



Power and management according to Agamben: Some implications of Agamben's thoughts to management scholarship

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abstract

This review discusses some of the most prominent contributions of Giorgio Agamben to philosophy and political theories that are relevant to management scholars. By addressing Agamben's theological genealogy of economy and government included in *The Kingdom and the Glory*, I introduce management scholars to innovative significations and understandings of power and management, including the notion that power is a form of management. I also offer some reflections on the ramifications for management scholarship of Agamben's engagement with management as a *praxis*.

Introduction

It is the scholarly instinct in general, and the American predilection in particular, to equalize management with exercise of power. This intuitive understanding of management, Italian philosopher and political theorist Giorgio Agamben argues, reflects a distinct relationship between political theory and management. However, Agamben claims that economy, not politics, is the key to this connection between power and management. With the term 'economy' Agamben explores a variety of meanings, including the Greek *oikonomia*, that is, household management. This shift from politics to

economy offers two advantages. First, it allows Agamben to reveal that the link of politics with management in contemporary times is established hegemonically, from which the prescriptive character of management scholarship can be deducted. Second, a focus on economy allows Agamben to reframe management as operability, or the simple act of using something. While the reader may think that this shift has little or no relevance to contemporary management, the claim can be made that modern management lies on fragile theoretical roots. In fact, if management takes the form of action, management is not dependent on a superior order of affairs; it does not receive legitimacy and authority from an external body. To put it in more general terms, from Agamben's work it is deducible that not one, but two different understandings of management are possible. On one hand is the paradigm of authority, which links politics and management, expresses a transcendental tendency, and conceives management as a form of knowledge, and eventually as a science. On the other hand, the paradigm of economy and management replaces this transcendence with the idea of an *oikonomia*, conceived as an immanent ordering – domestic and not political in a strict sense. By claiming that management derives from economy, Agamben suggests that management belongs to a non-epistemic paradigm, something that is not a knowledge or a science. As a matter of fact, management is action, and action does not need further justification. In this context, Agamben frames management as:

... an activity that is not bound to a system of rules, and does not constitute a science in the proper sense. This activity rather implies decisions and orders that cope with problems that are each time specific. (Agamben, 2011b: 17-18)

In an effort to correct Michel Foucault's analysis on Western politics, Agamben has been occupied with an extensive project of power reconceptualization. In political theory there is the long-established notion of a negative relationship between sovereignty and government, or, political authority and political activity. Foucault addresses this relationship: he suggests that in modern times, the dominant political element, sovereignty – the juridical-political form of power – has been replaced by government – the economic-administrative form of power. Reflected in this process for Foucault is a profound transformation of the nature of power itself: power takes the

form of government and regulates the population; this is what Foucault occasionally called a 'biopolitics' (Foucault, 2003: 243). The biopolitical is the political concern with biological life. Foucault's contribution has already been assimilated in management scholarship.

Enter Agamben. His argument is that government has not replaced sovereignty as the dominant form of power, but rather that sovereignty belongs to a certain ontological domain, that government belongs to another, and that the two domains mutually influence each other. The notion of Government (different than the notion of 'government') stands for the articulation between the two. It can be said that, for Agamben, 'government' stands for the executive power, while 'Government' is the articulation or coordination of sovereignty and government. Moreover, Agamben argues that the negative relationship between sovereignty and government is the result of a juridical-political paradigm, while the articulation between these two 'antinomical but functionally related' poles (i.e., sovereignty and government) is the effect of an economic paradigm (Agamben, 2011b: 1). Thus, Agamben's first concern is that the relationship between sovereignty and government is that of mutual coordination, and that it is not hierarchical. This activity of mutual coordination is the Government. His second concern is that sovereignty and government belong to an economic-administrative paradigm. As a consequence of belonging to an economic-administrative paradigm, Agamben notes, management is a praxis, an activity.

The aim of this article is to deal with these radical theses of claiming that (1) power belongs to an economic-administrative paradigm, not to a juridical-political paradigm; (2) Government is the bipolar machine of power, i.e., norm and order, legitimacy and execution, sovereignty and government, *auctoritas* and *potestas*; and (3) government is an activity, not a science.

This article is divided into three parts: first, I briefly introduce Agamben and his work; second, I address Agamben's work on power; third, I explore the implications of Agamben's work for management scholars. In the first part, as indispensable background, I introduce briefly Agamben's overall project and the related notions of state of exception and bare life. I then turn to

Agamben's general assumptions about secularization, his interpretation of Foucault's work on power, and Agamben's study of two theological paradigms, one political and the other economic-driven. My central interest does not concern the accuracies or inaccuracies of Agamben's readings of Foucault's corpus of political texts. Instead, the intention is to tease out the main features of Agamben's theoretical and philosophical conceptions of power and management. Then, Government comes to the fore and occupies my focus. Finally, as follow and take further Agamben's argument, I invite readers to recognize the ramifications of Agamben's ideas for management scholarship.

Agamben is a thinker whose texts are characterized by a scrupulous attention to other authors' terminology; unfortunately, he does not pay the same attention to his own. With that said, in coherence with Agamben's works, 'government' is used in three distinct senses in this article: (1) government (or governance) as executive power; (2) government as the bipolar system of power composed of sovereign power and executive power (and in order to avoid confusion, the capital letter – i.e., 'Government' or 'Governance' – is used to indicate the second sense; (3) government as government of people and things (used as a synonym of governmentality). The terms administration, government, management, and economy are used synonymously.¹ Finally, the meaning of terms such as 'political theology,' 'economic theology,' 'biopolitical,' 'economy,' and 'management' are defined in the text.

1 An introductory note on some terms used in this article. 'Sovereign power' is power as right within a territory; 'biopower' stands for power as competence over a population. 'Sovereignty' is the *supreme authority within a territory*; 'governmentality' is a term that Foucault originally formulated to combine the terms 'government' and 'rationality.' Governmentality in this sense refers to the process of governing as well as the mentality, the 'governmental *ratio*' or 'governmental reason' or 'rationality of governing.' To put it differently, the concern of governmentality is how to govern, or the intellectual and practical activity of governing. 'Law' stands for 'norm', 'rule', or 'prescription'.

Agamben's thought

Italian political philosopher Giorgio Agamben (born 1942) dedicated the first part of his academic career to focusing on questions of aesthetics and the readings of major figures in the history of philosophy. Since the 1990s, however, much of Agamben's work can be read as a re-conception of the notion of political power. Here I refer mostly to his so-called *Homo Sacer* project, a series of nine volumes published across 20 years (1995-2014), which are intended to be read together as a single work. In this capacity, Agamben's work has had a deep impact on contemporary scholarship in a number of disciplines in the Anglo-American intellectual world. Following the trajectory of Agamben's work since the mid-1990s makes evident that he proceeds by an ongoing interpretation of the thought of two main European thinkers, Walter Bendix Schönflies Benjamin (1892-1940) and Michel Foucault (1926-1984). Benjamin was a German Jewish philosopher associated mostly with the Frankfurt School. Agamben served from 1979 to 1994 as editor of the Italian edition of Benjamin's collected works. Foucault was a French philosopher, often cited as a poststructuralist and postmodernist. Agamben's (1998: 9) work on political theory is explicitly engaged with Foucault's thesis on the condition of biopolitics, claiming that he aims to 'correct or at least complete' it.

Agamben is best known for his work investigating the concepts of 'state of exception' and 'bare life'. These two concepts might be relevant to management scholars and remain worth reading. Certainly, one of Agamben's main theses is that sovereign power, through the inclusive exclusion of natural life, is always already biopolitical. More precisely, Agamben argues that sovereign power establishes itself through the production of a political order based on the exclusion of human life. It achieves this, according to legal scholar Amy O'Donoghue (2015), through the enactment of the exception in which the law is suspended, withdrawn from the human being who is stripped of legal status and transformed in relation to sovereign power into a bare life without rights (*zoē*). O'Donoghue explains that the bare life in the sovereign exception is captured in a specific relation to sovereign power, what Agamben terms a 'relation of exception' or 'relation of ban'. Those who inhabit the state of exception cannot be said to be freed from the juridical order and from

sovereign rule; bare life is not ‘simply set outside the law and made indifferent to it’ (Agamben, 1998: 28). Through its own suspension, the ‘law encompasses living beings’ (Agamben, 2005a: 3) who are simultaneously bound and abandoned to it. As such, the bare life captured in the sovereign ban is included in the juridical order ‘through its exclusion’; it finds itself tied to the order, and the sovereign power by which it is constituted, in the relation of exception (Agamben, 1998: 18).

Agamben’s attempt to move beyond Foucault’s work on biopolitics, as the regulation of populations, has led to an important debate in fields as diverse as political theology (Siisiäinen, 2014), philosophy of politics (Toscano, 2011; Kishik, 2012), legal studies (Frost, 2012; O’Donoghue, 2015), political theory (Luisetti, 2011; Whyte, 2014), geography (Minca 2006; 2007), and Foucault studies (Genel, 2006; Snoek, 2010). While the contribution of Agamben’s project to Foucault’s political ideas remains yet to be explored in a comprehensive and systematic way (see for example Mills, 2008; de la Durantaye, 2009; Murray, 2010; Kishik, 2012; Whyte, 2014; Attell, 2014), Agamben’s work has been addressed in management scholarship with regards to politics of the gesture (ten Bos, 2005), state of exception (Cunha et al., 2012), organization (Banerjee, 2008; O’Doherty et al., 2013), and workplace (Ek et al., 2007).

Readers should be aware of Agamben’s extraordinary and intimidating range of interests and readings, including poetics and politics, logic and linguistics, philology and philosophy, and theology and biblical studies. It is impossible to summarize Agamben’s thought on political philosophy and theory in the space of one article. I limit this review to the most influential dimension of Agamben’s work in recent years, specially the first five chapters of his *The kingdom and the glory: For a theological genealogy of economy and glory* (or simply *The kingdom and the glory*). While some of Agamben’s texts were long ago translated into English, some are only newly translated, and some are not yet translated from the Italian. For the sake of terminological and stylistic coherence, I have for the most part provided my own English translations of Agamben’s Italian texts.

The kingdom and the glory

Agamben's *The kingdom and the glory* is, alongside *Homo Sacer*, his most important book and it is quite surprising that *The kingdom and the glory* has not earned the interest of more management scholars. Notable exceptions in the field of social sciences include the writings of Dean (2012, 2013, 2017) and Minca (2008, 2009).

Agamben's methodology

I start with a preliminary clarification of the significance and implications of the term 'secularization' in order to make Agamben's methodology explicit. Secularization for Agamben is not a retreat from religion, rather a byproduct of religion. In *The kingdom and the glory*, Agamben points out that he is closer to Carl Schmitt than to Max Weber (2011b: 76-77). Schmitt argues that religion continues to be present and to act in an eminent way in the modern world, while Weber suggests the option of a progressive disenchantment of the world. This reinterpretation of secularization changes the relationship between theology and politics. It does not necessarily imply a substantial identity between theology and politics, nor a perfect identity of signification between theological concepts and political concepts; it concerns, rather, a particular strategic relation, which marks political concepts, referring them to their theological origin. Most apparent concepts of the political philosophical tradition are, in this way, *signature* in the sense of Foucault, that is something which defers and dislocates concepts from one sphere to another (in this case, from sacred to profane or vice-versa) without redefining them semantically (Agamben, 2011a: 4) (see also Toscano, 2011; Zawisza, 2015).² I must make evident Agamben's strategy: when he states that the Trinity 'has functioned as the hidden ontological paradigm of modern governance', he is not doing theology (Agamben, 2011b). When he mentions an ancient doctrine, a theological debate on the Trinitarian mystery or the role of angels, he is not

2 On the concept of signature, Agamben wrote a methodological treatise (Agamben, 2009). Agamben has recently defined signature as something that in a sign or a concept marks and exceeds such a sign or concept referring it back to a determinate field of interpretation, without for that reason leaving the semiotic to constitute a new meaning or new concept.

proposing a return to theology, but using theology as a prism to better understand the modern concepts of power. Agamben is suggesting that the old theological concept of the Trinity can be seen as a generating source of the modern notion of government.

Power

In his attempt to redefine power, Foucault introduces the notion of ‘economy of power’ (Foucault, 1977: 25). According to Foucault (1979: 92), power is not a substance or thing, rather

It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization.

For Foucault, power is not related to some form of class, gender, racial, or economic structure, nor is it a resource or a stock; it is, rather, the production of a set of relations of forces. From the perspective of a systemic conception of power, power is framed as the final result of an organization of different actors, technologies, materiality, and forms of knowledge. For Foucault, a pre-modern organization (or regime) of power is based on sovereignty. In the modern age, sovereign forms of power are replaced by a governmental form of power, the expression of a biopolitics of the population. I will revisit this replacement theory later.

This governmental form of power is the economy of power. Foucault never attempted a definition of ‘economy of power’. However, the expression stands for power as administration, or eventually for power as management. If power is a system of forces, economy of power is the administrative, i.e., the regulating, measuring, calculating *modus operandi* of this system. This notion of an economy of power has become, since Foucault’s initial contribution, increasingly influential. Although inaugurated with Foucault in recent times, this concept of ‘economy of power’ has a long history beginning with the notion of *oikonomia*, which is the Greek term understood in Aristotle and Xenophon as the administration of the *oikos*, the house. In Ancient Greece, in fact, economy suggested an ordering, or a form of management. Foucault used the term *dispositif*, often translated into English as ‘apparatus’; it is derived

from the Latin *disposito*, which is one translation of *oikonomia*. I will return to this.

For Foucault, a ‘profound transformation’ of the ‘mechanisms of power’ in the West is the eclipse of the political by the economical that occurred in the transition from the classical age to modernity (Foucault, 1979: 136). According to Foucault, the transition marks the transformation of the forms of power relations, from sovereign power to biopower. In the pre-modern world, sovereign power was characterized by a king’s right over the life and death of his subjects. Yet, there was no serious attempt by kings to regulate the people who lived in their domains. Sovereign power was ‘essentially a right of seizure: of things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself’ (Foucault, 1979: 136). Whereas sovereign power was the power of the king to appropriate property, labor, or the lives of his subjects (a juridical-political form of power), biopower in modern times is characterized by the governance of specific populations as objects (an economic-administrative form of power). In the modern period, governments take an active interest in the lives of the people (i.e., biopolitics) and people have turned from constitutive political body into population: a demographical biological entity (Agamben, 2005b). Biopower aims to regulate, manage, and administer the life of the people who live in a nation state. It is a regulatory mechanism of power that allows the state to administrate and monitor the nation through institutions such as health care, education, tax collection, and military drafting. Thus, Foucault argues that pre-modern power was characterized by sovereignty rationality, while modern power is characterized by a governmental rationality. For Foucault, power has changed its character from a juridical-political system to a regulating administration. Foucault defines governmentality as allowing for a complex form of ‘power which has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument’ (Foucault, 2009: 107-8).

According to Agamben, Foucault is correct in assuming a distinction between a juridical-political understanding of the state, ultimately concerned with questions of legitimacy, on one hand, and on the other concerned with the economic-administrative significance of government finalized to a regulatory approach to citizens’ life. However, Agamben suggests that Foucault misses

the point in postulating an essential continuity between the original juridical-political orientation of the state, based on sovereignty, and the economic-administrative orientation of government, or biopolitics. Agamben in fact refuses the idea that power has abandoned politics and law for embracing economy and administration: in his opinion, Western politics has been since its inception biopolitics, i.e., concerned with the government of the living. The source of this difference of opinions between Foucault and Agamben resides, at least according to Agamben, in two different genealogies of power. For Foucault, the origins of power are located in a theological-political paradigm, for Agamben, in a theological-economic paradigm.

Genealogy

In *The kingdom and the glory* (2011b: 13) Agamben claims that there are ‘two broadly speaking political paradigms’, both

... derive from Christian theology... in a broad, antinomous but functionally connected way: political theology, which founds in the one God the transcendence of sovereign power, and economic theology, which substitutes for this the idea of an *oikonomia*, conceived as an immanent order – domestic and not political in the strict sense – as much of the divine life as of the human one. From the first derives political philosophy and the modern theory of sovereignty; from the second, modern biopolitics up to the current triumph of economy and government over every other aspect of social life.

It is a dense quote. Agamben enquires the genealogy of the two paradigms that power has assumed throughout the history of the West. He argues that both paradigms find their origins in Christian theology. Political theology derives from the notion of the sovereign power of a single God. Agamben already discussed the first paradigm specifically in *Homo Sacer* and *State of exception*, where he further developed the work of Carl Schmitt. Economic theology, instead, results from the idea of a domestic, not political administration of both divine and human life (respectively, Trinity and creation). Political philosophy and the modern theory of sovereignty derive from the first paradigm; modern biopolitics up to the current triumph of economy and government over every other aspect of social life derive from the second paradigm. In *The kingdom and the glory*, he investigates the second paradigm.

Agamben traces the patterns of conceptual descent in current theories of government to economic theology, aligned with the now fashionable line of reasoning introduced by Mark Lilla in his *The stillborn god* (2007). Agamben argues that investigations into the nature of executive power in the West have operated within a framework that, taking its departure from Carl Schmitt's analysis of sovereignty, have remained essentially within the horizon of political theology (which founds the transcendence of sovereign power on the single God), with biopolitics understood as a phenomenon of political theology. Agamben, however, sustains that it is not political theology but rather economic theology (the idea of an immanent ordering) that is the interpretive paradigm of reference in which to investigate the source the triumph of economy and government over all forms of contemporary life. In this sense, *The kingdom and the glory* is an investigation of the ways and the reasons for which executive power came to assume, in the West, the form of an *oikonomia*, that of a government of humans (Agamben, 2011b).

Not only does Agamben establish a connection between government and the notion of the *oikonomia* (economy); he frames the nature of this connection. The English word 'government' has Greek and Latin ancestries: initially, it takes the form of *oikonomia* (economy); then it was conceived as a form of arrangement and disposition, being translated later in Latin as *dispositio* (apparatus). From the initial definition of *oikonomia* as 'economy', or 'administration of the house', Agamben traces the ramifications of the significance and understanding of this term. He seeks to understand the current conception of government in light of an important but rarely acknowledged transformation in the idea of government brought about by Christianity. Through a careful exposition of early Christian theology, Agamben demonstrates that economy, not politics, is the intellectual offspring of government. But the activity the ancients termed 'economy,' assumes today, he argues, the form of what is called 'administration,' or 'management'.

Thus, 'economy', 'administration', and 'management' are all terms that can be used synonymously: government is a form of management. For Aristotle, economy is a non-epistemic paradigm, something that is not a science or an episteme, but rather a praxis which implies decisions and measures that can

be understood only in relation to a given situation and a given problem. What emerges is a sense that economy is distinguished from politics in not being law-governed. Rather, it is a series of ad hoc measures suited to each particular situation, and so economy can never be the object of a science properly-so-called. Xenophon, an ancient Greek philosopher, used the analogy of a ship on a voyage, where there is a captain and yet everyone is immediately responsible for everything, shifting their strategies according to ever-changing conditions. Agamben maintains that this notion of ad hoc, non-rule-governed management is the semantic core of the term. In addition to 'administration of the household', he notes, the concept has to do with an ordered functioning and has often been associated with a managerial or operational focus. To put it briefly: the key to understanding the contemporary mechanisms of power, including forms of economic power, lies, according to Agamben, in a properly theoretical research into the concept of human praxis. In Agamben, praxis is an activity, but not really a productive activity; it is rather a willed practical activity, a practical activity in which human will finds expression (Agamben, 1999).

Agamben sees in modern and present-day models of political activity the unmistakable footprint of the fourth and fifth-century 'economic' doctrine of the Trinity ('divine life'). The starting point of Agamben's investigation is, in fact, the history of the early Church and the elaboration of the Trinitarian doctrine as a form of domestic administration, or economy, or *oikonomia*. In the early centuries of Christianity, in order to reconcile monotheism with God's threefold nature, theologians introduced *oikonomia*, economy, in terms of an administration of divine life. God, as far as his substance or being is concerned, is one. But as for his *oikonomia*, his economy – that is to say the way He manages the divine house – He is three. Thus, the 'divine life', the Trinity, is a 'divine economy', the administration of the divine house. These early church theologians distinguished two discourses: the ontological discourse, concerning God's being, and the economical discourse which refers to God's action and to how He manages His house. This articulation of *theologia* and *oikonomia*, the being of God and the activity of God, 'introduces personality and action into the being of God' (Agamben, 2011b:

18). Agamben argues that the economy of divine life (the Trinitarian model) is a crucial point in the genealogy of governmentality.

In *The kingdom and the glory*, Agamben explains that it is not the monotheistic political theology that culminates in the theory of sovereignty, but rather the notion of divine *oikonomia* that ultimately underwrites modern biopolitics. Moreover, Agamben shares with other scholars, including Erik Peterson (1890-1960), a recent line of reasoning that traces the patterns of conceptual descent in current theories of democracy in the patristic 'economic' paradigms in theology. He argues that a theological-economic paradigm operates better than a theological-political paradigm for understanding the relation between the sovereign power and biopower.

Government

At this point, Agamben moves from the administration of the divine life, the Trinity, to the administration of human life, the divine government of the world, or providence. 'Providence – according to Agamben – just means the divine government' (Agamben, 2011c: n.p.). Providence means that God is constantly at work governing the world. If He stops for a single instance, the world (His creation) would collapse. But how does divine government, how does providence, operate? Providence is conceived as a double machine. Theologians distinguish between a general providence and a special providence. The former establishes the universal laws, the universal and transcendent laws, and the first causes. Theologians call this *ordinatio*, Latin for ordering order. The latter is entrusted to the angels or to the mechanisms of immanent and secondary causes. Theologians call this execution, *executio*. So, the machine of the divine government is order and execution (Agamben, 2011b: 142). However, order and execution are not linked together in the context of a theological-political paradigm, but of a theological-economic paradigm. What does it mean? It means that, in a theological-economic paradigm, execution is not subordinated to order, special providence is not secondary to general providence. In fact, general providence and special providence, ontology and economy, order and execution, are autonomous to each other yet operating in mutual coordination. To understand this model, one has to go back to the Trinity.

Back to the Trinity. Christian theologians articulated a distinction between God's being and God's action. The distinction between the being of God and the activity of God, God's being and God's action, implies the question of the relationship between the two: is God's action based on God's being? The Father, the first person of the Trinity, is without beginning or foundation. The Father is *anarchos*, without beginning. Christ, the Son, who is the logos, the word and the action of God, Agamben argues, is supposed to be grounded in the Father. But He is not. The doctrine of the Church, in fact, ultimately states that the Son, the Christ, is *anarchos*, without beginning or foundation, exactly like the Father. Christ, the Son, the Logos, the Word and the action of God, is not grounded in the Father, rather is anarchical like the Father. He is without *arché*, without foundation without beginning, exactly like the Father. So, Christ is completely independent. This is the paradox of divine anarchy: God's action is completely independent from God's being. Agamben notes three implications of this theological move. An effect of this is the anarchic, groundless character of action.

This thesis of the anarchy of the Christ ... implies that language and action – as the divine language and the divine action – had no foundation in being, are in this sense anarchical. This means that the classical Greek ontology with its idea of a substantial link between being and logos, being and language, but also between being and praxis, action, is ruined forever. Any attempt, since that moment to found language on being is doomed to fail. (Agamben, 2011c: n.p.)

God's being is the Father, the first person of the Trinity. God's action is the Son, the second person of the Trinity. Together, they identify the double structure of the government of the world. This bipolar machine, Agamben argues, is a constant in Christian thought. The same bipolar machine is postulated with regard to the divine administration of the world. This is the conjunction of this doctrine of the divine economy with the divine government of the world. Since the beginning of the theory of power, there is a double structure. The divine economy is a dual structure; the Government is a dual structure. This dual structure implies the necessity of some form of government that governs the entire system.

It is precisely because being and action are both anarchical in this sense, precisely for that reason, something such as a government – the word government comes from the Greek *kybernetes*, which mean the Pilot of a ship,

to guide the ship. So precisely because being and action are both anarchical, a government becomes possible and even necessary. It is the groundless and anarchical paradigm of human action that makes it possible to govern this action. (Agamben, 2011c: n.p.)

Precisely because being and action are both anarchical, government becomes necessary.

It is well known that the division between the power that authorizes the action (*auctoritas*) and the power of acting (*potestas*) is supplemented in the theological genealogy of politics. In the tradition of political philosophy this double structure is expressed in the old formula: The king reigns, but he doesn't govern. Agamben (2011c) notes that this is an old dictum, which had already been founded by the 16th century. In modern democracy this division between kingdom and government is the division in legislative or sovereign power, which acts always through universal laws and principles, and executive power, which carries out in detail the general principle. Agamben agrees that this division exists but refuses to identify any juridical-political relationship between the two. In fact, he notes, the relationship between God's being and God's action is that of reciprocal coordination in autonomy. Similarly, the relationship between executive power and sovereign power is economical, driven by an administrative, not a political or juridical concern.

In theology, the administration of the world is precisely what results from the coordination and articulation of God's being and God's action, general providence and special providence. The same can be said in the theory of power: Government is the result of the mutual coordination and articulation of sovereign power and executive power. Nobody exercises Government; Government is the spontaneous result of the mutual adjustment between one form of power and another. In Agamben's (2011c: n.p.) words,

No matter how theologians conceive the relationship between the two poles, in any case, the bipolar structure must be present. If they are completely divided, no government is possible. There would be on the one hand side an almighty sovereign who is effectively impotent, and on the other, the chaotic mess of the particular acts of interventions of governance. A government is possible only if the two aspects are coordinated in a bipolar machine. So I will define government when you will have the coordination of these two elements. General law and an execution, general providence and particular providence.

Modern theory considers sovereignty as the central political category and reduces Government to government, executive power. As a result, Agamben notes, political philosophy fails to understand the real nature of Government and focuses instead on universal problems. But the bipolar machine of Government is not the result of the evolution of a political paradigm. Government is the result of the necessary functional relation between the two forms of power, sovereignty and government. Thus, Government is, according to Agamben, the convergence of these two forms of power that are hitherto distinct: *auctoritas* and *potestas*, *ordinatio* and *execution*, sovereignty and execution. The articulation between these two antinomical but functionally related orders, that is, the ontological and the economical, is Government (2011b: 1). To put it differently, Government is the structural articulation of power according to two different levels, aspects, or polarities, because ‘power – every power ... – must hold these two poles together, that is, it must be, at the same time, kingdom and government, transcendent norm and immanent order’ (Agamben, 2011b: 82).

As Agamben states when discussing Thomas Aquinas, “‘the economic’ sense of order ... does not concern the substance, but the relation” (Agamben, 2011b: 136). Government is precisely concerned with the relation between sovereignty and government; Government is the coordination and articulation of general laws and particular situation. Agamben (2011b: 276) notes that

... the real problem – the secret core of politics – is neither sovereignty nor law, it is government ... It is the governmental machine that functions through the complicated system of relations that binds these two poles together.

This means that Government is not targeting the general or the particular, the end or the means, but their functional correlation. Government is neither only substance nor action, but the composition of the gap between the two. This means that the dominance of administration over legitimacy in modernity is not the result of replacement of law with bureaucracy, but rather a different aggregation within the bipolar machine. In the course of history, sometimes the first pole becomes dominant over the second, and monarchs or legislators (in the context of nation-state) assume a commanding position over governments; sometimes the second pole becomes dominant over the first.

Today one could say that the act of government, or execution, has the primacy over the parliamentary and legislative power. The crisis of legislative power is evident everywhere. Regardless, Agamben notes, both legislative power and executive power are here to stay. In fact, one pole can prevail on the other, like now it is the case for government and executive power, but nevertheless both poles must be there, otherwise no Government is possible (Agamben, 2011c: n.p.).

Implications

For contemporary readers working at the intersection of management and political theory, Agamben's contributions summarized in this review may look irrelevant: Agamben, in fact, offers material to the intellectual history of politics and to scholarly conceptions of the operations of political power. Yet, he also instantiates economy and management as absolutely central to the political discourse. He states that economic concepts are at the origin of modern political theory. As said, it is a monumental shift from Foucault's view of political discourse. For Foucault, within the very same juridical-political paradigm that sustains the relationship between sovereignty and government, sovereignty is replaced by government as the dominant form of power. With modernity, power moves from legitimacy to administration, from politics to management. Agamben changes it all. First, he states that Foucault's main idea, i.e., government has replaced sovereignty as the dominant form of power, is embodied into, in Agamben's words, a theological-political paradigm. This paradigm, which is invisible to scholars because taken for granted, it is the paradigm of the administration of the city, i.e., *polis*. This paradigm becomes visible only after comparison with an alternative paradigm: the economic-administrative paradigm. This economic-administrative paradigm, framed in *The kingdom and the glory*, has a managerial nature: it is the paradigm of the administration of the house. What is 'political', including the notion of political power, is actually economical. This last statement drives the reader, in Agamben's words, to 'the vicarious character of the governmental power' (Agamben, 2011c: n.p.). In which sense? In the sense that the governmental power is ungrounded, it does not receive legitimacy from sovereignty. Once again, Agamben finds the roots of this idea within the theology of the Trinity. In the Trinitarian economy,

both Father and Son are anarchical; neither has a foundation. This intra-Trinitarian relation between the Father and the Son can be considered as the theological source of the intrinsically vicarious character of governmental power.

Trinitarian economy is the expression of an anarchical power which moves to and through the divine persons according to an essentially vicarious paradigm. There is no way to assign to one person the original foundation of power. Power has a Trinitarian form; it circulates vicariously in this form. (Agamben, 2011c: n.p.)

This is why, according to Agamben, the supreme sovereign power in the history of Western politics presents itself as vicarious. And governmental power is essentially vicarious, too. The groundlessness of power is the reason why the fundamental problem of Western public law is to ground: government in sovereignty, order in law, economical practice in juridical patterns, and legality in legitimacy (Agamben, 2011c). This is also why in Western public law the source of power is impossible to describe and moves always in circles between sovereignty and execution. Agamben notes that ‘the ontology of the acts of government is a vicarious ontology, in the sense that, within the economical paradigm, every power has a vicarious character’ (Agamben, 2011b: 141). Power has a vicarious structure, Agamben points out, and moves in circles. This is the first implication: power has no foundation.

The second implication refers to the relationship between the two poles of sovereignty and government. The relationship between sovereignty and government is not political, or juridical; it is economic, or administrative. The relationship between different orders and forms of power is not related to obedience (political) or norm (juridical). Thus, a second implication of *The kingdom and the glory* is that power is not related to a juridical-political paradigm, and therefore it does not derive from authority and is not transferred through norms. Power is related to an administrative activity. In fact, the relationship between the two poles is driven by voluntary action.

Agamben’s main concern in the first five chapters of *The kingdom and the glory* is power and how power works in an economic-administrative paradigm. For Agamben, power implies not a juridical-political system, but an economy,

an administration, a management. This makes management all the more relevant to the political development of the West.

Government

For Agamben, power is a form of management, and management operates in the context of an economic-administrative paradigm. With Agamben's theses in mind, management scholars are invited to conduct fresh investigations into that notion of management. In the final part of this section, I will suggest some possible investigations, probably the most obvious ones, leaving others to further, more detailed analysis.

A first line of investigation concerns the origins of management and how management entered Western consciousness. Agamben's work suggests a credible and definitive answer to the origins of management. In a hypothetical intellectual history of management, it can be said that management was originally *oikonomia*, domestic administration. How did management enter into the great conversation of the West? It entered through economic theology, and therefore became part of a theological-economic paradigm. In the context of this paradigm, management was considered an element of an historical project of salvation. Here, I like to emphasise all three elements of this definition. *Historical*: management happens on time, in the flux of time. It is a *project*, a work in progress, an activity. More on this later. Finally, management is framed within an historical project of salvation, i.e., for the good of the entire community. In sum, management was conceived within a theological-economic paradigm as a social activity operating in a certain space at a certain time for the good. Management was not the *lunga manus*, the operative branch of an authority. The anarchical character of government, that is, of management, freed management from any obligation toward general principles or mandatory norms coming from the reign of ontology or metaphysics. Management might be part of a plan, but only if autonomously and voluntarily accepted. Management was not subject to a power, it was itself a power and eventually worked in coordination with other powers outside a relationship of subordination. Management was immediately operative, without need of an external authority. In the beginnings, management did not belong to a political paradigm, therefore it was not a means for an end.

Mission of management was not bringing order, separating the useful from the useless, respecting authority and exercising power, but acting properly in any situation so that members of the community remain safe or retain protection. To put it differently, management was an end in itself. Management stood for operating a constant, permanent activity of caring for the entire community in the flux of ever-changing historical circumstances. Management did not belong to the reign of *ordo* (order, organize, conquer, command, obey, implement, dispose, etc.) but of *salus* (taking care, saving, protecting, etc.).

A second line of investigation focuses on the ontological blue-print of modern management. Of course, Agamben does not address this topic. However, management scholars can probably deduct from *The kingdom and the glory* that modern management bears the imprint of political theology. Accordingly, modern management may be located within a juridical-political paradigm, in which the relationship between sovereignty and government, authority and execution, is regulated by norm and power. Management scholars may investigate this link between theological politics and modern management either to confirm it or reject it. I cannot stop thinking, however, that this link was established already twenty years ago with regards to social science. In his ground-breaking book *Theology and social theory: Beyond secular reason*, the Anglican theologian John Milbank (2006) claimed that social science emerged from effectively non-Trinitarian theism, a model of deity that does not maintain the integrity of the triune God. In other words, social science emerged from a form of political theology based on the notion of the sovereign power of a single God. Moreover, Milbank argued that the secular reason informing and shaping social science is not neutral, but rich with distorted images of religion. In his view, non-theological disciplines like sociology and other social sciences maintain religious assumptions that may not be aligned with orthodox Christianity. Or, as Milbank (2006) famously said, what scholars encounter in social science is only theology in disguise. His conclusion seems to validate the hypothesis of political theology as the legitimate place of origin the modern management. In the remaining part of this section, I will assume as confirmed the existence of this relationship between political theology and management.

A third line of investigation regards how management moved from being incorporated into an economic paradigm to become part of a political paradigm. In this case, like in the previous one, Agamben cannot be of help and the entire topic is open to scholarly discussion. However, it is clear that Agamben's *The kingdom and the glory* (or at least the first chapters of the book considered here), allows management scholars to describe a trajectory in what can be understood as a semantic shift in academic vocabularies. At the beginning, management belongs to an economic-administrative paradigm, then it assumes the tracts of a juridical-political paradigm. Historically, a shift can be implied at this point, a shift that occurred in the semantic domain of management. Originally conceived as domestic administration, management assumed the significance of management of the *polis*, an organization. When and why this shift occurred is, of course, open to discussion. Management scholars are left with the important task of tracing the development of academic vocabularies through the dynamically shifting cultural, political, and linguistic landscapes of the twentieth century.

A fourth line of investigation addresses the future of management. Scholars should be in full speculative mode to dare to answer this question. I propose three options. First, the future of management will be similar to the present: management is and will remain in the domain of a juridical-political paradigm. Scholars will continue their work without further consideration of Agamben's work. Second, an economic-administrative paradigm will emerge as an alternative to the dominant juridical-political paradigm. In this hypothesis, scholars will be regrouped according to the paradigm of reference. Third, management will be replaced by technology as an absolutized form of juridical-political paradigm. In this context, technology is nothing else than a radical expression of the current juridical-political paradigm.

A fifth and final line of investigation is concerned Agamben's notion of management as *praxis*. Agamben's thesis of the anarchy of Christ is the rejection of the classical Greek idea of a substantial link between being and logos, being and language, being and praxis, action. To put it differently, action does not need extrinsic justification, government is not based on authority, and management does not stand on law. The point can be expanded: politics is an epistemic paradigm, something that is a science, an

episteme. Economy is a non-epistemic paradigm, something that is not a science or an episteme. The relationship between different orders of power is not a science and does not require a form of epistemic knowledge. With Agamben's distinction in mind, readers can see the dominance in management scholarship of a paradigm focused on power and norm over the economical and the administrative, the transcendence of general laws over practice, which bases itself on the notion of an *oikonomia*, an economy conceived as an immanent order. The emphasis on the juridical, or juridical-political, understood as prescriptive, over the managerial, which treats all of society, including economic organizations, like a household, has given rise to the domination of a scientific form of management. Beginning with modern theory of management – this is the argument – scholarship began to consider prescription as the central managerial category, reducing practice to implementation. To put it differently, a prescriptive tendency that culminates in the theory of management as science has marginalized the alternative option of management as *oikonomia*.

Here the work of Henry Mintzberg on the nature of managerial works comes to mind. It is not enough, however, to signal Mintzberg's claim on the pragmatic nature of management. Without tracing the genealogy of management ideas back to the origins, even marshalling obscure concepts from Roman law, scholars cannot truly establish the semantic core of what Mintzberg says, i.e., that management is a kind of practical know-how rather than a form of rigorous knowledge. This is why Agamben's work is important. By investigating Agamben's study about 'economy' and the related notion of *oikonomia*, which Mintzberg totally ignores, scholars can make a better sense of what Mintzberg is saying.

More importantly, management scholars can see in the necessary functional relation between political theology and *oikonomia* a model to comprehend the gulf separating the principle and the implementation, the theory and the practice, in modern management. Agamben establishes the semantic core of 'economy' in the realm of home administration, in which the master does not force himself on his relatives, but instead works through his/her family members' own free choices, which he/she indirectly manipulates to achieve his/her own ends. This is identical to the way the modern economic

organizations supposedly work, where all of people's free choices add up to a positive outcome due to the intervention of the invisible hand (which is actually a secularized version of the hand of God, as Agamben argues in the appendix to *The kingdom and the glory*). With Agamben's writings in the background, management scholars can see how they still operate in a classical ontological paradigm exemplified in Aristotle, where the relationship between God and the world is unproblematic. Agamben believes that the classical ontology expresses itself as a continuum from being to praxis. However, he sets the economic paradigm in contrast to the classical ontological paradigm exemplified in Aristotle; in effect, he believes that the economic paradigm grows out of the breakdown of classical ontology. In fact, in Agamben's view, economy belongs to a paradigm different from politics, and action is not grounded on principle. The perceived fracture between theology and *oikonomia*, in other words, between being and acting, is Agamben's explanation for free and anarchic praxis. If management scholars follow Agamben to his final, radical conclusion, management is anarchic (i.e., autonomous from theory) practice.

Conclusion

This article is primarily a review of some of Agamben's most prominent contributions to philosophy and political theories that seem relevant to management scholars. By addressing Agamben's theological genealogy of economy and government, management scholars engage primarily with the overarching 'problem of management' – that is, the *what* of management: what is management, what is the relation with power and norm and finally, what is the relation of management with itself, the process by which management gradually becomes *managerialized*. I dealt briefly with these topics. In summary, one of the key features of Agamben's thought on management is the way he leaves management unthought. Rather than leave management unthought, modern scholarship has thought management most rigorously as a transcendent body of knowledge. I argue that Agamben's account of management opens a way of deactivating the transcendent tendency of contemporary management and return it to an immanent order of things.

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