A book review:

T. Lemke, *Biopolitics*, transl. by T. Dominiak, Warsaw: Editions Sic!, 2010, pp. 152

by Artur Filipowicz

A modern development of biological sciences, used by biomedicine with the help of biotechnology, has contributed largely to an artificial interference in natural life processes. Biotechnologies allow people a bigger and bigger control of their own nature, population and biosphere. Due to this fact, the character of traditional authority changes radically. In this context a notion of biopolitics has a growing popularity. The history and also the diversity of problems discussed in this field is approached by the synthetic work of Thomas Lemke entitled *Biopolitics*. The author does a historical reconstruction of this concept, used for the first time by Rudolf Kjellén in 1920. He dedicates a lot of time to the theme of antinaturalistic and antipoliticistic interpretation of biopolitics, started in the seventies of the 20th century by Michel Foucault, and continued in the works of Giorgio Agamben, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.

In our modern public debate the notion of biopolitics appears in a context of protection of the natural environment and in the implementation of new biotechnologies requiring legal regulations. Such an understanding of biopolitics is an uncomplete and only very partial aspect of the biopolitics discussions. The biopolitics concerns not only ecological and biotechnological problems, but life in general.

In Aristotele's days it was considered that a human being is a political animal. Nature and politics were clearly distinguished. Presently a transgression of discussions occurred and the politics started to cover all the domains concerning life. This happened mainly thanks to biotechnology interfering in mankind itself and into the surrounding world of living beings. Biotechnological interferences, leading to the effacement of differences between natural and artificial, forced politicians to determine admissible limits of biotechnological interference into the domain of life. The traditional idea was that such a limitation is determined by the nature itself. Meanwhile the term nature, which can be freely shaped, becomes more and more ambiguous. The uncertain understanding of nature, causing definite consequences for decisions, requires to build a base of biopolitics on two metabiopolitic pillars. The first of these is bioethics, understood as an ethic reflection on all the phenomena concerning life. The second one is a biojurisprudence as a philosophical and legal reflection focused around an artificial biotechnological, biotechnical and biomedical interference into natural life processes.

Michel Foucault's concept gives an essential contribution to such determined

biopolicy fields. In his belief in modern times there was a significant change in the way of exercising power. In earlier times the sovereign's authority was extended to society understood as a set of individuals. In modern times a population becomes a subject the object of the authority. The passage from the authority over an individual to authority over the population was possible thanks to the knowledge's development in the field of biomedical sciences. Since the 18th century one can observe a well-defined authority assignment, and then a connection of authority with biological knowledge. This understanding of authority – knowledge has been defined by M. Foucault as a bioauthority.

A modern bioauthority interferes in life's processes. It analyses, inspects, modifies and optimizes the body of an individual and of a population according to established targets and corresponding strategies. We can even risk the statement, that the bioauthority replaced the ancient sovereign's law to condemn to death or to keep alive. More and more, bioauthority, executing the regulation's role with respect to the population, claims the law to condemn for life or allow to die.

The regulating attributes of the modern bioauthority inevitably have led the followers of pre foucaultative biopolitics to initiate eugenic programmes in the framework of totalitarian nazi and communist systems. The protagonists of organic and racist concept of a state have considered that politics is ruled by biological laws, so political phenomena

should be perceived by a prism of biological science. Such an understanding of politics have been typical for national-socialists. After the rise of Hitler to power they believed, that the body of the german nation has the right to life's space. "Blood and Land" became an emblematic characteristic and also an imperative of the national-socialistic biopolitics. This imperative focused on a care of the purity of the German race. It would be favoured by the positive and negative eugenic's programs to prevent „race mixing". From the one side they have taken care for the native Germans transfer of „pure genetic patrimonium" for the next generations. From the other, they have sterilized or eliminated representatives of the „lesser races", to which they classified not only Jews and Slaves but also persons infirmed, physically and mentally retarded, antisocial or unemployed. Similarly to the national-socialist regime, stalinist ideologists undertook eugenic biopolitic strategies to „improve" and „ennoble" a soviet man.

Even though it was compromised with the fall of the nazi and communism ideology the logic of the naturalistic and policistic thinking in the biopolitic it continues to exist and it takes today different forms of expresion. The bioauthority in a democratic lawful country, although in changed conditions, still tries to regulate, rank and value the life of a population, but also exclude „redundant society members". In the period of national socialism or soviet communism the authority alone – regardless of society

– controlled, optimised and disciplined the individuals and the population. Today we can observe an apparent displacement of accents in the direction of an individual. Presently the bioauthority allows an individual a certain degree of autodiscipline, autooptimisation and interference into its own nature. The bioauthority – at least verbally – cannot dogmatically impose its own biopolitics otherwise than by acquirement of the approbate of society for its own strategies. A social consent for the bioauthority's activities is in an important degree induced and formed by the bioauthority itself. The biopolitics became therefore a form of control, overtaking the integrity of social relations. Reaching however into the depth of individual's consciousness in a different manner it penetrates to the most intimate fields of human life.

Biopolitical decisions taken by the bioauthority and standardized in the biolaw's domain, especially those concerning the artificial interference into human nature, carry concrete consequences for the life of an individual and of a population. Taken in spirit of the „soft eugenic“ they can favour new social divisions and stratifications. The category of the division may not be only constituted by a „purity“ or a hierarchy of races. It may be

constituted by the „purity“ of society, culture and civilization. The „purity“ values and hierarchises of the community. It divides into the „better“ and the „worst“. The better, progressive and modern societies, cultures and civilizations – will be allowed to survive. The worst ones, backward and less developed – will „die“.

A reading of the book of Thomas Lemke allows us to understand why this, which is the external border of politics: body and life, becomes the deepest essence of the biopolitics. It induces a conclusion, that the interferences between life and politics will not be exhaustively elaborated if in the considerations will be used only the research material typical for social sciences. The research of the correlation between politics and *bios* requires an overdisciplinary dialog between different cultures of knowledge, methods of analysis and explanation's competencies. An interdisciplinarity of the biopolitics supposes then that from the part of political decision-makers, the need of more important synergy with the individual and society in the solutions of biopolitical problems. The final goal of the biopolitics should be the common care for preservation and promotion of life and not the manipulation of life according to some subjective calculations and bioauthority's strategies.