

Axiology of the Right-wing Bioluddism

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Political Dialogues

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Summary

The main purpose of this article is to describe and elaborate an axiology of new political movement named bioluddism or bioconservatism. We are going to focus on the right wing of biolludism, which embraces ideas and theories such authors as John Kass, Francis Fukuyama and Michael Sandel. The background of our work is biopolitical litigation between bioluddists and transhumansists which takes place in contemporary USA. Common point to this theories is a crypto-religious character of their argumentation. In conclusion we are going to show the value of this kind of arguments in the contemporary political and ideological context.

Introduction

Left Wing and Right Wing dichotomy has appeared in the beginning phase of the French Revolution. The cause of this division was solely the coincidental placement of political parties in the National Assembly. This division has survived *mutatis mutandis* until the present time and has functioned as a simplification theme, pejorative designation, or axis of litigation between political parties. This dispute has gained a new dimension during last two hundred years. The Industrial

Revolution of XIX century resulted in the growing importance of economic issues; Cultural Revolution of the second half of XX century focused on moral questions; Biotechnological Revolution, which takes place before our very eyes, causes a new dimension of dispute named Biopolitics. An approach to the human nature is the rudimentary question in the context of Biopolitics. Fundamental fission basis on opposition between transhumanists and bioluddists – battle between progressiveness and tradition transferred to the new area of investigations. Francis Fukuyama – one of the most famous bioskepticists put the question: “What is it that we want to protect from any future advances in biotechnology? - and he answered - “we want to protect the full range of our complex, evolved natures against attempts at self-modification. We do not want to disrupt either the unity or the continuity of human nature, and thereby the human rights that are based on it.” (Fukuyama 2002, p. 172). But on the other hand we can also find arguments for the unavoidable character of biotechnological progress. Transhumanists have high hopes for biotechnology, which could provide the higher level of development. And contemporary human nature does not deserve for attention from this point of view – in

opposite to the conservative standpoint.

Bio-political issues embrace strict political problems, for example the distributive justice problem, which leads to the next split. Hence, we can observe a split to right-wing trans-humanism (libertarian) and left-wing trans-humanism (democratic). Bioconservatists, also known as Bioluddists are divided into right-wing Bioluddism, which concern traditional values, and left-wing trans-humanism, which belief in supremacy of nature and is related to ecology movements (Hughes 2004). To investigate the axiology of the right-wing bioluddism is the main goal of this article. For this issue we will choose three representatives of this standpoint: Leon Kass - chairman of the President's Council on Bioethics, Michael Sandel, a member of this council and political philosopher related to communitarianism

Characteristic of Standpoint and the General Context

The context of the above consideration is the dispute regarding human enhancement. This enhancement concerns the biological dimension of human life, and it is caused by the development of biotechnology and medical science. The discovery of the role of neurotransmitters in human body functioning has allowed the development of neuropharmacology and the growth of pharmacology market. Psychotropic medications or other controversial drugs like Ritalin has forced the necessity of a redefinition and categorization of health and disease on medical science grounds and on the other hand, in political regulation, in the sphere of distributive justice, availability, and legality of these substances. Another im-

portant plot from the perspective of bio-politics, which is linked with human enhancement consists in the extraordinary progress of genetic engineering. From this point of view, reproduction is one of the main problems. Eugenics – usually linking with the Nazi regime – nowadays goes on the new way. We can now distinct the old eugenics, free-market eugenics and liberal eugenics. The first one is *prima facie* differs from others because it was a coercive procedure, but the recent circumstances lead us to reconsider certain individual rights, like for example reproductive freedom (Robertson 2003, p. 439-87).

Within the above framework there is dispute between representatives of bio-politics parties. It is worth noticing certain characteristic points and conceptual framework. The term of Bioluddist is related to the nineteenth-century movement of Luddism, which in a radical vein was opposed to industrialisation and technological development. James Hughes put this term as pejorative (luddism as anachronistic and radical idea). The equivalent term for bioluddism is a bio-conservatism. Within this standpoint we can deal with the next split into the left-wing (linked to ecological, egalitarian and neoluddism movements) and right-wing. Right-wing bioluddism consists in respect for the ethical dimension of humanity, such as: dignity, flourishing (eudajmnonia), responsibility, liberty. There is a strong predilection to the category of nature as well, but it is understood in different ways. The argument of Bioluddists is based largely on the theory of natural law, perfectionist ethic and religion. For analysis purposes we going to focus on this particular element of the

the Bioluddist's theories.

Francis Fukuyama – *Factor X*

The Idea of *Factor X* is at the central core of Francis Fukuyama's bio-political theory. Let us now reconstruct his thinking process. In his opinion the most important philosophical question, from beginning the philosophy, is the question about human nature. He has analyzed the ideas of human nature and its evolution, and on that basis he has assumed the following definition of human nature: "human nature is the sum of the behavior and characteristics that are typical of the human species, arising from genetic rather than environmental factors." (Fukuyama 2002, p. 130). It follows then, from this definition, that there are typical species traits in representatives of specie. Differences between individuals are results of complicated relationship between human and environment, but there is a range of traits strict related to species. In this perspective a typical species traits is that men are taller than women. The category of nature, which was mentioned above, occurs here in specific meaning. Nature does not determine individuals in the genetic dimension, but it sets down the species traits. The criterion of personhood based on categories of human species is criticized by Richard Dawkins (Dawkins 2011) and Peter Singer (Singer 1996) as so-called *speciesism*. Species chauvinism is understood by analogy to be racism or sexism, transmitted to the area of relation between species. An alternative way, which is proposed by the above authors is so-called Personhood theory. From this point of view, dignity is entitled to a person, understood as a conscious be-

ing which has capacity for feeling. In the light of this theory not every human is a person, and the person does not have to be a human. In Francis Fukuyama's opinion, human species is equipped with a factor which has special character. "What the demand for equality of recognition implies is that when we strip all of a person's contingent and accidental characteristics away, there remains some essential human quality underneath that is worthy of a certain minimal level of respect--call it Factor X. [...] But in the political realm we are required to respect people equally on the basis of their possession of Factor X. You can cook, eat, torture, enslave, or render the carcass of any creature lacking Factor X, but if you do the same thing to a human being, you are guilty of a "crime against humanity." (Fukuyama 2002, 149-150). To make it clear, the author signals that there is analogy between factor X and Kantian theory of practical reason. In the other vein it could be held in the religious perspective as the exceptionality of the human species; created by the God, in his similarity and predestined for special purposes. Factor X has a synergical character – it's separate parts means less then as a unity. What is the political meaning of Factor X? "If the question of equality in a future biotech world threatens to tear up the Left, the Right will quite literally fall apart over questions related to human dignity. In the United States, the Right (as represented by the Republican Party) is divided between economic libertarians, who like entrepreneurship and technology with minimal regulation, and social conservatives, many of whom are

religious, who care about a range of issues including abortion and the family. The coalition between these two groups is usually strong enough to hold up during elections, but it papers over some fundamental differences in outlook” (Fukuyama 2002, p. 177). Thus, Francis Fukuyama thinks that we should defend, care for something that could be designated by everything – all and nothing. The clue of the factor X is unavailable to articulate, and we can ask if it could be thought. But it is agreed that we can feel this factor, that leads to link this theory to the emotivism¹. In this point we can catch a conspicuous discrepancy that leads to paradox. Fukuyama invoking McShea’s thought experiment argues that DNA has no such meaning. In consequence he should agree with conclusion that to hurt a chimpanzee, which has DNA similarly to the human, is in fact the “crime against humanity”, as the author mentioned above.

Leon Kass – Wisdom of Repugnance

Peter Singer – author who was mentioned above – said that we should shift our ethical approach from Traditional Ethics to the New Ethics. Representatives of right-wing bioluddism do not see this ne-

cessity. In their opinion we should be concerned with Traditional Ethics instead of creating New Ethics. In response to the question about the essence of traditional approach, Leon Kass says: “The first task for ethics is proper description. And here is where our failure begins.” (Kass 1997, p. 6). In this perspective the subject receives the moral contents by the moral sense, which means that some moral assertions are impossible to justify. However, it constitutes a wisdom. This approach could be *prima facie* ascribed to natural law theory, but the wisdom which Leon Kass describes belongs to different kinds of theories. In this perspective the wisdom consists in things which we cannot do, this which invoke aversion, atrocity – this is the wisdom of repugnance. So the base of this kind of ethics is not the aim to which our actions should gain, but the proper reaction for evil, or wrong conduct. The author writes a lot about the role of the nature, but we should underline that his theory has a negative character – negative principles of natural law. The chairman of President’s Council of Bioethics elaborates on the meaning of wisdom of repugnance: „In crucial cases, however, repugnance is the emotional expression of deep wisdom, beyond reason’s power fully to articulate it. Can anyone really give an argument fully adequate to the horror which is father-daughter incest (even with consent), or having sex with animals, or mutilating a corpse, or eating human flesh, or even just (just!) raping or murdering another human being? [...]. On the contrary, we are suspicious of those who think that they can rationalize away our horror, say, by trying to explain the enormity of incest with arguments only

1 Fukuyama use the Robert j. McShea’s thought experiment: “Suppose you met two creatures on a desert island, both of which had the rational capacity of a human being and hence the ability to carry on a conversation. One had the physical form of a lion but the emotions of a human being, while the other had the physical form of a human being but the emotional characteristics of a lion. Which creature would you feel more comfortable with, which creature would you be more likely to befriend or enter into a moral relationship with?” R. J. McShea, *Morality and Human Nature: A New Route to Ethical Theory*, Philadelphia 1990, p. 77. F. Fukuyama, *op. cit.* p. 169.

about the genetic risks of inbreeding.” (Kass 1997, p. 6). This line of argument leads to a certain inconsistency. While he criticizes an approaches to the problem of cloning (meliorist, liberal, technical), he then emphasizes that: „The technical, liberal and meliorist approaches all ignore the deeper anthropological, social and, indeed, ontological meanings of bringing forth new life” (Kass 1997, p. 8). Leon Kass claims that his theory is adequate and that it touches the deeper dimension: anthropological, social and ontological. Let us put that question in this point: which dimension is related to the wisdom of repugnance? Theories of natural law have an ontological core, for example when identified being with good, so it can pass for universal theory – valid semper and ubique. But wisdom about repugnance is on a major scale, determined by the social condition and cultural context. Kass doesn’t care about the cultural plots, because he want to gain an rudimentary aversion, fundamental repugnance. It is impossible to claim the universality of this assertion. Sensuality is strictly attached to subjectivity and repugnance is impossible to measure. Meanwhile theories of natural law derive from fundamental principle, which could be recognized by reasoning. At the end of the quoted essay we can read: „The good things that men do can be made complete only by the things they refuse to do.” (Kass 1997, p. 19). There occurs a real doubt if aversion could have give a positive contribution to proper acting. So the objection is that wisdom of repugnance has a pseudo-universal character.

Michael Sandel – Ethics of Giftedness

The author of *The Case Against Perfection*

emphasizes the ethical dimension of the human enhancement problem. Considering the problem of doping in sport and eugenics issues he observed that prima facie this practice is without objection from an ethical point of view. Constraining the sportsman in this area seems to be unjustified. Also, the boundary between legal and illegal doping is in many instances blurred. Which inge-rence is so artificial and unnatural that it should be prohibited? On the higher level we can ask if there is any justification to such constraints. There occurs another controversial point when Sandel moves his investigation to the area of Eugenics. He has distinct coercive Eugenics (The Old Eugenics), free-market Eugenics and liberal Eugenics. Now we have to face the question how far parents could intervene into baby’s life. Sandel shows that entirely conventional methods of enhancement child’s life could essentially consist in constraining freedom and could lead to the ceasing of growth. The development of medical sciences entails the child designing problem. In this point we are going to focused on the core of Sandel’s theory – ethic of giftedness. From the beginning we should make a general notice. The main condition of such concepts existing as responsibility is a non-determinism assumption, which could be named a demand for ignorance. Isaiah Berlin in introduction to *Four Essay on Liberty* (Berlin 1990) criticizes a determinism by using an argument which is embedded rather in practice than in philosophy. He uncovers lack of consequence in determinism ideas. If it was be true, than it would change daily life of societies. Existing in an area of human action, which imposes the possibility of free

choice, is a condition sine qua non morality as such. Bio-politics changes the level of consideration on determinism. The cosmic perspective is replaced by genetic perspective. In Sandel's opinion, assumption, that a human's birth is caused by the God, nature or fortune, is possible because we can hold an equilibrium between issues for which we can be responsible and these for which we cannot be responsible (Sandel 2007, p. 8). In the context of bioethics we should notice that development of genetic engineering leads to change in view. Deterministic threat for morality has been changed to a so-called explosion of responsibility. The author shows an example: „Today when the basketball player misses a rebound his coach can blame him for being out of position. Tomorrow coach may blame him for being too short” (Sandel 2007, p. 87). However the ethic of giftedness aims to emphasize the role of life as the gift, in contrast to designing life. This thesis assumes necessity of concern on growth and respect for life. Hence, in Sandel's opinion the category of health is an autotelic value. This is the crucial issue in the context of bio-politics. There are rivals ideas, like for example Julian Savulescu's theory of health as instrumental value, that could lead us to a conclusion that the definition of health is the core of any bio-political standpoints.

Conclusions

In sum, axiology of right-wing bioluddism consists in the opinion that we should work against so-called *hybris* – the sin of vanity. Since the ancient times touching the god's era, transgression was understood as wrong, because it was crossing boundaries between sacrum and profa-

num. The questions which were mentioned above (cloning, genetic engineering, artificial insemination) are related to sacrum are, but in the contemporary secularized reality they came to the subject of political, bioethics, scientist consideration. There are a lot of difficulties with the *hybris* argument. We should try to assess its value in isolation from the theological attitude. We have to face the doubt of whether in fact this argument has any power in public sphere investigation. The practice of arguing has crucial meaning in the political dimension. A very important element of arguing is justification of the thesis. In the *wisdom of repugnance* argument, the scope of claims, which could be justified are limited a priori. Leon Kass excludes some kind of justification. An irrational and indisputable, elements of his theory are a main advantage in his opinion. There is similar approach in Francis Fukuyama's theory – factor X is an axiomatic which is used as an element of a theorem – hence it is not predestined for public sphere deliberation. Michael Sandel was facing another problem; the assumption about giftedness, and our qualities being understood as gifts, entails existing the giver, what could be received as a crypto-theology assertion. The author didn't resolve this problem (Sandel 2007, p. 94).

Right-wing bioluddist's values are contrary to the catalogue of liberal values. This is an obvious sentence if we focus on Sandel's works, which are recognized as some of the most interesting critics of liberal doctrine (Sandel 1998). Similarly, Leon Kass is affiliated to neo-conservative institution. Also Francis Fukuyama is recognized as an author of American conservative doctrine. So, this



standpoint has a clear position – it is in opposition to left-wing liberalism *sensu largo* and to left-wing standpoints on the bio-political dimension. Right-wing bioluddism meets the same difficulties as religion doctrines. The Idea of neutral worldview as principle of state and limits in public sphere excludes right-wing bioluddist's arguments. But there occurs a set of question: Are the right-wing bioluddist in fact hiding the theological or religion assumption behind the new theories? Are there any possibilities of constructing non-theological anti-liberal arguments? For the answer we can merely claim that the metaphysical question remains the core of political litigation. Micheal Sandel, whilst resigned from resolving the *giver problem* has claimed that this kind of problem has a longer history in western political thought. For evidence he invokes Jurgen Habermas and John Locke ideas, in which we can observe the crossing controversial question – human rights and metaphysical issues. The conclusion is that the critic of liberalism cannot escape from the metaphysical dimension. In the context of bio-politics we have to understand that radical change of political debate shape forces us to transform our previous opinions and principles in order to provide rational political solutions.

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