will. It is in this analogy that the understanding of the craftsman's tool as an instrument for action derives its meaning. Aristotle viewed slaves as animate instruments because he recognised their potential as instruments for life and their significance in the practices of ancient society. He thus promotes the idea of "naturalised instrumentality," which can be understood in terms of the equation of the *ergon* of the slave to that of the craftsman tool.

To further justify the "naturalised instrumentality" of the slave, Aristotle evokes the two fundamental mental qualities, rationality, and virtue. This further marks the relationship between the master and the slave in which the master as a free man possesses the quality of rationality and virtue that can administer the labour of the slave. Aristotle suggests that a slave's virtue is determined by their relationship to their master. They only need enough virtue to avoid "intemperance and cowardice," ensuring they can fulfil their tasks effectively (Aristotle 1932, 65). Consequently, this analogy further supports the separation between the master and the slave by reducing the slave to property that is necessary for the peace and overall structure of the household by being categorised as an instrument of action.

The last analogy of whole/part sheds light on the relationship between the master as "the whole," and the slave, who functions as a smaller but essential constituent part within this relational context. Although the slave is seen as a fundamental element that is closely connected to their master, their identity and purpose is intricately linked to the master's existence and purpose. Aristotle argues that the whole is always prior to its parts. By that, he refers to the fact that if a body as a whole is destroyed the individual body parts that constitute it lose their function (Aristotle 1932, 11). Objects are defined by their function, so when they cannot fulfil their function, they can only bear their names figuratively (Aristotle 1932, 11).

The Aristotelian slave is a being that does not exist for themselves as it is always said to exist in relation to someone or something else. The slave is mainly defined based on their relationship with their master, caught up in a dialectical relationship that continuously constitutes their positions as ruler and ruled. The whole/part analogy in the context of Aristotelian thought is used to explain the organisational structure of the master/slave relationship, which consists of slaves being "part of their master, the master/slave relationship is part of the house household, the household is part of the *polis* – but natural the slave is not part of

the *polis*" (Gernsey 1996, 123). Slavery as a social institution is a complicated web of cultural, political, and economic influences that is fostered by various hierarchical relationships. In Aristotle, slavery is a natural phenomenon within the household and is defined by a series of hierarchical relationships between authority and subordination. For Aristotle, authority and subordination are both necessary and beneficial. He argues that some individuals are naturally destined to rule, while others are destined to be ruled over (Aristotle 1932, 19). It is a characteristic that is present in all living beings and arises naturally from their overall nature (Aristotle 1932, 19).

Considering the fact that Aristotle and Agamben both claim that the slave essentially remains human, the conditions and characteristics that define the slave continuously disregard their humanity. In fact, "The three images around which the rest of Aristotle account [of the slave] hovers, soul/body, craftsman/tool, and whole/part do nothing to rescue his humanity. They cannot do so, by reason of their very nature" (Gernsey 1996, 119). The account of slavery derived by Aristotle mainly points towards the idea of slavery as a social institution that distinguishes between different forms of humanism that are placed on a hierarchical scale. On this scale, the rational being forms the "purest" form of humanism and is exclusive to those that are capable of possessing and exercising virtue. Whilst the slave, on the other hand, marks the exact opposite. The slave is a being that possesses the absolute minimum of virtue, just enough so the slave does not abandon their tasks. Paradoxically, in discussing the conditions of the slave and their body, the only thing that one gets a better understanding of is what defines the body of the free man, and the slave is solely defined on the basis of what it is not and what it is incapable of.

Necropolitics or Biopolitics: Understanding the Slave's Condition

In the chapter "The Human Being without Work," Agamben poses the question "does there exist something like a body (of the) slave" (Agamben 2017, 1034)? He agrees but limits his answer to the Aristotelian slave and its project of justifying slavery by viewing it as a natural and private praxis (Agamben 2017, 1034). Although Agamben does separate himself from Aristotle's account of natural slavery, he is incapable of formulating a direct answer to this question. However, it is possible to read an implicit answer to his question by having a look at one of the characteristics that Agamben lists in his attempt of understanding the slave's body:" The slave, who is defined by means of this "use of the body," is the human being without work who renders possible the realization of the work of the human being, that living being who, though being human, is excluded – and through this exclusion, included – in humanity, so that human beings can have a human life, which is to say a political life" (Agamben 2017, 1047).

Those familiar with Agamben's *Homo Sacer* series will be able to see the resemblance between the conditions of the slave's body to that of the *homo sacer*. Interestingly, Agamben acknowledges the shared similarities between the condition of the slave and *the homo sacer* in terms of legality and vulnerability, but there seems to be, at the very least, a conceptual distinction between the two. He goes as far as stating that "it is possible that the slave represents the capture within the law of a figure of human acting that remains for us to recognize" (Agamben 2017, 1047).

For Agamben, the *homo sacer* functions as a metaphorical figure that he utilises to explore the general scope and problems of sovereignty, bare and the state of exception. The *homo sacer* represents those individuals or groups that have been put in a state of exception, leaving them vulnerable to state violence and arbitrary measures (Agamben 2017, 70). The *homo sacer* solely functions as a point of analysis to see how the power structures and dynamics present in the ancient articulations of the *homo sacer* as the politicisation of life are still present in modern occurrences of biopolitics (Agamben 2017, 7). Nonetheless, it is also important to admit that Agamben's *homo sacer*, strictly speaking, is limited to the expressions of ancient Roman law and that any application of that analysis is a matter of interpretation and analysis. With this in mind, the analysis of the relation between the body of the slave and the *homo sacer* can be continued.

To further understand the connection between the body of the slave and that of the *homo sacer* it is helpful to have a look at Mbembe's notion of "necropolitics." Under the term "necropolitics," Mbembe aims to correct Foucault's concept of biopolitics, which argues for a shift in the understanding of power and its particular governance over modern life (Foucault 2013, 43). Foucault observes a shift in the power dynamics of the sovereign, where the focus has moved from control over life to the fostering and maintenance of life. This change is reflected in the establishment of biopower[5] mechanisms and institutions aimed at administering and optimising life (Foucault 2013,42). Mbembe corrects Foucault by arguing that in the contemporary world, the sovereign's power is not solely based on their capacity to manage and regulate the life of a given society, as suggested by Foucault's notion of biopolitics, but also through the decision over life, which he assumes to be the ultimate expression of sovereignty (Mbembe 2013, 161). Necropolitics therefore deals with the exploration of the sovereign's power and its hidden two-fold project: administrating life in terms of fostering and expanding life but also the capacity to end life articulated in the decision over what life is expendable, disposable, or killable.

[5] Biopower refers to the practices of regulation and control of life within a society, designed to manage and govern its population. The term encompasses various institutions and practices, including medicine, education, and the welfare system, all of which contribute toward the political goal of protecting and sustaining life.

It is commonly assumed that the ultimate expression of sovereignty lies in the capacity to kill and decision which subjects have the right to live and which ones must die. Within biopolitics, as the administration of life, the notion of death plays a central role as "its reason for being and the logic of its exercise – and not the awakening of humanitarian feelings – made it more and more difficult to apply the death penalty" (Foucault 2013, 43). Death, with fear at its core, has hidden itself under the administration of life and alienated itself from the concept of life. The veiling of death has reached the point in which its role in the administration of life has become almost invisible. This becomes clear in Mbembe's idea of necropower in which he highlights various contexts of state violence towards vulnerable bodies, such as colonialism, slavery, and other forms of genocides. It is here that Mbembe's interests in figures of sovereignty find their significance, as he is more concerned with what is at the centre of such governance, "not the struggle for autonomy but *the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations*" (Mbembe 2013, 163).

It is important to note that biopolitics and necropolitics are concerned with the very same phenomenon of sovereign power. Whilst the Foucauldian analysis is more concerned with biopower as the organisation of life, Mbembe is more concerned with its opposite, necropower as the main organisational apparatus of sovereign power. Necropower, like biopower, suggests a practice of regulating and controlling life. While biopower is concerned with managing life, necropower concentrates on instilling terror to maintain authority and dominate specific populations in pursuit of their goals. Terror as an extreme form of fear, in Mbembe, is an integral aspect of the logic of modernity. It must be understood as such, to further understand the forms that governance under the premise of administration of life can take on in necropolitics (Mbembe 2013, 168).

To understand how the conditions of the slave qualify to be the same as that of the *homo sacer*, it is necessary to have a look at the paradoxical state figure of the plantation slave. Within the context of slavery, the slave is reduced to a mere object of instrumentality and their subjugation is established through a series of exceptions that can be summarised under what Mbembe calls the "paradoxical state figure of the state of exception" (Mbembe 2013, 169). The term "paradoxical" here serves as a reflection of the complex relationship between the state (or sovereign) and slavery. It highlights the structure of state power and its capacity to exercise power over life under exceptional conditions. Mbembe claims that "the very structure of the plantation system and its aftermath manifests the emblematic and paradoxical figure of the state of exception" (Mbembe 2013, 169).

Another aspect of the paradoxical state figure of the state of exception is the blurred line between death and life in the exception. For Mbembe the plantation

system highlights the blurred relationship between life and death and the overall contradictory nature of the involvement of the state with exceptional structures such as that of slavery (Mbembe 2013, 170). This contradictory nature is captured in the slave's life as a form of "death-in-life" that is captured in a life of non-synchronicity. Non-synchronicity must be understood in terms of the slave's experience as a socially dead individual that is kept alive solely based on their value as an instrument of labour (Mbembe 2013, 170). The concept of social death must be understood as the consequence of the natal alienation[6] that is constituted by the refusal of the slave's humanity and their independent social existence outside of the master-slave relationship. This alienation is defined by the detachment "of the slave from all formal, legally enforceable ties of 'blood,' and from any attachment to groups or localities other than those chosen for him by the master" (Patterson 1982, 7).

The term "natal alienation" encompasses what Mbembe refers to as the "triple loss" experience of the slave. The triple loss experience of the "enslaved person" is constituted by the violent uprooting of the "enslaved person" from their "home," the displacement of the slaves through the slave trade, the loss of the rights of their bodies as a result of legal ownership of the slave over their bodies and the loss of their political rights as a human being due to their instrumentalisation (Mbembe 2013, 169). Natal ties, thus, play a significant role in the social existence of a human being as, "The incapacity to make any claims of birth or to pass on such claims is considered a natural injustice among all peoples, so that those who were obliged to suffer it had to be regarded as somehow socially dead" (Patterson 1972, 8).

In the context of the plantation slave, the natal alienation is expressed in terms of race. However, this experience is not limited to racial, religious, or ethnic categories and plays a significant role in the displacement of a person holding the title of the *homo sacer*. Like the plantation slave, the *homo sacer* is experiencing the same form of alienation that results in their social death.

Reflections on the Slave as *Homo Sacer*

Returning to Agamben and the question "Does there exist something like a body (of the) slave?" it is fair to say that there are, at the very least, parallels between the body of the *homo sacer* and that of the slave. It is rather odd that Agamben does not view the body of the slave as a *homo sacer*, despite him acknowledging that "it is possible that the slave represents the capture within law of a figure of human acting that still remains for us to recognize" (Agamben 2017, 1047). One

[6] The term "natal alienation" is borrowed here from Jamaican American sociologist Orlando Patterson and refers to the violent uprooting of the slave from all the ties of their birthplace and thus the prior social existence of the slave as a person (Patterson 1982, 7).

of the possible reasons to explain Agamben's resistance to align the conditions of the slave to that of the *homo sacer* can be contributed to its complex and elusive nature. The *homo sacer* finds its original relevance in the context of ancient Roman law, which historically does not align with either the Aristotelian slave or the slaves encountered in chattel slavery.

As aforementioned, the *homo sacer* is a criminal "*who may be killed and yet not sacrificed*" (Agamben 2017, 10). The very implication of this fact is that prior to their conviction, the *homo sacer* was from a legal perspective considered to be a free man. Under the Roman Law of Persons (also known as *persona* or *caput*) "all human beings were classified from the legal point of view as falling under the Law of Persons even when, as in the case of the slave, the individual was considered more as a thing, an object of rights rather than a subject thereof" (Shumway 1901, 636). This is an important aspect as it implies that a *homo sacer* cannot be a slave in the Roman context,[7] as their status is the direct result of their misconduct that has led to their condemnation. Additionally, when a slave committed a crime that is punishable by both substantive and procedural law, the procedure of prosecution was different from that of free men (Amielańczyk 2020, 15). Generally speaking, the slave under Roman law, or more specifically private law, was protected as an object of property and the rights were awarded to their owner (Amielańczyk 2020, 16). Under the fully developed Roman law, the two elements that qualified an individual to hold rights and secured their status as a proper legal personality were freedom from slavery (*Libertas*) and citizenship (*Civitas*) (Shumway 1901, 636). Consequently, the status of the *homo sacer* is not comparable to the slave; rather, the *homo sacer* is a formerly free person that has lost all their status and experiences a very particular form of natal alienation resulting in their social death.

However, if one attempts to define the conditions of *homo sacer* there seems to be another qualifying characteristic, namely that of violence. Agamben does not explicitly name violence to be a characteristic of the *homo sacer*. Nonetheless, it is present in the experience of the state of exception and featured in the sovereign ban to which the *homo sacer* is structurally exposed to (Agamben 2017, 70). In Agamben, the notion of violence is predominantly explored through his concept of the state of exception and the sovereign ban (Agamben 2017, 26). The state of

[7] There are two causes for becoming a slave: birth and post-birth circumstances. When born into slavery, the child's status is determined by the mother's status, as the father's status can only be acquired through marriage (Shumway 1901, 640). The inability of slave women to marry ensures their offspring to remain slaves. Becoming a slave through after birth circumstances was legitimised through the laws and customs surrounding captivity and ownership under the customs of the Law of Nations (Shumway 1901, 641). Other pathway to slavery were through the Civil law, where allowing "another to sell him, pretending that he was a slave […]; also a commuted condemnation to death, or to hard labor in mines involved slavery to the municipality" (Shumway 1901, 641).

exception thus highlights a particular form of violence that is exercised through sovereign power over the life of the *homo sacer*.

Surprisingly, in *The Use of Bodies,* the notion of violence and more particularly the experience of violence is only addressed implicitly. Although Agamben does primarily investigate the concepts of biopolitics and the relationship between power and human, the reference to violence as a potential consequence of sovereign power is present. The relationship between sovereign power and violence is expressed in terms of the institutional order and refers to the sovereign's power to create new laws that regulate, control, and manipulate bodies (Agamben 2017, 1273). The question of violence in Agamben is ambiguous as for him this question reflects violence's "increasingly ambiguous relation to politics" (Agamben, Fabbri and Fay 2009, 104). Agamben writes, "Just as the tradition of metaphysics has always thought of the human being in the form of an articulation between two elements (nature and logos, body and soul, animality and humanity;) so has Western political philosophy always thought of politics in the figure of the relation between two figures that it is a question of linking together: bare life and power, the household and the city, violence and institutional order, anomie (anarchy) and law, multitude and people" (Agamben 2017, 1273).

The implicitness of violence is specifically present in the conditions of the slave. The slave plays a significant role in *The Use of Bodies* to understand the basic concepts of biopolitics and the relationship established between (sovereign) power and its subjects (citizenry). However, for some reason, Agamben does not articulate his own account of the slave's experience of violence but returns to his study of Aristotelian slavery. In this interpretation, the slave as an animate instrument and human "belongs neither to the sphere of nature nor to that of convention, neither to the sphere of justice nor to that of violence" (Agamben 2017, 1045). Again, it is not necessarily the conditions of violence that Agamben is interested in but rather the very role or function of instrumentality[8] that captures the slave in their state of exception.

The concept of violence, in Agamben, is rather ambiguous. He argues, "Violence as pure means is never a means with regard to an end: it is attested only as exposition and destitution of the relationship between violence and juridical order, between means and end" (Agamben 2017, 1271). As such, violence is viewed as a disruptive force that exposes and undermines the relationship between the use of violence and the juridical order. For Agamben, violence in its pure form does not function as a means to achieve a particular end or goal. Instead, what he intends to

[8] The discussion of violence and its role in instrumentality will be further explored in the subsequent section of this thesis. For now, this section predominantly focuses on the suggestion of the condition of violence as a possible concept that binds together the slave and the *homo sacer* in the same body as figures captured in law.

imply is that the form of violence he envisioned in *The Use of Bodies* operates outside the realm of instrumental logic, where means are typically employed to achieve specific ends (Agamben 2017, 1271). In this sense, violence is not a tool or strategy used to attain a desired outcome, but it serves to disrupt or challenge the established order and the normative framework in which means and ends are typically defined. Therefore, Agamben aims to critique the justification of violence based on its instrumental value in maintaining or establishing power, specifically.

The intersection between Mbembe's notion of necropolitics and Agamben's violence as pure means lies in their critique of the instrumentalisation of violence by political powers. Both scholars highlight how violence can be deployed as a tool for domination and control disregarding the inherent value and dignity of human life. In both cases, violence acts as a means of control and domination, enforcing the subordination and submission of these individuals. Agamben's focus is on the figure of the *homo sacer*, which highlights the violence exercised by the sovereign through the exploitation of their exclusion from legal protection (Agamben 2017, 26). On the other hand, Mbembe analyses the dynamics of power and violence in postcolonial contexts, with an emphasis on the racial dimensions of oppression and instrumentalisation. The violence experienced by the plantation slave is based on their natal alienation that results in their exclusion from humanity by rendering them as objects to maintain the political-juridical structure of the plantation that leaves the slave vulnerable to the rule of their master (Mbembe 2013, 169). It is exercised as an element "in manners, like whipping, or taking of the slave's life itself: an act of caprice and pure destruction aimed at instilling terror" (Mbembe 2013, 170).

What both thinkers reveal with their critique of instrumentality are the ways in which the utilisation of violence can be justified and normalised, leading to the dehumanisation and marginalisation of certain populations. The condition of violence, when combined with Mbembe's notion of necropolitics is capable of drawing more than parallels between the status of the *homo sacer* and the slave. The *homo sacer*'s vulnerability to violence aligns with the logic of necropolitics, which renders the lives of slaves disposable under the same experience of vulnerability. With necropolitics as the exercise of power that dictates who can live and who must die, the violence experienced by both the *homo sacer* and the slave highlights the treatment of certain individuals and groups as disposable and expendable (Mbembe 2013, 163). By considering the conditions of violence in conjunction with Mbembe's notion of necropolitics, the status of the *homo sacer* can be equated to that of a slave. Both are symbolic figures captured in the framework of law that subjects them to extreme forms of violence, dehumanisation, and disposability.

The concept of the *homo sacer* needs a revised definition when applied beyond its original context. In this case, the *homo sacer* represents a state where an individual's existence is reduced to bare life, a life without legal protection that is marked by their vulnerability to the arbitrary exercise of power that leads to violence and death. This figure highlights the interconnectedness of law, sovereignty, and the denial of human dignity, emphasizing the necropolitical mechanisms within governance.

Use as a Theologico-Political Paradigm

Instrumentality vs. Use

The previous section touched upon the concept of violence hinting towards its intricate relationship with instrumentality. To examine the relationship between the slave's *ergon* and violence in Agamben, it is important to understand the origins of Agamben's framework of *chrēsis* (use) and how this account differs from that of instrumentality. Instrumentality, in Agamben, is hardly defined and only understood in its function as a critical lens to explore the state of exception. This critical lens is integral in Agamben's project of exploring sovereign power and its relation to the employment of bodies throughout *The Use of Bodies*. He writes, "We are so accustomed to thinking of use and instrumentality as a function that it is not easy for us to understand a dimension of use entirely independent of an end" (Agamben 2017, 1037). For reasons that remain elusive and unclear, Agamben engages extensively in examining the nuances of use (*chrēsis*), approaching it from various angles, while comparatively neglecting the discussion on instrumentality. The closest Agamben gets to a definition of instrumentality is when he refers to it "as a form of causality" (Agamben 2017, 1090). What defines the concept of the instrumental cause is its double nature which is expressed in the action of the object (Agamben 2017, 1092). To further explain the notion of instrumental cause, Agamben employs the example of the carpenter using an axe. He writes, "On the one hand, it acts not in the virtue of itself but in virtue of the principal agent (namely, the carpenter), but on the other hand, it works according to its own nature, which is that of cutting. That is this to say, it serves the end of another, only to the degree that it realizes its own end" (Agamben 2017, 1092).

In Agamben, the concept of use, on the other hand, is based upon *chrēsis* that encompasses both the subjective experience of using one's body (*tou somatos chrēsis*) and the objective competence to act in the world (Agamben 2017, 1039). What is central to Agamben's understanding of *chrēsis* can be located in his readings of Saint Paul in which he interprets *chrēsis* based upon the messianic mode of life. What the messianic mode of life in Saint Paul exemplifies is "how the messianic vocation – *klēsis* is vocation or calling – revokes all previous vocation. To revoke is not to annihilate vocations, but allows people to live their vocations differently" (van der Heiden 2020, 70).

The messianic vocation or calling (*klēsis*) in this context refers to an individual's specific role or purpose in life and is comparable but not synonymous with the notion of *ergon*. Just like the *ergon*, the idea of messianic vocation refers to a specific purpose that reflects one's role in the collective. It is important to note that the messianic vocation as a Christian vocation is one of many and does not replace other pre-existing vocations but rather influences and shapes them. As such, the messianic vocation must be understood in terms of a vocation that is capable of the transformation of life that focuses on aligning one's vocations with

the values of Christianity. Therefore, the notion of messianic vocation and that of *ergon* are two distinct concepts that can be related to one another. It is important to note that Paul's chapter in the "Corinthians" has been shaped by "the common place of Greco-Roman morality and politics that the health of the city-state (*polis*) depends on the health of its constituent households (*oikiai*), and the attention given in the Jewish scriptures to the practical and symbolic significance of marriage and sex riles for marking Israel off from 'the nations' as God's holy people" (Dunn and Rogerson 2003, 1328)

As such, the relationship between *klēsis* and *ergon* can be understood in terms of Paul's attempt of encouraging believers to align their beliefs with their daily work and actions. As already stated earlier, the term *ergon* refers to the role that each individual plays in the bigger network of society. The *ergon* of an individual determines their daily activity and tasks as well. By aligning *klēsis* with *ergon*, what Paul does is to call for the transformation of life to one in which the *ergon* is shaped by one's religious belief. As a result, this form of life whilst retaining the very essence and function of *ergon* on a societal scale remains maintained but influenced and shaped by an individual's belief system.

According to scholar and philosopher Gert-Jan van der Heiden, the new mode of living is explained by Paul's writing on the expression of *hōs mē*. He writes, "Paul uses the expression *hōs mē*, 'as not', which plays a crucial role in Agamben's reading […] exemplifying a messianic mode of life that no longer identifies with a vocation but rather uses it" (van der Heiden 2020, 70). It is based on this reading of *hōs mē* that Agamben can introduce his notion of *chrēsis* in opposition to possession (van der Heiden 2020, 70). Van der Heiden offers a critical insight that confronts Agamben's understanding of use by drawing attention to the nuances of this concept. He starts his argument by stating "The actual tension in the final *hōs mē* formula is not between possession and use, [as indicated by Agamben,] but rather between use and abuse, misuse, or using up (as in the French *usure*: a use to the extreme that leads to wastage or wears out)" (van der Heiden 2020, 70). Thus, for him, the emphasis should be on the reading of Paul that highlights the notion of use and its potential of abuse or using up in each use, which should be avoided instead of a form of use that resides outside of possession (van der Heiden 2020, 71).

The Cycle of (Ab)use and the Master-Slave Dynamic

Building upon the discussion of Paul's expression of *hōs mē* and its interpretation by van der Heiden, one question arises. "Are all forms of use instrumental, or is there a distinction between legitimate use and abuse or misuse?" If all forms of use can be instrumental that would suggest that everything and everyone can be treated as a means to an end. However, there is one master-slave dynamic that

Agamben briefly discusses that can offer an attempt at a pure relationship of use. The dynamic here at stake is the master-slave dynamic in sadomasochism.[9] Agamben claims that "*sadomasochism exhibits the truth of use which does not know subject and object, agent and patient.* And in being taken up in this indetermination, pleasure is also made non-despotic and common" (Agamben 2017, 1060). To fully understand the sadomasochism relationship, it must be first understood in terms of an interpersonal personal union (Fromm 1956, 16). First and foremost, sadomasochism is generally understood as the consensual practice of exploration and exchange of power dynamics and is seen as either a psychological tendency or sexual practice that unites sadism and masochism. According to German psychologist Erich Fromm, the desire for interpersonal fusion "is the most fundamental passion, it is the force which keeps the human race together, the clan, the family, society. The failure to achieve it means insanity or destruction – self-destruction or destruction of others" (Fromm 1956, 18).

Central to Fromm's understanding of the sadomasochism dynamic is the notion of symbiotic union. He compares the symbiotic union to the relationship between the mother and the unborn foetus in which the lives of mother and unborn child are intertwined and they live together in *sym-biosis* (Fromm 1956, 19). The symbiotic union consists of two parts: one active part, which is represented by sadism and one passive part, masochism. Beginning with the latter, masochism is an extreme form of submission that can be blended with physical, and sexual desire which does not only take place in the individual's mind but also involves the whole body (Fromm 1956, 19). The sadist, as its conceptual counterpart, represents the realm of domination (Fromm 1956, 20). What defines their relationship is the practice of the interplay of power between submitting and dominating. This relationship is defined by co-dependency as "the sadistic person is as dependent on the submissive person as the latter is on the former; neither can live without the other" (Fromm 1956, 20). This form of co-dependency is expressed in terms of ritualistic performative ownership as their power dynamic, the very essence of their relationship, relies on a continuous recognition of their sense of identities as sadists and masochists. By ritualistic performative ownership, I am referring to the performed power-play at stake in which the sadistic person "commands, exploits, hurts, humiliates, and the masochistic person is commanded, exploited, hurt, and humiliated" (Fromm 1956, 20). I refer to this practice as ritualistic as the nature of their power-play often involves rituals and symbolic acts to establish and maintain their dynamic. An example of such a ritualistic event would be the act of "collaring." Collaring in D/s relationships is a significant practice as the collar is meant to serve as a physical reminder of the status of ownership of the submissive

[9] It is important to note that sadomasochism is one of many forms that a Dominant/submissive (D/s) dynamic can take on in the framework of BDSM (short for Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission). It primarily describes the specific form of D/s interaction.

by the dominant. It can also be used pre-scene as a (mini) ceremony to symbolise an act of consensual power exchange. A scene is an agreed-upon timeframe in which practitioners of BDSM come together to engage in consensual and safe BDSM and/or power exchange. It can be described based upon six characteristics, "namely, power exchange in the form of dominance and submission, the infliction and reception of painful stimuli that is experienced as pleasurable by those involved, the use of role play or fantasy, some form of humiliation or degradation of the submissive partner, the incorporation of fetishistic elements, and ritualistic activities" (Dunkley and Brotto 2020, 660).

Contrary to popular belief, most BDSM interactions are planned out, discussed, and negotiated before entering a scene. A pre-scene negotiation is the practice in which the participants discuss limits, boundaries, desires, safe words[10], and other safety precautions to establish a safe and most importantly consensual environment for the upcoming scene. These precautions are made for both parties, the dominant and the submissive.

Agamben acknowledges the potential that the reciprocal relationship in the sadomasochism dynamic offers for his analysis of *chrēsis*. He even goes as far as stating "*sadomasochism exhibits the truth of use which does not know subject and object, agent and patient*" (Agamben 2017, 1060). Moreover, what characterises sadomasochism for Agamben is its inherent structure of subjectification and *ethos* (Agamben 2017, 1059). This means that the individual whose body is being used is simultaneously constituted as a subject of that usage, as they willingly take on this role and derive pleasure from it (Agamben 2017, 1059). As such the individual functions as both object and subject of their own experience and becomes actively involved in the process of subjectification and objectification (Agamben 2017, 1059). Consequently, the person who appears to be using the other's body can also be used by the other person for their own pleasure. This relationship and "the use of the body" is not just reciprocal but also essentially constituent.

The potential of the realisation of the Greek *chrēsis* in a modern context is further confirmed in Agamben's assessment of German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and his short analysis of the reversal of the dialectic of the master-slave dynamic in sadomasochism. Agamben's interpretation of Hegel's critique on the dialectical reversal sheds further light on how its first impression could appear to be of instrumental nature (Agamben 2017, 1062). He states, "Hegel dwells upon precisely what makes it possible to separate and recognize the two positions: the distinction between the labor of the slave and the enjoyment of

[10] A safeword is a pre-agreed term that allows the practitioner to communicate consent, boundaries, or limits during a scene when it is used. Safewords serve as verbal signals to either pause, modify, or to stop ongoing activities, indicating a desire to stop the activity and withdraw consent (at times momentarily) (Dunkley and Brotto 2020, 663-664).

the master. Naturally, as in sadomasochism […] the two roles tend to be reversed, and, in the end, since 'the truth of the master's consciousness is servile consciousness' […] the labor of the servant, as 'desire held in check and fleetingness staves off' […], acquires its independence with respect to the fleeting enjoyment of the master" (Agamben 2017, 1061-1062). The passage suggests that in Hegel's view, the truth of the master's consciousness is servile consciousness. The notion of servile consciousness refers to the experience of the slave being dependent upon the master for their very existence. This state of dependence and subordination shapes the slave's consciousness leading to a deep awareness of their vulnerability and subservience in relation to their master. The statement of the master's consciousness being in praxis closer to that of servile consciousness, therefore, highlights the undecidable nature of use that prevents a proper distinction between subject and object in this very practice (Agamben 2017, 1061). It is not just their roles that are affected by the servile consciousness of the master but also the juridical order that defines the masochist as the property of the sadist (Agamben 2017, 1061).

However, when examining the sadomasochistic dynamic, it becomes apparent that their pursuit of pleasure also inherently carries the potential of misuse or abuse. Within the BDSM community, the notion of consent is fundamental and is expressed in mottos such as "Safe, Sane, and Consensual (SSC)," "Risk-Aware Consensual Kink (RACK)," or "Caring, Communication, Consent and Caution (4Cs)" (Dunkley and Brotto 2020, 661). The relevance of these slogans lies in their function to provide practitioners with a quick and easy-to-remember guideline to educate new practitioners on appropriate behaviour. Moreover, the lack of communication, violation of agreed-upon terms, and the pushing of boundaries discussed in pre-scene negotiations are considered unacceptable in BDSM communities and qualify as sexual abuse (Dunkley and Brotto 2020, 665). There are three distinct levels that must be taken into account when discussing the parameters of consent in BDSM: "(a) surface consent, which is described as a basic 'yes' or 'no'; (b) scene consent, which involves the Top [(refers to the individual performing actions upon another person)] and Bottom [(refers to the recipient of such acts)] negotiating the parameters of the scene; and (c) deep consent, which involves the Top being cognizant of the Bottom's ability or mental capacity to use a safeword during a scene" (Dunkley and Brotto 2020, 661).

Moreover, what the notion of consent in BDSM carries is the hyperawareness of the potentiality of abuse or misuse in each of their acts. Each act of use within the sadomasochistic dynamic is dependent upon prior negotiations and agreement within the framework of the dynamic. The distinction between proper use and abuse is always present and determined by the adherence to these agreed-upon boundaries.

The *Ergon* of the Slave and the Theologico-Political Paradigm of Instrumentality

In his work, *The Kingdom and the Glory,* Agamben examines the intricate relationship between theology and politics. He argues that both theological concepts and their religious discourse have greatly influenced "the development and the global arrangement of Western society" (Agamben 2011, 1). However, it is important to state that Agamben's exploration of the theologico-political paradigm in this work does not seek to provide a strict definition of this paradigm. Instead, it offers a critical analysis that stresses the significance of *oikonomia* within a theological framework and more specifically its transformation over time. He argues that the early Christian theologians and the Church have appropriated and transformed the meaning of the concept of *oikonomia* from the "administration of the household" to the "economy of salvation" (Agamben 2011, 20). This theological revival of *oikonomia* as God's governance became a crucial element in the development of modern political thought. Over time, the meaning of *oikonomia* evolved into the secular concept of "economy" and, applicable to the management of individual households which expanded itself to the management of the state and society at large (Agamben 2011, 3). Thus, the theological-political paradigm, as conceptualised by Agamben, is the result of the interplay between theological and political power. It involves the intertwinement of religious authority and political governance, where religious ideas and principles influence and shape political structures and practices (Agamben 2011, 1).

Another central aspect of the theological-political paradigm in Agamben is the notion of instrumentality. Agamben claims that the modern understanding of governance is characterised by a paradigm of instrumentality in which governance operates based on a logic of means and ends (Agamben 2011, 1). As such, this instrumental logic treats governance as a tool or mechanism aimed at achieving specific goals. To provide an example of the theologico-political paradigm of instrumentality it is helpful to employ the example of the minister as an instrument for the divine. It is crucial to recognise that the minister cannot exert control or manipulate in the name of God, but rather serves as an intermediary or vessel for divine purpose, such as spreading the word of God. The minister, as a theological figure, embodies a vessel for the divine message and serves as an intermediary between God and the audience. The very notion of man as a vessel for God can be found in the scriptures of the *Bible* (Romans 9:21-23). Nonetheless, there is one place in the *Bible* that is worth quoting to highlight the instrumental dimension, namely, "In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for special purposes and some for common use. Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepare" (2 Timothy 2:20-21). This passage uses figurative language, comparing the world to a large house with various individuals represented by different materials such as

gold, silver, wood, and clay. The more precious metals symbolise those who have purified themselves from worldly influences, qualifying them to become vessels of God for special (or divine) purposes. This purification process entails striving for a life of faith and service to God guided by the holy scriptures. However, if individuals exploit their vessel status for personal gain, they become corrupted and deviate from their path of righteousness. The instrumental role of a vessel is to transmit and safeguard God's message from corruption driven by self-interest.

The instrumentality displayed in the minister is integral to the theologico-political paradigm. According to Agamben, the theologico-political paradigm instrumentalises theological concepts, strips them of their religious significance and transforms them into tools for political governance (Agamben 2011, 3). The example of the instrumentality of the minister can be applied to politics and the role of the ruler and different vocations in society. The various materials in the large house represent different individuals and their unique qualities, as well as the different vocations and positions of authority reflected in the diversity of people within society. In the same fashion that the vessel transmits and safeguards God's message, the ruler is entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring justice, order, and the well-being of its subjects. The ruler, like the vessel, possesses a particular instrumental role in governing and guiding the people and as their vocation sets their expectation to fulfil their duties in a manner that aligns with the common good. It is here that the notion of *oikonomia* is appropriated from divine administration and care for the people to a means to manage and control human affairs.

Furthermore, when considering the conditions of the slave, it is possible to see how this figure exemplifies the same appropriation of *oikonomia* as an instrument for governance in the theologico-political paradigm. The instrumentalisation of the slave within the *oikos* reflects the general logic present in governance structures, where individuals are treated as disposable resources or as a means to an end. This end is usually expressed in terms of *oikonomia* for the flourishing of the households or, in the case of the slave, the maintenance of the relationships that allow the free man to exercise their freedom (Agamben 2017, 1029).). Agamben defines instrumentality based on the instrumental cause (Agamben 2017, 1090), connecting it to the figure of the slave as "the first appearance of pure instrumentality" (Agamben 2017, 1096). This concept refers to the condition in which an object is valued solely for its functional qualities or the purpose it serves. In the case of the slave, their nature as animate instruments for life within the household is determined by their usefulness to their master and displays the same instrumentality present in the minister (Agamben 2017, 1029).

The notion of instrumental cause can also be understood in terms of vocations. Agamben argues that the instrumental cause goes beyond the efficient cause and has the power to transform the final cause (or end) and the essence of the

instrument itself (Agamben 2017, 1095). Moreover, he claims that the instrumental cause establishes a hierarchical relationship between causes. This shift is signalled in the alteration of its nature which is defined by a reciprocal form of use, that is present in *chrēsis*, to a mode of pure instrumentality (Agamben 2017, 1095). This is further reflected in his statement on how the relationship of use in instrumentality is no longer a relation of twofold or reciprocal affection, in which subject and object are indeterminate, but a hierarchical relation between two causes, defined by instrumentality (Agamben 2017, 1095). As a result, what Agamben seems to suggest is that the notion of the instance of the slave as a form of pure instrumentality reveals a fundamental difference between use and instrumentality. What this difference highlights, in terms of the slave, is how instrumentality, in Agamben, refers to instrumentalised bodies and their treatment as means to an end within the socio-political structure of slavery.

Agamben's exploration of the instrumental cause becomes especially interesting in the context of the broader understanding of how individuals and their roles are conceptualised within social and political systems. In this context, vocations can be viewed as specific instances of instrumental causes, where individuals are assigned or take up specific functions or roles within society. Within the theologico-political paradigm, the understanding of vocations as instrumental causes becomes significant as their distribution and utility often serve to maintain and reinforce hierarchical structures of power. Thus, vocations can be seen as part of a larger apparatus through which power operates, defining an individual's place, function and therefore value within a society, by shaping their relationships to authority and governance.

When considering the relationship between the notion of vocations and the *ergon* of the slave, it is possible to discover its important connections to the theologico-political paradigm of instrumentality. The *ergon* of the slave as "the use of the body," as discussed earlier, refers to their assigned function or role within the socio-political structure of slavery within the household. The alignment between the *ergon* of the slave and the theologico-political paradigm becomes evident when we recognise that the instrumentalisation of individuals as slaves serves as a fundamental mechanism to consolidate and maintain power. Not only does Agamben define the slave as the first appearance of pure instrumentality, but he defines the life of the slave as "while living according to its own end, is precisely for that reason and to the same extent used for another's end" (Agamben 2017, 1096).

In this paradigm, the *ergon* of the slave becomes instrumental in maintaining hierarchical systems of dominance where individuals are objectified and reduced to mere tools for the fulfilment of the master's desires. Furthermore, the *ergon* of the slave sheds light on the intricate relationship between the body and the cycle

of abuse. The assigned function of the slave positions their body as a resource to be exploited, manipulated and violates at the discretion of the master. The body, in this context, becomes a site of (ab)use, perpetuating a vicious cycle where power is exerted through physical domination, humiliation, and degradation. Therefore, by considering vocations as instrumental causes within the framework of the theologico-political paradigm of instrumentality it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of the way power operates.

Conclusion

To summarise and conclude, Agamben's conceptualisation of the slave's body exemplifies a critique of the paradigm of instrumentality. Although, he reveals the inherent acts of dehumanisation and objectification of the slave as an instrument, his exploration of the concept of instrumentality hardly reads as a critique. Agamben primarily engages with this notion in terms of the instrumentalisation of bodies, and more specifically the body of the slave. The reduction of the slave to a mere instrument function as a prime example of Agamben's broader critique of modern biopolitics, where individuals are reduced to their biological and productive capacities within a political system. What the figure of the slave illuminates is the instrumental logic present in biopolitical regimes that subject bodies to mechanisms of control, exploitation, and exclusion.

Paradoxically Agamben's use of the slave as a theoretical tool in his critique of instrumentality exemplifies the very paradigm he seeks to critique. His intention is to expose the dehumanising effects of instrumentality, however, the very act of employing the slave, as a conceptual device, risks replicating the objectification and devaluation of the human condition that he aims to challenge. By reducing the slave to a theoretical construct and treating their bodies as a mere object of analysis, Agamben carelessly continues the instrumentalisation of the slave. This raises important questions about the extent to which Agamben's theoretical framework aligns with the principles of *chrēsis* that he advocates for in his work. While he critiques the dehumanisation of individuals within instrumental systems, his use of the slave as a tool for his analysis seems to fall into the same trap of reducing human beings to mere objects, denying their inherent worth and agency. This highlights the need for critical reflection on the methods and approaches employed in critiques of instrumentality, ensuring that they do not inadvertently continue the very systems of oppression they seek to dismantle.

The Use of Bodies introduces a new conceptual framework of use that challenges the Western understanding of subject-object relationships and the instrumental logic of the modern world. Agamben critiques the modern translation of the ancient Greek verb *chresthai*, arguing that it fails to capture the essence of *chresthai*, particularly in relation to the middle voice in the Greek language. Agamben highlights the middle voice as a crucial characteristic, as it expresses the involvement of the subject in the action and the reciprocal relationship between the subject and object. The modern understanding of use as a one-sided appropriation, is incapable of capturing this dynamic. It is based on the falling short of the modern meaning of use that Agamben proposes a re-definition of *chresthai* that emphasises the mutual and affective relationship between bodies, calling for a conceptual shift in human relations.

This new framework challenges the dominant figure of human action, namely use and appropriation, which have influenced the ideology of humans as masters and possessors of nature. Agamben's critique of the modern notion of use as a one-sided appropriation highlights the failure to capture the reciprocal relationship and involvement of the subject in the action. Instead, he proposes a re-definition of *chresthai* that emphasises the mutual and affective relationship between bodies, calling for a conceptual shift in human relations. Agamben attempts to articulate a new form-of-life that moves away from the modern understanding of human agency and instead emphasises the possibilities and powers inherent to each act of living.

Through his exploration of the slave's body, Agamben exposes the power dynamics and violence inherent in the administration of life and death by the sovereign in the biopolitical paradigm. While Agamben's interpretation of the Aristotelian slave has been subject to criticism, particularly regarding the lack of analysis of the slave's body itself. Both Agamben and Aristotle emphasise the importance of the instrumental and integral role that the slave plays in the household. The question of the instrumentality of the slave's body in Agamben is revealed in the dehumanising and hierarchical nature of the master-slave relationship. The nature of the slave's body is further addressed implicitly in Agamben's acknowledgement of the parallels between the *homo sacer* and the slave as figures captured in law whose mode of acting has yet not been defined. The possibility of the alignment of the *homo sacer* and the slave can be made, regardless of Agamben's difficulties to align these figures due to his focus on Aristotelian slavery and the historical context of the *homo sacer* in ancient Roman law. The contribution of Mbembe's concept of necropolitics highlights how the slave can be aligned with the *homo sacer* by stressing the shared experience of power dynamics and violence under the administration of life and death by the sovereign.

Throughout the discussion, the examination of violence within the realm of instrumentality and its association with Agamben's use of *chrēsis* has been a central focus. Agamben's emphasis on use as a distinct entity separate from instrumentality has provided valuable insights into the subjective experience of employing one's body and the objective competence to act in the world. While instrumentality, on the other hand, remains vaguely defined in his work, its characterisation as a form of causality and its connection to the state of exception experienced by the slave have been significant points for this discussion. The notion of violence in his analysis of instrumentality and the conditions of the slave are implicit. While he does not explicitly discuss violence, it can be inferred from his exploration of the state of exception and the role of sovereign power in the conditions of the slave. The conditions of the slave align with the *homo sacer*, representing a state of vulnerability to violence and disposability. It further

highlights the interconnectedness of law, sovereignty, and the denial of human dignity, emphasising the presence of bio- and necropolitical mechanisms within governance.

Agamben's notion of use proves itself as a distinct entity separate from instrumentality and provides valuable insights into the subjective experience of employing one's body and the objective competence to act in the world. Additionally, the interplay between personal purpose and societal function, as seen in Saint Paul's concept of *klēsis* and *ergon*, highlights the importance of ideological beliefs within daily life. However, the examination of the master-slave dynamic within sadomasochism offers insight into the limitation of pure use. The limitation that a pure notion of use poses is the potential for misuse or abuse further linking the intricate nature of use and its connection to violence, prompting a critical relationship between use and instrumentality within Agamben's theologico-political paradigm of instrumentality.

In conclusion, Agamben's framework of *chresthai* invites us to critically reflect on the relationship between use and instrumentality and to question the dominant figures of human activity that perpetuate the objectification of nature and the exploitation of bodies. By shedding light on the problematic aspects of Agamben's interpretation of the slave, we uncover the intricate nature of instrumentality and its connection to violence. Agamben's conceptualisation of the slave's body, therefore, challenges us to reevaluate and expand our understanding of power dynamics and human interaction and other bodies in our world to strive for a more equitable and humane form of existence and interaction.

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