

Biopolitics and Sovereignty

Alpár LOSONCZ

Department of Social Sciences

University of Novi Sad, Serbia

Keywords: sovereignty, biopolitics, life, power

Abstract

This article investigates the meanings of life in political philosophy. There are two answers to the question concerning the legitimacy of life in political philosophy. The first, negative answer is connected to Arendt, the second is connected to Michel Foucault, who delineated the genesis of biopolitics in Western tradition and argued that, ever since the classical age, “deduction” based on the practice of sovereign power has become merely one element in a range of mechanisms working to generate, incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize, and organize the forces of life. Nowadays, the capacity to manipulate our bare biological life, rather than simply govern the aspects of forms of life, implies biopolitics which contests how and when we use these technologies and for what purposes. The author of this article emphasizes the significance of the common treatment of biopolitics and sovereignty. Political philosophy demonstrates that there is irreducible difference between these types of power, but it is necessary to analyze them simultaneously. There are several tendencies (for example, biosecurity) that prove the importance of sovereign power for the practice of biopolitics. Nevertheless, sovereignty without biopolitics is exposed to weaknesses and regression. The task for political philosophy is to articulate the dynamic relations between sovereignty and biopolitics today.

E-mail: corna@eunet.yu

*

Walter Benjamin in one of his recently much quoted works criticises the “errant Western tradition” because it is caught up in substitute activities: once it has lost its sacredness, now it experiments with canonizing that which has always been destined to be sinful, namely the “sheer human life”. Bare life was perceived earlier as a life of condemnation. The man cannot be equalled with “sheer life”, his bodily

conditions or the uniqueness, the modifications of his body. Benjamin differentiates between “life” (“an interminable aggregate-like condition of man”) and “sheer life”, as a man’s “sheer life” cannot be a substratum of saintliness, because in the opposite case all the differences between humans, plants, and animals would fade, and, in addition, the separation lines between a “sheer” and a “just/truthful existence” would also be lost.

Certainly, Benjamin is very well aware of all the teachings which have always considered life sacred, more sacred than anything else in the world (and at the same time considered humans the most superior beings of the world). However, the man can only be a “saint” if the transient conditions of his body (pain, illness, sensations) lack any sacredness. The “life” which remains the same in earthly life, death, or continuing existence, means the chance of liberation, the “not-yet-existence of the true man”, but the laudation of a bare, reduced kind of life is but a pale reflection of sacredness. Benjamin’s argumentation will surely yield several directions to follow. Traditionally, life is the *name* of coming into being, of formation, by which dynamism is opposed to a static condition, movement, flowing, and circularity to immobility, and activity to passivity. Nature is full of life, says Leibniz. But life is a link, a connecting thread between being and non-being, and the “task” of life is exactly to preserve the distinction of being and non-being, this “struggle without which there is no real life”.¹

How is it possible then to differentiate between “life” and “bare life”? What kind of surplus does “life” have over man, confined to a “reduced” life? Is it perhaps the self-differentiation of “life” which leads to this difference? It is also a feature of tradition that it opposes life, grasped in movement, to mechanism, while it contains within itself the first self-organizing causality which defined its own paths and tracks. For Aristotle – whose ideas appear for a moment in Benjamin’s argument, while pinning down the differences between humans, plants, and animals – self-organization is a hierarchical gauge: non-organic matter has the lowest ability for self-organization, while the immortals situated at the top of the scale have the highest potential for self-organization. However, Benjamin’s reasoning leads us to another direction: his argumentation implies the perspectives of political philosophy. That is, the difference between life modalities can be grasped by the methods of political philosophy, and we are interested in politics’ reference to life. After all,

¹ F. W. J. Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, VII, p. 400. „wo nicht Kampf ist, da ist nicht Leben”.

there is the well-known statement of Aristotle's *Politics* which again surfaces a difference: the polis is the most developed form of human life; or more precisely the polis comes into being because of life, but its existence can be examined from the point of view of *good life*.

The previous train of thought has led us to a threefold structure: bare life / life / good life. However, the breaking of the Aristotelian tradition has questioned the interpretation possibilities of a teleologically designed good life. At the same time, there is still a question which remains open: once the syntagm of "good life" has lost its validity, what is there to be done with the other two parts of the equation?

Will political philosophy be able to construe "life" or "sheer life"? Well, this question can be answered in two directly opposing ways.

*

The first answer to this question derives from the philosophy of Hannah Arendt: it comprises a robust NO. In Arendt's perception the thesis of the sacredness of life has lived on even after the foundations of Christianity's faith in life after death had eventually shaken; moreover, this thesis was conceived of as one of the most important questions of modern philosophy. This development however comprises unalterable aspects of loss, because: "Since we have made life our supreme and foremost concern, we have no room left for an activity based on contempt for one's own life-interest. Selflessness may still be a religious or a moral virtue; it can hardly be a political one. Under these conditions objectivity lost its validity in experience, was divorced from real life, and became that "lifeless" academic affair which Droysen rightly denounced as being eunuchic."¹ Arendt mainly disapproves of the fact that modernity's turning towards life ultimately weakens the foundations of "objectivity", because "objectivity" has transformed into a lifeless academic question, or in other words it has broken away from living life.

A mark of this loss is that production and action have both suffered modifications of meanings in the flow of modernity. The man who interferes with nature produces something in such a way that his activity has a strictly defined beginning and purpose, while this purpose

¹ Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought*, New York: The Viking Press, 1961, p. 53; see also Frederick M. Dolan, "The paradoxical liberty of biopower, Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault on modern politics", *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 3 (2005): 369–380.

is expressed in the form of a concrete product. Then the created things separate from their creator, and gain their final application on the market, in the course of consumption. In opposition, the most striking characteristic of action is its futility and its fragility, the constraint for a repeated restart, and the institution of the chains of events the results of which are unpredictable. Furthermore, it cannot be neglected that action (as any political phenomenon) is connected to plurality, and this connection is "Human action, like all strictly political phenomena, is bound up with human plurality, which is one of the fundamental conditions of human life insofar as it rests on the fact of natality, through which the human world is constantly invaded by strangers, newcomers whose actions and reactions cannot be foreseen by those who are already there and are going to leave in a short while."¹

A historical excursus would be in order here: the "industrial revolution" made work processes mechanical, man's activity was based on using raw matter offered by nature; the model of this age is the *homo faber*. However, deep changes occur when the rule is taken over by the *animal laborans*, which, besides claiming the highest possible productiveness in natural metabolism, it creates natural processes itself (such as nuclear fission), and induces them into a man-created world.

Arendt suggests that production is never independent from action, and the producer is an actor at the same time, that is, an initiator of unpredictable processes. It is so because the producer, although his activity has a determined beginning and a foreseeable end, steps into the world: it is the human world which must integrate the ready-made products brought to life by the *homo faber*. An example: is it not so that any product becomes available for consumption by a spontaneous market with unpredictable tendencies? Another important development must be considered in this context. The *animal laborans* is most efficient when the elements of nature cease to exceed social boundaries, because the actors of extensive labour entirely socialize nature. On this account, weakening and annulling the borderlines between natural phenomena and human creations pushes nature into the whirl of human action characterized by unpredictability.

At this point, the role of labour in Arendt's argumentation must be especially emphasized. Arendt presents labour as a kind of activity which parallels the biological processes of the human body, and the logic

¹ Arendt, *Between Past and Future...*, p. 61. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1958, p. 38.

of labour reflects the circular logic of an organic process. As she expresses it: the “human determination” of labour is life itself, that is, the context related to labour. While action presents us with birth, with the new, labour embodies the continuity of an endless repetition. Modern society was formed under the sign of labour, everybody is transformed into a labourer, a carrier of a subjectivity formed in labour (the capitalist also, of course). In this social force field the cyclical alternations of production and consumption gain an exceptional role at the expense of the manifold world of politics and public space.¹

Then Arendt hints at the fact that modernity operates with a notion of process which derives from a constant despair. More precisely, the reason of the modern man’s despair is his ability or inability to experience that which is not produced by him, which is not the result of his activity. But this attitude always suggests that the modern man loses his force by being doomed to contemplation. However, this tendency makes contemplation lose its significance; the Platonic/Aristotelian idea according to which contemplation is the noblest form of life, becomes invalid, and contemplation transforms into a servant of action.

Arendt qualifies the ability to act as the most dangerous of all human abilities and possibilities, which, in addition, also subordinates all our other abilities in our age. Still, her life work also contains another thread, which especially concerns us. Namely, Arendt considers that the inversion of production and action is an enormous danger which haunts us since the beginnings of Western philosophy. Plato’s philosophy may serve as an example: it contains a great attempt, overarching several centuries, to tame pluralism by the construed meanings of leadership. A characteristic of this leadership is that it places man in the perspective of self-control, and the possibility of action is replaced by the meanings of giving and obeying orders. Furthermore, knowledge is separated from action, which results in that political action is sent to the field of instruments and objectives. Political knowledge yields to a philosophically based knowledge on the Good and the Just, the uncontrollable spontaneity of action is replaced by the anticipation deriving from the regularities of the ruling order. If caring love is taken over to politics, then politics is annulled, because too much emphasis on

¹ On the possibilities of connecting this thought with the polemical ideas of feminism about labour, see: Claudia Lenz, “The End or the Apotheosis of “Labor”? Hannah Arendt’s Contribution to the Question of the Good Life in Times of Global Superfluity of Human Labor Power”, *Hypatia* 2 (2005): 135-154.

intimacy questions political bonds based on solidarity. Philosophy is meant to grasp the essence of politics, while it strives to escape politics itself. Politics is reduced to the level of the technology of human affairs and conditions. According to the Platonic *politeia*, life is an organism regulated by rules which are expressed in all manifestations of life.¹ The Platonic *techné* appears in modernity in such a way that it eliminates the hierarchy between biological life and contemplative life, while the levelling force of biopower also cancels the ranking of human activities.

Apart from Arendt, it can be remembered as well that Plato also applied a great number of parallels between medicine and politics, the biological and the citizen's body. It is not accidental therefore that Plato applied an archaic word (*komein*), which proved to be of an equally pastoral and medical nature, leading to the interpretive circle of the *nomos*, with the help of which Plato was able to explain politics from the perspective of pastoral care.² At any rate, according to Arendt pastoral politics has gained a special emphasis in modernity: life becomes the most important reference point, and this accompanies the simplification of politics to a mere instrument, the laudation of labour as a means for self-preservation, and the social celebration of the *animal laborans*. The modern age takes over from Christianity the celebration of individual life, which is not related to immortality, but appears as a temporary biological phenomenon. Moreover, the plurality which was still perceivable at the Greeks has died out in modern life, while the vocal plurality so much emphasized by Arendt, which would enable common actions, has also disappeared. Arendt repeatedly comments upon the enormous number of functional rules extending over all areas of modern life, exerting a normative pressure on the individual. Modern man, who sacrifices his entire life for labour, is urged in fact by normalized, "socialized" constraints. The labour centrism of modern "biopolitics", and politics reduced to a mere bio-police which entrusts itself with accepting peoples into, and rejecting them out of, life, cancels the possibility of a politics deriving from the practice of spontaneity. That is, the biopower which guides, calculates, and administrates the processes of natural metabolism and the satisfaction of the labouring man's needs excludes politics. More precisely, reconsidering Arendt's ideas, one may

¹ Jacques Rancière, *La mésentente*, Paris, Galilée, 1995, p. 98.

² Laurent Gerbier, "La politique et la médecine : une figure platonicienne et sa relecture averroïste", *Astérion*, 1 (June 2003), <http://asterion.revues.org/document13.html>. Simona Forti, "The Biopolitics of Souls, Racism, Nazism, and Plato", *Political Theory*, 1 (February 2006), 9-32.

state that the coupling of politics and life kills power itself, because in Arendt's concept power always derives from common action, community life, or a kind of radical intersubjectivity.

In Arendt's reasoning, however, the quintessence of politics is always connected to a definite kind of logic, that is, the lack of dominance. It denies the possibility of violence forming in the field of the *political*, because, in her view, politics is utterly inaccessible for violence. The fact that power has penetrated the field of life resulted in the decline of politics *as* intersubjectivity. Politics must distance itself from the world of routine and standard rules; a political perspective should not be concerned with a preorganized cosmos of institutions, but with the modes of actions of virtuosity and ethos. In other words, it must be concerned with politics itself, which lies outside the network of the automatisms of necessities. However, biopower neglects exactly this original possibility of politics. The life of the society is guided by necessity and at the same time life is subordinated to the power of necessity. To quote Arendt: "Nothing, I think, is more dangerous theoretically than this tradition of organic thought in political matters, in which power and violence are interpreted in biological terms. (...) The organic metaphors (...) – [such as] the notion of a "sick society", (...) – can only promote violence in the end."¹

*

Arendt's work, however, is a liminal phenomenon, so long as the statement of the strong dispersion of politics and life, and the idea that life cannot pertain to the order of politics due (among others) to episodes of 20th century history, need further considerations. It is obvious therefore to quote here Foucault, and the concept of biopolitics that he so emphatically advanced. It is all the more worthwhile to do so because there is an important meeting point between Arendt and Foucault as regards the criticism of sovereignty. Sovereignty, the absolute possibility of giving orders, the undivided and highest power is actually revealed in the power over life and death. Furthermore, sovereignty is enforced by legal implements. That is, the power over life and death representatively displays the origins of rights in pre-existent relations. Still, the last word of a political order based on sovereignty is always the "smiting sword",

¹ Hannah Arendt, "A Special Supplement: Reflections on Violence", *New York Review of Books*, 4 (1969): 75. (Also: <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/11395>)

the practice of sovereign power re-instating a given order. In other words, the crossing of Arendt's and Foucault's thinking can be observed here: in vital matters sovereignty is burdened by violence both in its origin and its outcome. Actually, sovereignty cannot be separated from the reality of death in this world, nor from the attitude of man permanently living under the threat of passing, concerned with his end.

However, if I choose to follow Foucault, then I may argue that there was a kind of shift in the 17th century which essentially modified the operation of the mechanisms of power. It was at this point when force power, regulating and bringing death, was replaced by *biopower*, which acts in relation to issues of value and profit, and distributes and re-distributes life possibilities. There are two forms of this kind of power: the first (called anatomical politics) comprises those disciplinary techniques which increase the potential of the body, and its productiveness as labour power. These techniques also enable the social recognition of subjectivity perceived as labour power, and the rational organization of labour processes. The other form contains macro references, it aims at the body of the nation, it applies statistics, it enforces norms of public health, it conducts a planning activity related to hygiene, it builds the infrastructure, and it interferes with the fields of industry, art, morality, etc.

This is not a kind of power which employs the process of deduction from the "highest" principles, because its principle is productivity, the regulation and optimization of the effects exercised over life, and the "normalization" of biological, psychological, and social technologies. This outcome sheds a new light on politics, which is now linked with life, the birth of new individuals, and the guidance of the population, and not with the terrifying and annihilating power of a predicted violent death. It must be mentioned that nothing is more alien to Arendt than the following idea: the objective of political conflicts is life in its various forms of manifestation, the right for life, health, and happiness, and biopower appears as an investment into life forms... Such kind of power is presented to us, demonstrating its productiveness by increasing the potentiality of life. This does not mean that the fact of death has been excluded from biopolitics; biopower cannot be indifferent to human finiteness, the lurking awareness of death, or to the extreme point of fragility. Not only in the sense that the biotechnological *maternus cura* deals with births as well as mortality, the number of the departed, or pathological mutations, but also in that life here appear as a resisting force. I do not only wish to emphasize that the members of a

biopolitical regime must suffer the perspective of a limited life maintained within limits, but also that life is a form of resistance against death. Deleuze writes in his monograph on Foucault that “We can no longer even say that death transforms life into destiny, an 'indivisible and decisive' event, but rather that death becomes multiplied and differentiated in order to bestow on life the particular features, and consequently the truths, which life believes arise from resisting death...Bichat broke with the classical conception of death, as a decisive moment or indivisible event, and broke with it in two ways, simultaneously presenting death as being coextensive with life and as something made up of a multiplicity of partial and particular deaths”¹ Biopolitics, therefore, does not merely guide the fact of life, but rules over the experience of the relationship of life and death.

At any rate, all I have previously said does not mean that politics in its turning towards life results in a kind of peaceful affirmation; the emphasis of the discursive transformation of the fact of life and death does not stress the innocence of politics or the disappearance of violent actions. That is, biopolitics is not an organon of an unbroken passage to conciliation. Death penalty, as a privilege of sovereign force power, is pushed to the background, then disappears, but the inexorable experience of the last century remains (when genocides followed each other), the genocide committed in the name of species, territory, or survival, which considered the enemy as a kind of virus, a pathological deviation. Biopower does not triumph because of its power over death, but the *direct* effect on life virtually points at death, or more precisely artificial death.

Foucault, similarly to Arendt, refers to Plato on several occasions, the activity of the guards of Plato's political order is outstandingly important for him, as well as the practice of leadership in the name of reason and justice. Arendt however chose a different way than Foucault: in her description the Platonic *techné* was directly connected to modern power, and Christianity only enriched this direction at most with the idea of an individual *summum bonum*. In Foucault's case however it is evident that the unfolding of Judeo-Christianity and Judeo-Christian pastoral care has a creative nature from the perspective of politics pertaining to life.

¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (translated into English by Sean Hand), Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1988, p. 95. Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1986, p. 98.

The fact should also be mentioned here that, although Foucault's works have repeatedly been connected with the idea of a strong discontinuity in history, the projected turning point of biopower must be rendered relative in a multiple way.

Firstly, the origin of biopower in the last century is not an unprecedented outcome, as the perception of the flock leader as a political leader also proves it. What kinds of differences are there between a Greek and a Judeo-Christian life conduct? In the former, it is a determined part of the land which is ruled, political leaders aim at the attenuation of conflicts, the legislator's normative act is enough to maintain the ruling power, after which he might as well withdraw, and the main task of a political leader is to find the common interests of the polis.¹ In the latter, the shepherd/pastor looks after the flock; he is always together with the members of the flock, and provides for their spiritual balance and well-being. Foucault still further refines his views, as he draws up differences between Jewish and Christian life conducts. In fact pastoral care is perfected in Christianity, as it is there that the life conduct concentrating on salvation gains its complete form within the framework of a thick institutional network. Caring appeared not only as a counsellor about consciousness, but it also created particular regimes of truth which guided the activities connected to salvation, and defined what to be considered true or false. Seen from a spiritual care extending to all individuals, the idea of legal right seemed instrumental, and, what is paramount for our subject, it corresponded with the idea of a contextually understood life. The principles of the spiritual guidance of salvation actually exceeded ecclesiastical frameworks, and penetrated fields which were connected to health and welfare. These latter references created conditions which can well be connected to the idea of biopower. The perspective of pastoral power did not reveal any general rules which aimed at the condensation of community members, as long as caring in the flow of everyday life relates to the individual man and his register of necessities. Actually, two kinds of "games" have unfolded in Western European history: one referring to the relationship of the polis and its citizens, and the other to the shepherd/pastor – flock relationships of Jewish – Christian tradition. The polis – citizen relationship lay at the basis of the questions which became basic issues of modern political philosophy, such as, for example, the ambivalence of public/private,

¹ Paul Veyne, *Comment on écrit l'histoire: Essai d'épistémologie*, Paris: Seuil, 1978, p. 215.

state/society. The shepherd/pastor – flock relationship yields other kinds of aspects than the previous relationship: while the polis – citizen “game” leads us into the dimension of confines, limitations, and balances (the society limits the state, etc), the kind of politics which turns towards life proves to be of a most comprehensive nature. That is, biopower, in harmony with Arendt’s description, but in the context of a different diagnosis, dissolves the above mentioned differences, and may address anyone. It is the omnipresence of life which makes possible for biopolitics to involve everybody in its singularity and as part of a whole (*omnes et singulatim*). This is a radical praxis, which strives inwards, concentrates on the individual, while it becomes the formal-institutional designer of the community. Life’s complete immanence, so much emphasized by Deleuze, is accomplished here. Biopower lacks indeed any aspiration for transcendence. Sovereignty, on the contrary, always has a transcendent position in opposition with a life living man, as long as it may only exercise its power over certain death if it is indifferent towards individual lives, and transcends the individual living according to the pragmatic standards of life.

Secondly, although Foucault perceived the otherness of biopower as compared to power manifested in sovereignty, it may still derive from his thinking that, being aware of the dynamism of European history, it is impossible to rigidly separate sovereignty from biopower.¹ The history of modernity derives much rather from the dynamics of sovereignty and immanent biopower. The formation of the absolutist state also refers to this, enforcing particular biopower regulations, and validating the contextual combination of sovereignty and pastoral care. Therefore we are not constrained to separate sovereignty from biopolitical regimes; instead, we have to pay attention to the connections of the two. It is this combination, that is, the contradictory connections of sovereignty and biopower, that Foucault called the “demonic project” of modernity, by which he meant that this interconnectedness of biopower and sovereignty has caused tensions impossible to be eliminated. While the organizational activities of “pastoral power” assume ever newer forms because of the dynamics of “life sciences”, the state and its sovereign force power cannot be considered neutral. Sovereignty is

¹ I say this because recent tendencies also exist which, following Foucault, perceive biopower and sovereignty as sharply ambivalent (Nikolas Rose’s outstanding studies mirror this exact tendency). For myself, the most important possibility of Foucault’s thinking is exactly the articulation of the co-existence of biopower and sovereignty.

always embedded into the possibility of potential violence, but the mobility of European history reveals the weaknesses of a power reclining on sovereignty, and the impotence of pure sovereignty.

It would be the avoidance of the essence of things to think that such an interpretation of biopower would have left the notion of life untouched; on the contrary, one must remember the fact that the experience of grasping life, the meaning of life also changes. It is so because Foucault does not analyze the Aristotelian notion of life, which, as we have previously seen, concentrates on the variability and hierarchic nature of life (vegetative life...¹). Moreover, it is not the classical taxonomic attitude applied here, which distinguishes between species on the basis of their visible particularities.

On the basis of Aristotle, one may differentiate between the *bios* (the form of life) and the *zoe* (bare life). However, Foucault mentions the *immanent* and *synthetic* notion of life, which connects the multiplying meanings of life, and means the all-time “roots” of existence. The *zoe* is *bios* from the very beginning, that is, life manifested by forms, or more precisely: “the *bios* ... is founded in the *zoe*, which, in reality, has already become *techné*”.² In other words, the care which derives from biopower, and extends to everything and everybody, does not aim at a previously given “life”, but enforces a meaning of life which is a corollary of this new kind of power. The sovereign leader, who fulfils the threat of death, may reduce his subject to a mere *zoe* by “creating” bare life, as stated by Agamben, one of the outstanding figures of recent political-philosophical debates on life.³ However, for a biopolitical

¹ Scott Lash, “Life (Vitalism)”, *Theory, Culture & Society* 23 (2006): 323. Joseph Bleicher, “Leben”, *Theory, Culture & Society* 23 (2006): 343-345. Mika Ojakangas, “Impossible Dialogue on Biopower: Agamben and Foucault”, *Foucault-studies* 2 (2005): 12.

² Jean-Luc Nancy, *La création du monde ou mondialisation*, Paris: Galilée, 2002, p. 140. “ainsi le *bios*...se fonde dans la *zoe*, mais celle-ci, en réalité, est déjà devenue *tekhne*”.

³ Agamben’s significance for our subject is paramount; however, I can only make some notes about him here. First, I may refer back here to my initial argumentation connected to Benjamin, dealing with the sacredness of life. Agamben considers that it always belongs to the force-power of sovereignty to place our existence on the level of bare life, in the constellation of the unconditioned threat of death. On the basis of this, he states that the modern man is, at least virtually, a *homo sacer*, a man surrounded by sacredness. At the same time, he also reminds us of the modern tendency that a life conceived in such a way lacks the ideological support of sacredness. It is so because the man exposed

regime death penalty in itself is scandalous (Foucault seems to allow it in case somebody biologically endangered his fellow-citizens¹); what is more, the presence of death itself is unbearable. Since nobody can pretend to have power over death, then the power must manifest itself over life with help of life.

Considering again the relationship of Arendt and Foucault, one may say that their trains of thought separate on this issue. Let me refer to Arendt's analysis in her book on totalitarianism, treating the situation created after World War I. Arendt, as known, raised the problem of refugees and minorities: (actually, she showed that (adjusting her train of thought to our own topic and terminology) the members of Western democracy were able to enforce their rights and possibilities as citizens, and not as "bare humans". That is, the dignity of the citizen was always based on the *bios*, and not the *zoe*. The most horrible fate awaits the stateless nomads, humans who do not possess a state's protection; the refugee who lacks the security of a political community is exposed to various modes of violent actions in the most abominable way. When biopolitics prevails, it shows how doubtful the application of human rights is in the context of biopolitics. For example, the critical remark about the Iraq war – that the murders committed in the name of human rights, humanitarian logic, and the care of life introduce life into global politics – in fact also develops one of Arendt's motifs.² The citizen living in the context of the *bios* is able to do something for his rights, but the "man" is doomed to helplessness; the citizen simplified to the *zoe*, possessed by biopolitics, is forced to absolute dependence. The person reduced to the *zoe* becomes rootless, the extraction of his roots fixed in the field of politics proves to be a phenomenon with several consequences. This is why Arendt was so ruthless about "nation states" which became biopolitical, because he thought that these had a role in

to unconditioned death belongs neither to the field of positive, nor to natural law, possesses no citizen's, nor human rights, and therefore his murder does not mean homicide. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998; Idem, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999; Idem, *The Open: Man and Animal*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004.

¹ Pierre Manent problematized the elimination of death penalty from the point of view of the relationship of citizen and state. See: Pierre Manent, "Current Problems of European Democracy", *Modern Age*, Winter, 2003, 13.

² Michael Dillon and Julian Reid, "Global Liberal Governance: Biopolitics, Security and War", *Millennium Journal of International Studies*, 1 (2001): 41-66.

eventually weakening the space of freedom. The administration of the states having in mind the model of the *animal laborans* has become biopolitical. The states emphasizing the ideal of labour projected the image of the *animal laborans*, reduced to the *zoe*, the utterly bare life. Arendt is probably the first philosopher who paid special attention to the processes which had brought upon the formation of biopower.

When speaking about Arendt, it is evident to mention her ideas about totalitarianism, since one could hardly understand Arendt's way of thinking without the interpretation of the violence technology of totalitarianism. Still, this mention of totalitarianism, although an important part of Arendt's work, will not suffice. It seems practical to contextualize her argumentation, at least in short. She made her statements in an age when the dynamics of "life sciences" combined the various forms of biopolitics, in a way which coincided with definite contemporary tendencies. The repulsive forms of biopolitics, such as negative eugenics, for instance, are usually connected to Nazi rule or the raw versions of racism, but meanwhile the unrelenting fact seems to be forgotten that eugenics as a biopolitical interference with the life of the society has had a great number of representatives amongst scientists and intellectuals who considered themselves "progressive". The Nazi regime applied indeed biopolitical measures with regard to the operation of death camps; however, to identify biopolitics with Nazism or to qualify Nazism as the perfection of biopolitics would be quite far-fetched, since other states also applied biopolitical measures in the 1930s and later as well.¹ There are many leftist, socialist intellectuals who considered biology the hallway of socialism. For them, worldly socialism was nothing else than the marriage of biology and socialism, a biopolitical intervention extended over all the social ingredients, a gigantic birth regulation, the state prohibition of "racial" degradation.² The biopolitical investment urged nation state politics, the disciplinary regimes were concerned with the nation state design of the body; the practice of the

¹ E. R. Dickinson, "Biopolitics, Fascism, Democracy: Some Reflections on Our Discourse About "Modernity" ", *Central European History* 1 (2004): 1–48.

² Diane Paul, „Eugenics and the Left”, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45 (1984): 567-590; Albert Somit (ed.), *Biology and Politics. Recent Explorations*, The Hague: Mouton, 1976; Andrew Kimbrell, *The Human Body Shop, The Engineering and Marketing of Life*, New York: Harper Collins, 1993.

Scandinavian states can be mentioned as an example.¹ The formerly existing socialisms also acted as biopolitical powers, and it was an organic part of their exercise of force-power to have invested themselves with the right to care for the people who live in socialism, and acted in the name of “love” for the citizens (or, if you like, they practiced violence with help of ideological references to the just nature of the objectives). It is important for us to see that Arendt’s arguments recorded a determined tendency of modernity: the danger exists that biopower frees itself from any kind of constraints, issues any kinds of legally enforced regulations, and is available any time to achieve the objectives of force-power. Biopower, in the spirit of caring for the subject subordinated to the labour process, simplifies reality into processes of bio-objectivation, and supersedes vital action. Therefore one must not think that Arendt’s dialogue was exhausted by this reference to totalitarianism, because the presence of biopower can also be harmful in democracy, that is, it may mean the conspicuous degradation of violence.

Biopower for Arendt is actually *bioviolence*, a meta-framework of methods entangled into biological necessities, which at the same time means the cancellation of inter-subjectivity shaped by politics. For Foucault, however, biopolitics is not the preparation of the insertion of politics into objectified structures, but the opening of the possibility of life’s politization. In his case one must take into account the co-existence of a biological and political being. Biopower acts in the name of life enforcement, it treats life as an object, but it also provokes the resisting force of life. In other words, in treating biopower, one must take into account the self-referential character of life: when power chooses life as its object, it challenges life acting against power; the representatives of biopower must know that their activity makes life face itself. It is the Foucaultian thesis of the interaction of power and resistance, the idea of an immanently existing resistance what is apparent here. Therefore the normalization at home in Western societies does not create the conditions of depolitization. While for Arendt the biopolitical regime gaining strength, and the enforcement of the impersonal normalizing pressure cancels intersubjectivity deriving from vocal pluralism, for Foucault biopolitics does not hinder the manifestation of a “we” deriving from intersubjectivity, the possibility of communal action. In Foucault’s agonistic thinking, similarly to Arendt, political action growing beyond the

¹ Gunnar Bromberg and Nils Roll-Hansen (eds.), *Eugenics and the Welfare State. Sterilization Policy in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland*, East Lansing: Michigan University Press, 1996.

routine forms of activity has an important role, a kind of action which radically modifies the frameworks of the given “truth games”, which draws otherness into existing relations. But when Foucault speaks about political relations apparent in competition, then it becomes evident that it is possible for him to question the “games” of all organized and standardized human activities.¹ That is, there is a possibility of inserting differentiality into the field of existing regulated activity, political determination may rewrite the frameworks, whether clinical, prison-like, or other, of separated fields surrounded with regulations. The *agon* may leave his mark on all ruling practices, may break through the regularly drawn circles of institutions organized in the spirit of ruling, the logos of formal power structures, and may problematize the existing rules. The unfolding of agonistic freedom is not hindered by existing, formal, constitutional frameworks, and, appearing in various places, this kind of freedom may voice its necessities to rewrite the given ruling exercises. The interconnectedness of power and resistance is always a process, which never arrives to a halt, never attains a solution in some kind of fulfilling project of liberation. It is also highly important that this situation opens up perspectives which coincide with contemporary issues, and there are more ruling practices in international relations as well, which challenge the practice of agonistic freedom beyond formal frameworks. The most important issue for us is that this creates the possibility of connecting biological and political existence, and the practice of political readiness does not become a victim of biopower. And we have returned again to the phenomenon of self-referential life, with politics within it. Biopower marks the power over life, while the Foucaultian *agon* outlines the counter-power formed in the name of life.

Foucault only raised the possibility and outlined, but did not elaborate, the communal logic of vitalist resistance to biopolitics. But if considering the mutual structures of power and resistance, then the articulation of biopower and sovereignty in the course of history should not be linked to the projection of some kind of objective historical logic, but to the flowing, pulsating mobility of action/counter-action. In the world of pure sovereignty there is only *zoe*, the *bios* is left out from the field of politics, there is no possibility for action, only complete inertia remains, a complete exposure to the threat of death. However, in the world of pure biopolitics, remains the immersion into complete

¹ See on this: James Tully, “The agonic freedom of citizens”, *Economy and Society* 2 (1999): 161-182.

immanence, which leads to the triumph of depolitization – for Arendt’s clear warnings, despite their utopian implications, cannot be disregarded. What remains is, therefore, the analysis of the combinations of biopower and sovereignty.

*

No doubt, the reasoning of vitalism has left its marks on Foucault’s thinking, and the presence of the various representatives of vitalism in Foucault’s work could be discussed at length. For example, Nietzsche’s influence on Foucault’s reasoning is more or less known. Furthermore, Foucault himself claimed the importance of vitalism on several occasions, which particularly originates from mortalism.¹ However, it seems more important to me to mention one of Foucault’s masters: Canguilhem. His renewed vitalism is unavoidable in connection with Foucault, although Canguilhem pursued a non-political way of thinking. Nevertheless, Foucault’s concept of biopower could hardly be understood without Canguilhem’s thinking offensive of animism and mechanicism. It is exactly Canguilhem who, while discussing the historical concept of “normality”, creates the foundations for Foucault’s ideas. *Firstly*, the socially constructed meanings of “normal” and “pathological” allow the criticism of a normalizing social control. *Secondly*, by the analysis of the normative horizons of life and health, Canguilhem makes certain steps that also resound in Foucault’s philosophy. Because, when Foucault (reminding one of Spinoza) discusses, as seen earlier, that man, “insofar as he lives”, is nothing different from the “bundle of forces which resists”, he follows Canguilhem’s steps: life is the force of resistance against death, resistance is the force that penetrates life, which continuously resists, though only with partial success. Life obeys the pure weight of forces, and it manifests itself in the network of influences and the balance of movements. Bichat defined life with help of those functions which resist death – or rather, this is why he gained Foucault’s recognition. Foucault exploited the vitalistic potentials of the resistance against biopolitics based on Bichat. *Then*, when Canguilhem connected the normativity lying in medicine and biological thinking with normativity concerning

¹ “Life resists death, and at the same time it exposes itself to death ... Vitalism originates therefore from the foundations of mortalism” Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la clinique*, Paris: P. U. F., 1963, p. 146. [Transl. Emese G. Czintos]

life, then he led to Foucault's concept of biopower. Because, when the author of the *La connaissance*¹ explains that life itself has a normative nature, and this normativity surfaces at the moment of the loss of life as knowledge, altering the relationship of the normal and the pathological: it suggests that the abnormal, at least in an existential perspective, precedes the "normal". So, Canguilhem speaks about a change in bio-science (medicine, biology) which occurred when "abnormality", the normativity which appears in life questioning moments (illness, death) becomes the core of such forms of knowledge. On the basis of this one may conclude that the "normality" implied by these sciences is of a constructed-normative kind, and, as I have already mentioned in relation with vitalism, it is the condition to which the body as an organic formation strives with help of its self-organizing capacity. It should be emphasized that "health for Canguilhem ... is life lived in the silence of the organs and their normative struggles to resist death ... normality ... is life lived in silence of the authorities and their normative struggles to ensure social order and tranquillity".² However, here we must refer again to Foucault: when he speaks about a historical *a priori* in connection with the creation of the clinic, he thinks of the particular connection of vitalism and the statistical analysis of illnesses. Because in the background we see the progress of this aspect: the hygienic/biopower perspective creates again analogies between medical and citizens' bodies. It is this biopower perspective that condenses citizens' bodies into a social corpus, guided by statistical chains, relations, and rules fixed by life. The pastoral concept of care, the connection of politics and medicine is discussed again, in the name of life and health, and the norms of vitalism. Canguilhem's reasoning attested that medicine deeply influences the philosophical status of "Man". Medicine determines the individual's self-relating, and the ethical aspects of his life conduct. Foucault could also thank Canguilhem for his own developing of the idea that social norms are not external for hygiene. It is also Canguilhem's heritage to find that politics does not appear as an external field for biological or medical concerns as well; in the context in which politics aims at the vital processes of human existence, life is not a neutral fact.

At any rate, the more recent tendencies of biopolitics remind one of the ideas of Canguilhem and Foucault. Here I can only record formulations such as "the molecularization of life", "somatic I",

¹ Georges Canguilhem, *La connaissance de la vie*, Paris: Vrin, 1965.

² Nikolas Rose, "Life, Reason and History: Reading Georges Canguilhem Today", *Economy and Society*, 2-3 (May 1998): 164.

“molecular age”, “genetic body”, “body covered in genetic codes”, “biosociality”, “genetic citizenship”, “somatic risk”, “medical forms of life”.¹ The pertaining writings read that the visibility of the body is manifested in a different way, and that this new configuration of visibility cannot be displayed with help of clinical or eugenic perspectives, because the sub-microscopic perspectives, the codes projected to screens need a different kind of view (although the previous perspectives, such as eugenics, are not eliminated). These marks call attention at the same time to the fact that the biopolitical regime of modernity brings about a set of deep changes, which reinterpret the connections of technology, and biological and human co-existence, and result in modified forms of political rationality. This means that the revealed modes of body experience are placed into the dangerous dynamics of a chaotically organized molecular world.²

Foucault could be referred to again here. For it is important that the “molecularized” body, “displaying bioinformation”, creates the age-determined configurations of “self-technology”, of the care for ourselves: “labour” is somehow connected with labour processes done to ourselves, to our own health. That is, biological life turns into the exclusive labour area of life. The subjectivity of that age is, therefore, connected to the normalized production of ourselves, and the normalized neo-liberal subjectivity refers to a series of rational decisions about its own vitality, to the “ethos” of self-guidance. In this sense the conclusion is evident that our age presents anti-Arendtian developments. Moreover, these developments in the light of modified corporeal order highly justify Arendt’s doubts, because Arendt was preoccupied exactly by the danger which derived from the activity of a political and economic power which calculated the physical mechanisms of life. However, it is exactly this constellation we have to face: the biomolecular power, biopolitical network subordinates the bodies to different modes of ruling, with reference to the continuously emerging, and often hardly specifiable

¹ Nikolas Rose, “The Politics of Life Itself”, *Theory, Culture and Society*, 18 (2001): 1- 30; Carlos Novas and Nikolas Rose, “Genetic Risk and the Birth of the Somatic Individual”, *Economy and Society*, 29 (2000): 485- 513; Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002; Jürgen Habermas, *The future of human nature*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003; Michael Dillon, “Virtual Security: A Life Science of (Dis)order”, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 3 (2003): 531-558.

² Bruce Braun, “Biopolitics and the molecularization of life”, *Cultural Geographies*, 1 (1 January 2007): 6.

risks. The citizens as addressees of biopower operate according to the logic of market calculations, and their lives, after the demobilization of the welfare state, are manoeuvred by automatic, transcendental norms oriented by the market.

This last statement is also polemical, as it questions the assertion (e.g. Rose) that the non-violent biopower of modernity is only of an administrative nature, created only for the sake of life, and lacks any political references. Moreover, there is biosecurity, and the huge problem of state biopunishment¹, which extensively appears today in public discourse. Its manifestations reveal new modalities of sovereignty, which however do not mirror the advent of a traditional territorialized state because, for example, the limits are not localized from the side of biosecurity, and the control mechanisms also need deterritorialized solutions. All this is connected to the phenomenon that biopolitical market liberalization, as well as biopolitical individualization, that is, the practice of power over life in the name of life, is dependent on the individual, as long as it considers the individual making rational market decisions as the carrier of decisions. At the same time, the aforementioned liberalization necessarily goes hand in hand with the increase of the power of ruling capacities. True, it is not only the apparatus acting in the name of state sovereignty which makes relevant decisions about the guidance of individual decisions concerning life, because one must note the intricate connections of state force power and private regulating mechanisms. Still, these developments justify Foucault's idea that the dynamics of biopolitics lies at the basis of the multiplication of politics. Without Foucault it would be impossible to understand that the emanation of biopower cannot be imagined in the absence of truth discourses prevalent in society, or the authority which utters and enforces the truth, and makes decisions and acts in the name of collective vitality. Doubtlessly, biopolitical individualization is a significant characteristic of neo-liberalism, but it does not mean that "the individual self and the genetic body coincide", in fact, "bodies are understood less in terms of their intrinsic genetic essence the fantasy of one's genetic code carried around on a CD and more in terms of a global

¹ Paul Rabinow, *Anthropos Today: Reflections on Modern Equipment*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003; Nancy Meyer-Emerick, "Biopolitics, Dominance, and Critical Theory", *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 1 (2004): 1–15; Thomas F. Tierney, "Foucault on the Case: The Pastoral and Juridical Foundation of Medical Power", *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 4 (Winter 2004): 271–290; Dillon and Reid, "Global Liberal Governance".

economy of exchange and circulation, where the body is thrown into a chaotic and unpredictable molecular world filled with emergent yet unspecifiable risks.”¹ One should not forget that it is a characteristic of biopower that our body is not merely our own possession, but it is a part of collective vitality, and as such it always represents a biosecurity risk factor. The individual self-creation implied by genetic-pastoral care exists, but only in the context of such a sovereignty which must extend itself in order to insert the dynamism of molecularity into the order of rights.

“Humanity”, “the life itself” always brings out the possibility of politics, and political philosophy can hardly avoid the task of the interpretation of life and collective vitality. This task also involves the separation of sovereignty and biopolitical power, and the maintenance of their differences. At the same time, the simultaneous discussion of sovereignty concealing transcendent measures and the biopower existing within the immanent frameworks of life is necessarily connected to this approach. Sovereignty and biopolitics: the analysis of their relationship discusses the dynamic configurations of knowledge, power, and subjectivity, and the biological, technological, and political body. One cannot imagine the absolute power of sovereignty without a biopolitical “affection” and care, and, contrary to Arendt’s views, there is no relevant politics which would eliminate this “care”. In the absence of biopolitical care, sovereignty would always need to enforce the excess of “dominance” and “violence”. Moreover, the strengthening of biopolitics cannot be predicted without the affirmation of sovereignty.

Translated by Emese G. Czintos

¹ Braun, “Biopolitics...”, p. 7.