What is life? Ethical and biopolicy considerations in the light of cinema

O que é a vida? Considerações éticas e biopolíticas à luz do cinema

¿Qué es la vida? Consideraciones éticas y biopolíticas a la luz del cine

ABSTRACT
For a better understanding of what life is, one can rescue Saint Augustine's notes for the time and still, with an opportunity in the arguments of the Bishop of Hippo, if this question really makes sense, once if we want to explain, I already demonstrate the lack of knowledge. Or, if there is really a need to reflect in ethical terms. This brief communication will start from the assumption that the question What is life? It is extremely problematic from an ethical point of view. As a starting point, the Aristotelian conjectures about the concept of life and the Foucauldian analysis of power relations in Western societies in the light of cinema will be approached. Will still be concepts such as biopower, biopolitics and (bio)ethics are presented.

Keywords: bioethics, medicine, philosophy.
Palavras-chave: bioética, medicina, filosofia.

RESUMEN
Para una mejor comprensión de lo que es la vida, se pueden rescatar las notas de San Agustín para la época y aún, con una oportunidad en los argumentos del obispo de Hipona, si realmente tiene sentido esta pregunta, una vez si queremos explicar, ya lo demuesto. la falta de conocimiento. O, si realmente hay necesidad de reflexionar en términos éticos. Esta breve comunicación partirá del supuesto de que la pregunta ¿Qué es la vida? Es extremadamente problemático desde un punto de vista ético. Como punto de partida, se abordarán las conjeturas aristotélicas sobre el concepto de vida y el análisis foucaultiano de las relaciones de poder en las sociedades occidentales a la luz del cine. Seguirá siendo se presentan conceptos como biopoder, biopolítica y (bio)ética.

Palabras clave: bioética, medicina, filosofía.

1 INTRODUCTION

What is life? The approach to this question could be initiated similarly to Saint Augustine’s formulation for time: “if nobody asks me, I know; if I want to explain it to whoever asks me the question, I don’t know anymore”1. One can ask, in the wake of the proposition inspired by the Bishop of Hippo, if this question really makes sense – after all, if I want to explain it... I don’t know anymore. Or, if it has any relevance, especially in ethical terms. This brief communication will start from the assumption that the question What is life? It is extremely problematic from an ethical point of view. For such delimitation, two starting points will be established: (1) the Aristotelian conjectures about the concept of life and (2) the Foucauldian analysis of power relations in western societies. An attention to the question: power and knowledge (1) From the Foucauldian perspective, knowledge and power are related: that there is no power relationship without the constitution of a field of knowledge; that all knowledge constitutes new power relations; and that every point where power is exercised is, at the same time, a place for the formation of knowledge and practices.

Presenting here some concepts: biopower, biopolitics, (bio)ethics. In 1978, in the course entitled Security, Territory, Population, Foucault establishes the study of biopower as the guiding thread of his analysis, defining it as “the set of mechanisms by which what, in the human species, constitutes its fundamental biological characteristics, goes being able to enter into a politics, a political strategy, a general strategy of power”2.

By biopolitics, Foucault will designate the movement according to which, from the 18th century, biological life begins to become an object of politics, that is, biological life begins to be produced and, in addition, administered, with the particularity that, even being the object of normalization, biological life is never exhaustively held back in the mechanisms that intend to control it, as it always exceeds them and finally escapes. Bioethics, described as a specialization of ethics, is first of all a branch of Philosophy, being defined in various ways according to its history.

According to the context in which it is presented, it seeks to relate humans and animals to the facts (practical ethical conflicts), making them “subject-objects” under examination. Furthermore, according to the Ghente Project group of scientists: “[...] bioethics is a second-order practice, which operates on first-order practices, in direct contact with the concrete determinations of the action within the biological bases of human existence”. For the militants of the Health Reform Movement, it represented – above all – an ethical-political reform.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

Aristotle makes an important distinction regarding the notion of life in his Politics. The philosopher from Estagira differentiates zoe, the simple fact of living – or, in other words, organic life – from bios, a specific way of living, which was established in political terms. Thus, it would be possible to characterize that zoe refers to physis (nature) and bios refers to polis (city-state). Thus, bios is inscribed in the midst of politics, which is not the case of zoe, which is related to nature.

This distinction has important consequences for contemporary reflection on the ways in which power relations are established in contemporary times. So let's see an important aspect: Now, as politics uses the other sciences and, on the other hand, legislates on what we should...
and what we shouldn’t do, the purpose of this science must include those of the others, so that this purpose will be the good human.

Indeed, even if this purpose is the same for both the individual and the State, the latter’s objective seems to be something greater and more complete, whether to achieve or to preserve it. While it is well worth achieving this end for a single individual, it is more beautiful and more divine to achieve it for a nation or city-States. Zoé, according to Giorgio Agamben, was the word used in ancient Greece to name common life, or “the simple fact of living common to all living beings”.

The western philosophers of antiquity, such as Plato and Aristotle, did not consider the word zoé, because they were not interested in the approach of a simply natural life; their focus of interest and study was politically qualified life, social life, bios. The two words, bios and zoé, would be used by the Greeks to express what we simply call life. Furthermore, in his book Politics, Aristotle recognizes that the advent of language, which has been given the status of “supplement of politicization”, constitutes the mark of the differentiation between politically differentiated and bare animal life, insofar as it is responsible for the establishment of dichotomous value judgments, such as good and evil, fair or unfair, right and wrong, etc.

To zoé is only admitted a pair of opposites: pleasure and pain. The Peri psykhês treatise has a decisive importance in establishing the main theses that guide the “biopolitical” investigations of Giorgio Agamben. In the arguments of the Italian philosopher, when the modern State, from the 19th century, begins to include care for the life of the population in its management, citing here the well-known arguments of Foucault, it will be a redefinition and generalization of aspects of nutritional life. At the same time, the relationship and distinction between man and animal – one of the crucial points of debate in the medieval interpretation of the treaty – starts to assume, for Agamben, an unavoidable political dimension.

3 RESULTS

Michel Foucault describes, in different works, the ways in which power relations are established in societies. In this context, he distinguished three “types” of societies: (1) Sovereign societies, until the Industrial Revolution, in which power is exercised by the sovereign, in a perspective of “make die and let live”. In fact, “it is because the sovereign can kill that he exercises his right over life”, as portrayed in the film The Other, with Natalie

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Mary Boleyn, lover of King Henry VIII and his sister Anne Boleyn, who became his second wife. Synopsis: Based on a true story, the film shows two sisters, Anne (Natalie Portman) and Maria (Scarlett Johansson) Boleyn who, driven by family ambition and the quest for power and status, get involved in a game, where love and the attention of the King of England are the goal. Thrown into the dangerous life of the court, what was supposed to be an attempt to help the family turns into a cruel rivalry between sisters. The first to get King Henry VIII's attention, Mary, becomes pregnant, but the child is not King Henry VIII's (the film chose to omit this information).

Times later, the Boleyn family brings back Anne, who was in France as the Queen's chaperon and she conquers the king, until her tragic end, an anointed queen and wife of the reigning monarch, was put on public trial on charges of betrayal, adultery and incest with one's own brother, sentenced to death. (2) Disciplinary societies, after the Industrial Revolution, in which power was exercised in spaces of confinement of the individual, which passes, from one to another, throughout life.

These spaces include the family, the school, the barracks, the factory, the hospital and the prison, among others, as shown in the film Shutter Island (2010), with Leonardo Dicaprio and Mark Ruffalo. Psychological thriller film, directed by Martin Scorsese and written by Laeta Kalogridis, film adapted of Dennis Lehane's 2003 namesake novel. Leonardo DiCaprio plays federal agent Edward "Teddy" Daniels, considered a legend within the US federal police, who investigates a psychiatric unit on Shutter Island after one of the patients disappears from a outside locked room. Mark Ruffalo plays her official partner; Ben Kingsley is the institution's principal psychiatrist; Max von Sydow is a German physician; and Michelle Williams is Daniels' wife. To make his work even more difficult, inside the prison he is subject to the protocols of the place and has to follow all the rules. Contrary to sovereignty, it is a way of making live and letting die152. (3) Control societies, after the Second World War, in which power is exercised continuously through permanent surveillance in all spaces in which the subject finds himself – in the same spirit as “Smile, you are being filmed” –, similarly to what

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is explained in the movie Truman's Show, the show of life, with Jim Carrey – American film of dramedy of 1998 directed by Peter Weir and written by Andrew Niccol.

Starring Jim Carrey, the film shows Truman Burbank's life, a quiet insurance salesman, a man who leads a simple life with his wife Meryl Burbank, does not know that he is living in a simulated reality by a television program, broadcast 24 hours a day for billions of people around the world. Truman becomes suspicious of everything around him: his supposed friends and even his wife, and embarks on a quest to discover the truth about his life. After meeting the mysterious Lauren, he is intrigued and ends up discovering that his entire life has been monitored by cameras and broadcast on national television. Also in the cast are Laura Linney, Noah Emmerich, Natascha McElhone and Ed Harris. In this case, subjects are captured in networks of coercion and control, in a perennial and indefinite way.

The ways in which power relations are established in the different “social organizations” are different, and it can be conjectured, however, that from sovereign societies to control societies, the devices for capturing subjects and, more importantly, are highly qualified and, more than that, the strategies for the colonization of zoe.

4 DISCUSSION

The possible intersection between Aristotle's and Foucault's thinking is proposed by Giorgio Agamben, notably in the books *Homo sacer: sovereign power and bare life* and *State of exception*. Agamben argues that, for Foucault, the transition from sovereign societies to disciplinary societies concerns the development of techniques aimed at the individual body – in order to train it and order it in space and time, configuring an anatomo-politics of the body – and the management of life, defining aspects related to birth, death, health – that is, a biopolitics of life. Thus, *making to live*\(^\text{13}\), capable of encompassing the anatomo-politics of the body and the biopolitics of life, concerns what Foucault called biopower. One of the essential characteristics of this biopower is the colonization of *zoe*, that is, the capture of the latter into politics, the “entry of *zoe* into the sphere of the *polis*”\(^{14}\). This inclusion takes place, according to Agamben, from the state of exception, that is, the establishment of a context in which one can act outside the law by virtue of the law. Indeed, the contemporary sovereign - Adolf Hitler, portrayed in Charlie Chaplin's film, *The Great Dictator* (1940), in which he played two

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characters: one of Adenoid Hynkel, dictator of Tomania, and the another a Jewish barber. The action begins at the end of World War I, when pilot Schultz (Reginald Gardiner) is saved by a clumsy soldier (Chaplin).

However, the plane they were traveling on was shot down, and the soldier was taken to a hospital in an amnesiac state, where he remained for several years. After discharge, he decides to settle in Tomania, where he opens a barber shop in a Jewish quarter. Tomania is ruled despotically by Hynkel (Chaplin) who bears physical similarities to the poor barber. The dictator starts a policy of racial discrimination against Jews.

Accidentally, the barber is arrested by a platoon and brought into the presence of the commander, who is revealed to be Schultz. Both Schultz and the barber are taken to a concentration camp, while his girlfriend Hannah (Paulette Godard) and her father flee to Osterlich, next to Tomania. But this country is on the verge of being invaded by the troops of Benzino Napaloni (Jack Oakie), dictator of Bacteria, which infuriates Hynkel, who also coveted the territory. He then invites him to a leaders’ conference, while the barber and commander escape the field.

Similarly, another fruitful discussion as in the case of the Decree for the protection of the people and the state; when, in the George W. Bush administration, in the case of the indefinite detention of the Taliban incarcerated in Guantánamo, a very Kafkaesque scenario (when thinking about The process) – it defines the suspension of aspects of the current legal system, establishing rules that were previously illegal, almost always in name of security made explicit in the film Vice, Dick Cheney's story – a satirical biopic, does not spare acidity in its approach to the former vice president during the administration of George W. Bush (2001-2009). Christian Bale plays Cheney, shown as a Machiavellian, ruthless and cold conservative, considered the most powerful Vice in history, was Bush Father's Secretary of State and Vice President Bush Son, the film illustrates the rise of Dick Cheney to become the most powerful man in the world. It shaped the United States and the world, generating changes that remain to this day. Still, the filmmaker saw a Shakespearean component in the relationship between Cheney and his wife Lynne (Amy Adams), a sort of Macbeth couple in Washington. Thus, life and death are decided in a very sui generis composition between sovereignty and biopolitics.

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5 CONCLUSION

Some brutal consequences can be seen from this entry of zoe into politics in terms of the state and exception. The first is the certain indiscernibility between democracy and totalitarianism; the second, the emergence of bare life, that is, something between bios and zoe, but without being bios and zoe, in the case of a killable life – whose annihilation does not constitute murder –, a naked life, the life of the homo sacer.

Finally, the definition, by someone else, of which life is worth living, for its maintenance in the name of the sacredness of life – the case of therapeutic obstinacy, so common in ICUs – or for its extermination – comes into play. concentration camps, place par excellence of bio(thanato)politics. It is therefore no longer about “making people die”, nor “making people live”, but “making them survive” – as in the syphilis research involving human beings in the USA, in Tuskegee – The film “Miss Ever’s boys”, 1997, Anasazi Productions, based on the “Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in Black Men”, which took place in Macon County, Alabama, United States, from 1932 to 1972, it was one of the transformations that contributed most to the advancement of Bioethics, penicillin had not yet been discovered (discovered in 1928 by Alexander Fleming and used as a drug from 1941 onwards). Compared to other studies, in which the participants were also not informed about the experiment, such as the studies carried out in World War II (1939 - 1945) by Hitler on war prisoners, mostly jews, they were exposed to very low temperatures for prolonged periods; infected with typhus, malaria, and other diseases to test drugs and vaccines; sterilization; administering poisons to study their lethal effects; tests applying chemical dyes to prisoners’ eyes in an attempt to change their colors, experiments with twins, among others. In a clear production of survival, assisted with a single purpose (“attempt”) to produce knowledge “for the good of Science.” What will it be like, for you, to survive in this 21st century, as mere homo sacer, in a state of exception? In this context – of not making people die, of not making people live and, perhaps, of making people survive – would it still be ethically defensible, really, to ask what life is?
REFERÊNCIAS


