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# Human Rights: Bioethical and Biopolitical Implications of Torture

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# Outline

1. Bioethics and biopolitics
2. Towards a qualitative definition of torture
3. Thinking and promoting life in all its dimensions

# Bioethics:

## *strengthening justice concerning human life*

- ✓ individuality as the fundamental bioethical matter
- ✓ life and its meanings: *zoé*, *bios* and *psyché*
- ✓ *bios* is the irreducible expression of personal life, i.e. the place where the vitality in common with all the living beings (*zoé*) appears as psychic and spiritual life (*psyché*)

# Challenges concerning the human body

- ✓ protecting the *bios* as the only way to protect *psyché*
- ✓ the manipulation of the *bios* is condemnable when, by manipulating it, we cut out the bond with *psyché*

# Biopolitics: life as a product of the political system

- ✓ authority *on life* vs. authority *for life*
- ✓ Foucault: authority *defines bios*
- ✓ *zoé*, natural life, is the ultimate aim of power



the human body as an instrument

# Bioethical and Biopolitical Implications of Torture

- ✓ torture has to be considered illegal precisely because of the violation of biological life, which corresponds to the exercise of the dominion of one man on another, starting from the violation of corporeity
- ✓ violation of the corporeity: de-humanization of *bios*, separating it from the *psyché*

# Spaemann

«Above all torture is completely incompatible with respect for humans as persons, not because it hinders them from harmful action, for this hindrance can be necessary, **but because it forces them to abdication as free subjects, it reduces them to instinctual beings and wants to beat them down to a subhuman kind of reaction.** To affect the body of a human always means to affect a human»

Happiness and Benevolence, pp. 168-169

# Towards a qualitative definition of torture

- ✓ torture = radical violation of human dignity depending on the manipulation of the *bios*, reduced to *zoé*, transforming the person into a tool
- ✓ torture as an intrinsically evil act
- ✓ torture as the control of authority on the *bios* in order to manage the person's freedom



# A 'peaceful' subjugation of individuals?

other forms of biopolitical control on the *bios*:

- a) experiments on human embryos
- b) surrogacy
- c) forced sterilization as a mean of demographic control

**Key element in common with torture:**

*bios* manipulation and its separation from the *psyché* – the subjection to the will of someone else

# Thinking and promoting life in all its dimensions/1

confirming the condemnation of torture as an intrinsically evil act because of the dehumanization of the *bios*



rethinking critically other biopolitical (even socially accepted) practices that entail the same violation of human dignity

# Thinking and promoting life in all its dimensions/2

- ✓ favouring an adequate recognition of corporeity
- ✓ reflecting in a critical way about the concept of life in all its manifestations
- ✓ rethinking human identity in the light of an integral anthropology as a unity of soul and body, spirit and matter, biography and biology

# Thank you!



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