

PHILOSOPHICAL — POLITICAL REFLEXIONS AND (PRE)TEXTS OF *BIOPOLITICS* (I)*

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Abstract. *The present article (formed of two consecutive parts) aims to (un)tie the strings tied tightly around a hybrid concept, which is neither fashion, nor out of it, taken and (re)made equally by the contemporary extensions by which is operating the (hard or soft) political philosophy, (re)discussing the affirmation of Jean-Luc Nancy, according to which the word biopolitics would have been created by Foucault. In fact, the general hypothesis will approximate — harmonizing, suspecting, reinterpreting — biopolitics, placing it (by ricochet) in the modern-postmodern pretexts and reflexes, establishing, on the path of Ferenc Feher, that beyond of the paternity of the notion (of its obsolete nature or its originality!), the biopolitical discourse and its program are, nevertheless, Foucaultian par excellence. As a result of the entry into the circuit of Foucault's thinking (in the late '70s) about biopower and biopolitics, the terms (coinciding only partially) reconfirm the interest of their definitive settlement within the strong fundamentals of philosophical and political thinking.*

Keywords: *Biopolitics, Biopower, Biopolitical Body, Michel Foucault, naturalism-liberalism.*

Biopolitics: a Foucaultian discourse, par excellence

This study aims (not at all innocently!) to (un)tie the strings tied tightly around a hybrid concept, which is neither fashion, nor out of it, taken and (re)made equally out of the contemporary extensions by which is operating the (*hard* or *soft*) political philosophy, (re)discussing the affirmation of Jean-Luc Nancy¹, according to which the word *biopolitics* would have been created by Foucault.

The working hypothesis will establish, on the path of Ferenc Feher², that beyond of the paternity of the notion (of its obsolete or its originality!), the

* The present study (formed of two consecutive parts) represents the preliminary approaches of a book focused on the theoretical backgrounds of biopolitics, in order to be published at ISPRI Publishing House (2013).

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¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *La création du monde ou de la mondialisation*, Paris, Galilée, 2002. Another perspective of the paternity of the term, referrers exclusively to its application in the science political field — see in this sense, Lynton Caldwell, "Biopolitics", *Yale Review* 56:1-16, 1964.

² Ferenc Feher, Agnes Heller, *Biopolitics*, Avebury Publishing House, European Centre Vienna, 1994.

biopolitical discourse and its program are, nevertheless, Foucaultian par excellence.

As a starting point, regarding the few notes about the term of biopolitics, launched by Jean-Luc Nancy³, it could be established (in a light accord with the author), that, passing the analogue terms in form (*bioethics*, *biotechnology*, *ecotechny*, *bioidentity*), the notion designates “life determining politics” or “the politics field coextensive with the life field”, in fact, in an involuntary way, neither life (like in forms of life), nor politics (understood as a form of coexistence) — confusion maintained by the assault of technical administration, by the common sense (consensual — asymptotical) both of the living and of power.

In a possible (*recent attempt*) to define *biopolitics* as a trend, this would bring the “ethic-socio-political reflection upon the problems set by the biological techno-science”, with emphasis on the “political power interested in biotechnological possibilities”⁴. Or, in the terms of Jean-Luc Nancy, the biopolitics indicates the order of a global politics determined by life, destined to take into care and control⁵.

Semantically disputed by the two acceptances of *zôé* (the simple fact of living, common for animals, people or gods) and *bios* (the own manner/own form of living of an individual or group), on Aristotle’s path of a *bios politikos* (with the necessary distinctions *bios theoretikos-apolaustikos-politikos*), the *despotes* (the head of family) remains sworn in with the imperative of reproduction and life care⁶. Integrated in this specific distinction designed to determine the *zoon genre*, (exactly) by the appeal to a supplement of policies; only by having as a starting point such an evidence, we can accept the affirmation of Foucault, according to which, at the beginning of the modern époque, the natural life begins to be included in the mechanisms and the calculations of state power, politics transforming itself in biopolitics — (re)balancing of the living animal, capable of a political existence (Aristotle), with the profile of the modern man-animal in whose life politics is put into discussion.

For Ferenc Feher⁷, biopolitics maintains its meaning (restricted/small) of politicization of the body. Suspected that it is not politics in a traditional way (due to the lack of discrepancy between reality and discourse), exposed as an exaggerated and excessive model, biopolitics is revealing itself in the evidence which establish that: the biopolitical thinking equals simulated scientific thinking; biopolitics equals politicization of the social matter; the biopolitics values recall in an excessive way the dichotomy friend/enemy and puts freedom in the service of the biopolitical objective, rebiologizing, according to Carl Schmitt’s criteria, politics; biopolitics equals cultural politics, of masses, a dominant of the cultural environments. In the presence of these aspects, in the inside of non-political

³ Jean-Luc Nancy, *La création du monde ou de la mondialisation*, Paris, Galilée, 2002.

⁴ Christian Geyer (coord.), *Biopolitik*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2011. See also no. 1 of the *Multitudes Review*, “Biopolitique et biopouvoir”, Exils, 2000.

⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, *La création du monde ou de la mondialisation*, Paris, Galilée, 2002.

⁶ Aristotel, *Politica [Politics]*, IRI, Bucharest, 2001.

⁷ Ferenc Feher, Agnes Heller, *Biopolitics*, Avebury Publishing House, European Centre Vienna, 1994.

conflicts of biological nature, Arendt's biopolitics persists as a self-contradictory concept: where "bio" seems to contradict "politics"!

The modern world (beginning with the Renaissance) valued the sense according to which politics begins where supremacy of biological links and measurements ends, where membership of a common political body becomes a priority to the solidarity of the biological body. The heir of the Social Darwinism radicalism of the nineteenth century, biopolitics can sit back in a shell of inverted Platonism, of non-spiritual essence of all human manifestations (economic, biological, sexual instinctual), translated politically into / through competition of class position with a biological essence.

Unjustly considered isolated terms by the Romanian political historical research⁸, bio and politics are found [in their compound form] in the stance appetite of Romanian interwar anthropologists and sociologists to theorize and promote the application of racial theories of the time, in the modeling of new Romania — not a harmless framework of thinking, worsen by the explosion of the Saeculum community.

According to Maria Bucur⁹, in the context of reactivation of the notions of "biopolitics", "nosopolitics" or "politics of the Body", the body remains "a field of development regarding debates on rights, obligations, freedoms and limitations" (with appeal at the re-launching of the debate around existent relationships between modernization limits, disciplinarity, traditionalism, liberalism, authoritarianism and nationalism, between individual and society, despite the apparent novelty brought into the Romanian area by the eugenic rethinking of social relations and politics, having as starting point the human body) — a research imperative that gets away from (surprisingly) Foucault's analysis of the appearance/development of *nosopolitics* and modern medicine with social character, in short, of the relationship between biopolitics and the emergence of the modern state.

With the domination of the world upon the body which seemed banished in the pre-political world, contractualist theories will restore the idea that politics needs an imperative denaturalization (even a double one in a Rousseauian version).

Thus, the Hegelian attraction of the normative model of modernity is consolidated within the limits of hope that, even if modernity (re)admits the importance of identities / biological needs, it has the power to exile (as instances of an immediate relative) the intimate sphere also within civil society, "places" in which versions of *bioidentity* politics will not (re) enter. In a Hegelian manner, the biological element maintains its status of a mediated variant.

Because the birth of actual politics would consider, according to H. Arendt¹⁰, the separation of the economic area (the actual territory of manifestation of

⁸ The term (reduced to the implications of the racial theories in Interwar Romania) can be found at Maria Bucur, Radu Ioanid, Marius Turda, Viorel Achim or Marius Baloș.

⁹ Maria Bucur, *Eugenie și modernizare în România interbelică [Eugenic and Modernization in Inter-War Romania]*, Polirom Publishing House, Iassy, 2005.

¹⁰ On the analitical field of difficulties and resistances from/around the notion of biopolitics, the allegations of H. Arendt remain distinct from Foucault's attempt, making no reference to the French philosopher.

desires and needs biologically co-determinate, of their satisfaction) from the open space to/towards the emergence of political and ethical practices. For H. Arendt the process that guides *homo laborans* within biological life taken for granted into possession by progressive occupation of the center stage of political modernity remains essential. Precisely to this primate of the natural life of political action, the Arendtian allegations assign the transformation and decadence of the public space of modern societies.

Biopolitics — a moving support

Attracting the term of biopolitics inside a synthetic moving support, following the exercises of Meyerhold¹¹ we can establish that, in biomechanics logics, rational nature (co)exists together with the natural element of movement, according to the imperative of harmonization of technique with/to the (new) industrial situation. Such a dynamic (re)configures the status of the actor (master of his biological device) engaged in conducting multiple functionalities, of specific objectives, translated by Meyerhold by economic expressions of organizing raw/sensitive material, through precision movements. Marking the motion guidelines, the actor must possess the innate ability of excitability of reflexes (while facing any use within its physical characteristics) and physical competence — fair assessment, sense of balance, by cultivating the ability to feel at any time the location of its center of gravity.

According to Giorgio Agamben¹², only in a biopolitical horizon one will be able to decide whether — following the chain of Foucault or Benjamin — politics is any longer necessary, in the context in which the producing of the biopolitical body would represent the original act of sovereign power, biopolitics being as old as the sovereign exception.

Beyond the specific conventions of representation (more cyclical than linear time) — post-Leonard-ian, animated by a timeless physiology — between bilateralness and dignity, the metaphor of the social body supports (also theoretically) the physical weight and *massa*, the idea of opposing forces, opposability through evaluation and justice, transferring the area of interest from/to the bio as balance and scale in/to manufacturing balances, and hence, to manufacturing the social metaphors and “political specificity”. Because the world is body — inside and out —, economic production, possession of body energy is socially acceptable value, the body is involved simultaneously and interdependently in good and / or bad production.

Interpreted in the social mechanics obsessively (body is earth; earth translates the feminine active nature; between active nature and society there is no distinction; kings contract sacred marriages of cosmic importance; hierogamies support the social order and the natural one) the body is reinvested in European

¹¹ Vsevolod Meyerhold, *Biomechanica*[*Biomechanics*], in “Secolul 20” Review, no. 11-12, 154-155, 1973.

¹² Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Puterea suverană și viața nudă* [*Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*], Idea Design & Print Publishing House, Cluj, 2006.

Romanticism, together with its cosmology, with its social metaphors, with both revolutionary and conservative political aspirations. In a metaphorical register, society is a giant, a network, a balance, a clock, a battle, a Hobbesian translation of the primary metaphor of society, in general and of the political one, in particular. No wonder that within the vocabulary of structure and function of Herbert Spencer, one could find the space of a systematic and extended metaphor of social and biological bodies, the political theory taking in account both the conservative metaphor (Burke) and the liberal-progressive (Social Darwinism) one of the body in structure — an alternative metaphor applies not only to the space of nature but also to the one of culture¹³.

Harmonizing these theories, for Agamben, the state of exception in which bare life was both captured and excluded by the legal and political order, would restore man's position as a living being and subject to political power, as biopolitical body of humanity.

In the context in which the corpus remains an ambivalent being, bearing both obedience to the sovereign power as well as individual freedom, the new centrality of the body would coincide to a privileged position (Descartes, Newton, Leibniz and Spinoza) or to the central metaphor of political community (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau).

If both Foucault and Arendt avoided (voluntarily or not) the overlapping of the biopolitics with the totalitarian politics (in the case of Foucault, not pushing the research in hospitals, prisons, an abnormal space towards the concentration camp¹⁴, for H. Arendt, the link remains without continuity), for Agamben¹⁵, the biological life retains its decisive political role [issue with explicit reference to hijacking of parliamentary democracies within the totalitarian states or the slipping of ex-communist classes on a steep terrain (ethnic cleansing in Serbia, rebirth in new, neo-populist forms of fascism in Europe etc.)].

The affirmation and moving of biopolitics beyond the state of exception marks the point where the decision on life (pre)changes biopolitics into thanatopolitics¹⁶, confirming an obvious intrusion of scientific and biological principles into the political order (national — socialist eugenics, normative

¹³ Donald G. Mac Rae, *Corpul ca metaforă socială [Body as a Social Metaphor]*, in "Secolul 20" Review, no. 11-12, 154-155, 1973. In the United States, applying the labels "liberal-progressive" to social Darwinism would get one into trouble, partly because of factors such as the past racial segregation in the American South.

¹⁴ According to the study of D. Eribon, Michel Foucault (Paris, Flammarion, 1989), the German matter aims obsessively the methodological interrogations, historical-political, translated in/by the Foucaultian courses (together with all bendings of the philosopher to the left, towards a militantism which became moderate, based on an enthusiasm triggered by the Iranian Revolution!), with a mark point in the affirmation, according to which, Fascism and Stalinism have done nothing but extending a series of mechanisms already existing in the social-political systems of the West. For Foucault, the organization of the big unique parties, the development of police apparatus, the existence of repression techniques such as the labor camp are claiming the heritage of the liberal Western society, diverted by the totalitarian movements. From the perspective of power, Fascism and Stalinism are but conjunctures/responses to particular situations, or virtualities of power knobs.

¹⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Puterea suverană și viața nudă [Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life]*, Idea Design & Print Publishing House, Cluj, 2006.

¹⁶ In the sense of recovered history overlapped to the dead bodies, moving bodies, which have a posthumous political life in order to create an universe of renewed semnifications (see Katherine Verdery, *Viața politică a trupurilor moarte. Reînhumări și schimbări postsocialiste [The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Post-Socialist Change]*, Vremea Publishing House, Bucharest, 2006).

determining of death criteria, etc.) Stating that biopolitics novelty consists precisely in the fact that biological datum is (re)converted to immediate politics, totalitarianism is justifying its hardness into a dynamic identity — biopolitics as a mobilizing attempt.

In Giorgio Agamben's option¹⁷, such a confrontation would summarize to the threshold of biological modernity, only in a biopolitical horizon one being able to decide upon the major categorical oppositions, on which modernism was based: right / left; public / private; absolutism / democracy.

The modern (re)production of a biopolitical body puts politics at the center of its calculations, permuting the decision beyond the state of exception, in the perspective of the given biologics, transformed into immediate politics and vice versa. According to these theses, the primary political relationship might relate to exile — a state of exception that has become an indistinct area of / between outside and inside, exclusion and /or inclusion. Thus, a fundamental act of power can be spotted at the level of producing bare life, as original political element and as threshold of articulation between nature and culture, between *zôé* and *bios*. The camp and not the city becomes biopolitical paradigm of the West!

According to Agamben, a notion such as the one of experimental life is converted into *bios* (an aspect of the *neo dead* waiting for the removal of organs) which, in a very particular way, focused to such a degree on its *zôé*, that became indiscernible to it.

Apparently dynamited, the term of bios (re)cleaned itself inside new versions of new anthropocentrism, experimentalism, hymerism, connectionism, utilitarianism, virtual online, fantasy and cyberpunk.

For example, placing Foucault ("violent"¹⁸ / subversive guide¹⁹) inside the (sight) transformations of virtual space, Gabriela Crețu²⁰ forced only the upgrading of the power structures (camouflage), given the Internet as virtual mixer of social and volatile identities, with the effect of transforming the subject into object / list / user — open space for creative self — interrogation. If the knowledge techniques remain immanent to the power strategies and if, in a logical key, the power produces manipulating discourses, the forums, the discussion groups manifest as "terminal forms" of speech, framed in patterns of investigation, examination and confession, producing truths about itself.

Such a superfluous evidence may be extended by reference to a system "beyond structuralism and hermeneutics"²¹ (but of metaphysics, too), in the sequence of

¹⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo sacer. Puterea suverană și viața nudă* [*Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*], Idea Design & Print Publishing House, Cluj, 2006.

¹⁸ According to Gabriela Crețu (*Discursul lui Foucault. O pragmatică a metadiscursului* [*Foucault's Discourse. A Pragmatic of the Metadiscourse*], Cronica Publishing House, Iassy, 2004), violence ventilates the cultural and political conservatorism, by the very temptation to transform knowledge — as a factor of power — into action.

¹⁹ For Gabriela Crețu (2004) the unusual Subversive Foucault(!) is the one who offers the instruments by which the structures can be undermined, as purely human constructions, built against man.

²⁰ Gabriela Crețu, *Discursul lui Foucault. O pragmatică a metadiscursului* [*Foucault's Discourse. A Pragmatic of the Metadiscourse*], Cronica Publishing House, Iassy, 2004).

²¹ Michel Foucault, *Arheologia cunoașterii* [*Archaeology of Knowledge*], Univers Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999.

Nietzsche, by reallocating a strong sense of challenging the idea of the founding subject, of a “philosophy of the subject, experience and meaning” (via Merleau-Ponty and Sartre) or of the origin of the Husserl’s recovery of the transcendental moment. The new networks (where appropriate, updating old ones) are moving away from the composition model of a global history (unique forms), reconfiguring the field of general history (by the singularity of practice, the game of relations between them, by the shape of their dependencies).

The permutation scheme would require the call to “specific techniques that people use to understand what they are”, by manipulating signs, symbols, myths and rituals and / or power techniques, that (yet) claim objectification of the subject, its obedience (disciplinary) to the rules and norms. So nothing unusual in the extent to which, according to Foucault, personal techniques are the ones “which enable individuals to carry along or with others, a certain number of operations on their body and soul, their mind, their behavior and their way of being; to transform, also, in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality”²².

Biopolitics: dispute space of naturalism — liberalism

Operating with inverted instruments, capturing the movement inside/on governance practices, Foucault restricted the meaning of the term governance to the exercise of political sovereignty/government of people, a stake able to (re)draw the meaning of biopolitics inside the term of population of general scheme of governmental reason — in fact, an approach questioning liberalism, its strong principles of validity and truth.

If Foucault’s course structure, during the time period 1978-1979, focused on biopolitics proposed as a way of rationalizing the problems of governmental practice (beginning with the eighteenth century) and their political and economic stakes, such a concept is integrated and diverted in / for political rationality, bringing to the fore the population issues — health, hygiene, birthrate, longevity, race.

Political philosophy maintains liberalism as a general framework of biopolitics, integrated in the Foucaultian diagnostic plan in the original formula / in contemporary versions annexed, (pre)text of recovery of life policies. In fact (despite the initial delays and diversions of intentions towards the German neoliberals), the starting point / line organization of biopolitics remains the substitution / duplication marked by the emergence of political economy, by introducing the limiting principle in governmental practice. The subjects in case upon which sovereignty is exercised became a bodily presence.

The revolutionary axiomatic, legally-deductive version, of Rousseau import follows the route of human rights — the delimitation of government, overcoming the stage of sovereignty, articulating the traditional positions of public law. This radical option is used as a starting point for the very government practice /

²² See for details J. Schmidt și T. E. Wartenberg, în “Foucault’s Enlightenment” Critique, Revolution and the Fashioning of the Self”, in *Critique and Power*, Ed. M. Kelly, MIT Press, 1994.

independence of the governed, in the new economic version of government reason. The ambiguity that characterizes the liberalism of the nineteenth and twentieth century's has as source the very persistence (combined) of the two paths, of the two manners of establishing and regulating public power — two views on law / freedom.

Returning to nature as a Liberal, Kantian, guarantee of securing eternal peace and anchoring it within the (hard or soft) meaning of naturalism or liberalism (although due to its appearance in the middle of the eighteenth century one could talk more about naturalism²³ than about liberalism), the evidence is revealing. It easily shows that, the veracity of the market, limiting by calculation the role of government, designing Europe as a region with an unlimited economic development in relation to the global market, bears the insignia of liberalism — practice of “consuming” governance / producing freedom, functional only to the extent that there are actually a number of freedoms²⁴. Liberalism would rely only on the extraordinary proliferation of control procedures, constraint, coercion — as control and intervention added as the counterpart of freedoms.

As interpreted by Foucault, ideological and functional weakening of liberalism might be located in the period 1925-1930 (with all diagnostic and treatment efforts proposed by the Freiburg School or libertarians), resulting in response in coercive interventions in the field of economic practice. With explicit reference to the liberal / neoliberal program Foucault anchored it inside of two strong models: the German one²⁵ (of Weimar Republic, a model that entered into crisis in 1929, by attaching Nazism, followed by the critique and reconstruction after the war) and the American model [New Deal, the federal interventionism and programs implemented by Democratic administrations (Truman-Kennedy-Johnson)].

Considered by Foucault obstacles — the (arguing) failure of the Zollverein project, Bismarck socialism, the planned economy or Keynes's dirigisme — they are deepening the conviction that everything that opposes liberalism or proposes state management of the economy is an invariant, while the liberal politics panicked by its own consequences, has (self) limited (in a neoliberal version) to the Saint-Simon's import.

Otherwise, the liberals of Freiburg were defining Nazism as an indifferent economic invariant (in varying proportions) in opposition to socialism / capitalism and constitutional organization of states, by imposing the fact that the national socialism would be a link — cause and effect — of indefinite growth of state power, with effect in the destruction of the social community and reaffirming of protectionism of directed economy and of increasing state power.

²³ The affirmation is justified to the extent to which the freedom of physiocrats and Adam Smith bares the inscriptions of spontaneity, of intern/intrinsic mechanics of economic processes and less of the legal freedom admitted for individuals.

²⁴ Michel Foucault, *Nașterea biopoliticii [The Birth of Biopolitics]*, Idea Design & Print Publishing House, Cluj, 2007, p. 67.

²⁵ Referring to the German model, Foucault considers it a radical economic model, based on a closed commercial state (*Nașterea biopoliticii [The Birth of Biopolitics]*, Idea Design & Print Publishing House, Cluj, 2007, p. 87).

While ordoliberals²⁶ released and precipitated a series of discourses articulated on Nazism, on negative theology of the state, the current version re-interrogates the extent to which a market economy can serve as a model of a (fearful) state with visible flaws. Questioning and doubting social policy and equalization, ordoliberalism will rely on the genuine and fundamental social politics as a project of society, the subject of government action being represented by the *die soziale die Umwelt*.

The programmatic return to the neo-liberal theories regenerates the social by appealing to the informed force of society. Inside of the sense conferring to the notion of *Gesellschaftspolitik*, the neoliberals insisted on formalizing the society — according to the model of enterprise — redefining the legal institution as economic competitive function, namely through adjustments of the market.

As a partial conclusion, Foucault's appeal to the strong landmarks of neoliberal politics is justified either by the adjustment of the notion of government (by improving the functioning of the old grid in relation to new phenomena) or by calling to critical morality in the general topic of state phobia, capitalizing the intrinsic power of the state in relation to civil society and / or kinship / genetic continuity / evolutionary implication of the administrative state-providence (bureaucratic-fascist-totalitarian), an (inter)charging relationship that puts back into circulation a critical inflationist value.

In an inventory of neo-liberalism, M. Foucault was spotting major differences, germinating-among historical models. French liberalism has delivered a moderating principle in relation to the pre-existing nation. In the United States, liberalism has organized itself as a founding principle of legitimacy. By the mid-twentieth century, liberalism was opposed both to the right (confirmed by the hostility towards socialism), and to the left (as a struggle against development of an imperialist and military state). Only in this context one can integrate the theory of a *homo oeconomicus*²⁷, in neoliberal language, as an entrepreneur who represents capital to itself, producer and source of income.

Homo oeconomicus remains in Foucault vision, the abstract subject that populates the reality of civil society²⁸, an actual ensemble in which the ideal points of biopolitics may be conveniently managed — by the technology of liberal government²⁹.

²⁶ In Foucault's option, the contemporary neoliberalism would represent from the political point of view a "cover-up" for (disguised) generalized and administrative intervention of the state, characteristic for ordoliberals. Economic, neoliberalism is nothing else but the reactivation of old economical theories, and from the sociologic point of view, an instrument of reinforcing the strict commercial relationships. (*Nașterea biopoliticii* [The Birth of Biopolitics], Idea Design & Print Publishing House, Cluj, 2007, pp. 125).

²⁷ Foucault will locate the profile of *homo oeconomicus* in the tradition of English Empiricism — via Locke or Hume — as a subject of individual choice irreducible and non-transferable.

²⁸ In the context of reactivation (more or less useful) of concepts such as non-society or un-society A. Ferguson (*Essai sur l'histoire de la société civile*, PUF, Paris, 1992), was establishing that, the series of "disinterested interests, links individuals together within a civil society. The civil society is constituting as a permanent matrix of political power — spontaneous form of power, a link in fact that unites certain individuals to different ones".

²⁹ Michel Foucault, *Nașterea biopoliticii* [The Birth of Biopolitics], Idea Design & Print Publishing House, Cluj, 2007, p. 269.

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