

ARTÍCULOS

Neoliberalism and the duty to die: biopolitical and psychopolitical perspectives

Neoliberalismo y el deber de morir: perspectivas biopolíticas y psicopolíticas

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ABSTRACT: This paper aims to explore and offer different hypotheses that could account for an adequate understanding of the duty to die and its relation to biopolitics from two neglected approaches. First, death will be analysed from a biopolitical perspective to understand the crucial role it has in biopower. Second, the focus lies on the two-folded implication that death has in biopower, for it could be either a defiance of it or the final sublimation of its control. Similarly, the next section addresses the relations between death and neoliberalism from a biopolitical perspective, exploring the possibility of understanding the duty to die as resistance to economic mandates or, on the contrary, as the fulfilment of neoliberal interests. Finally, as a continuation of the relations between the duty to die and neoliberalism, the paper analyses a similar two-folded view of the former from a psychopolitical perspective.

Keywords: Duty to die; Biopolitics; Psychopolitics; Thanatopolitics; Death.

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RESUMEN: El objetivo de este artículo es explorar y ofrecer diferentes hipótesis que puedan dar cuenta de una adecuada comprensión del deber de morir y su relación con la biopolítica desde dos enfoques olvidados. En primer lugar, se analizará la muerte desde una perspectiva biopolítica para comprender el papel crucial que tiene para el biopoder. En segundo lugar, la atención se centra en la implicación doble que tiene la muerte para el biopoder, ya que podría ser bien un desafío para él o la sublimación final de su control. De igual forma, la siguiente sección aborda las relaciones entre muerte y neoliberalismo desde una perspectiva biopolítica, explorando la posibilidad de entender el deber de morir como una resistencia a los mandatos económicos o, por el contrario, como el cumplimiento de los intereses neoliberales. Finalmente, como continuación de las relaciones entre el deber de morir y el neoliberalismo, el artículo analiza una doble visión similar a la primera desde una perspectiva psicopolítica.

Palabras clave: Deber de morir; biopolítica; psicopolítica; tanatopolítica; muerte.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the last decades, the duty to die has been a hot topic of discussion within the field of bioethics. Although the idea was first introduced by Lamm (1997), who was concerned with the possibility of bankrupting future generations due to the elderly usage of medical resources at the end of life, it received thorough discussion after the publication of John Hardwig's paper *Is there a duty to die?* (1997). Hardwig advocates for the recognition of a duty to die, where the bonds and loving relationships we have created with our loved ones require us not to become a burden to them and compromise their lives. Thus, we are responsible to end our lives before it occurs, impeding the evils that would befall them from occurring.

This understanding of the duty to die has received considerable critical attention due to its apparent contradiction with our current understanding of what family members and loved ones can expect from each other (Ackerman, 2000; den Hartogh, 2018; Tong, 2000). Others also question whether Hardwig's interpretation of the term 'duty' is morally appropriate (Callahan, 2000; Cholbi, 2010). Yet, some have also defended and argued for the moral relevance of a duty to die on contractarian grounds (Ehman, 2000), and from the necessity to (re)distribute scarce resources in closed healthcare systems (Buchanan, 1984) and protect equal access to a decent minimum of health care (Battin, 2005, p. 14). However, no assessment of the duty to die has been offered from either a biopolitical or a psychopolitical perspective.

The aim of this paper is to explore and offer different hypotheses that could account for an adequate understanding of the duty to die and its relation to biopolitics from those two neglected approaches. First, death will be analysed from a biopolitical perspective to understand the crucial role it has in biopower. Second, the focus lies on the two-folded implication that death has in biopower, for it could be either a defiance of it or the final sublimation of its control. Similarly, the next section addresses the relations between death and neoliberalism from a biopolitical perspective, exploring the possibility of understanding the duty to die as resistance to economic mandates or, on the contrary, as the fulfilment of neoliberal interests. Finally, as a continuation of the relations between the duty to die and neoliberalism, the paper analyses a similar two-folded view of the former this time from a psychopolitical perspective.

2. UNDERSTANDING DEATH WITHIN BIOPOLITICS

The passage from older forms of political organisation to the modern understanding of democratic societies is clearly marked by the inclusion of bare life, *zoē*, into the political realm: "the entry of *zoē* into the sphere of the polis -the politicization of bare life as such- constitutes the decisive event of modernity and signals a radical transformation of the political-philosophical categories of classical thought" (Agamben, 2013a, pp. 136-137).

Life, understood in its most simplistic manner as biological life, as a mere being alive, becomes a problem for sovereign power. This new type of power is concerned no more with the individual's life as a member of society, with the political life, *bios*, of the subject, but instead it focuses its efforts on controlling, caring, and using bare life (*zoē*) for its own benefit. It is the individual as a body, a *corpus*, that lies at the foundations of democracy (Agamben, 2013b). The relevance of the human body and its basic biological functioning placed at the centre of political control allows us to understand, as we will see below, why death, the dissolution of the subject as a body, is a fundamental element of biopower's control.

The term *biopower* was coined by the French philosopher Michel Foucault (2013a) when analysing diverse techniques to achieve the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations.

Foucault recognised an increasing governments' trend, beginning in the XIX century, to focus their exercise of control and power within the domain of life. To guarantee the welfare of the governed, understood as the maximization of life—health, longevity, wealth—, became the ultimate objective of governments (Esposito, 2013). This new power could be recognised at two distinct levels: a) the anatomo-politics of the human body, where it aimed to optimise the body's capabilities, make it docile, obedient, and efficient for economic control; b) the biopolitics of the population, concerned with the overall level of health, the propagation of illnesses, birth, and mortality rates (Foucault, 2013a, p. 44). Life becomes the new dominion of power, a biopower that fosters life and/or disallows it to the point of death. Sovereign power is not anymore exercised by killing people as a way of punishing them; thus, with biopower, death loses the central role that had before.

However, biopower is still concerned with the mass production of death, albeit in a different manner, for the death of others is necessary to preserve life in most of the population (Esposito, 2013). Now the

sovereign right to death, to put an end to the subjects' lives, is substituted by an effortless allowing them to die. Similarly, it is also relegated from the sphere of law, which now focuses on the normalization and distribution of living within the domain of value and utility, both understood in neoliberal terms (Foucault, 2008, 2013b). This relocation of death within the realm of power has an important consequence for our argument, for death is left outside the power relationship, is hidden away from biopower, unreachable to it. Death becomes the limit of biopower, a realm within which a life-administering power has no control; thus, it becomes the demarcation of the subject's interiority and freedom within the Modern triangle of life, knowledge, and power (Foucault, 2013b). Death is the moment when the individual escapes all power (Mbembe, 2013).

3. THE DUTY TO DIE AND ITS RELATION TO BIOPOWER

3.1. Defying biopower

How are we to interpret an autonomously chosen death within the context of biopolitics then? The first alternative I would like to explore in detail is the possibility of understanding the duty to die as a defiance of biopower. The view of death and dying as individual choices with ulterior moral motives that escape biopolitical control could be problematic for biopower. An individual who actively pursues her own death emerges as a defying element within the biopolitical network of power's exercise. The acknowledgment of a duty to die would cause serious problems due to its motivation, i.e., to avoid being a burden for those we love or to be allocated too many resources that could be employed differently. In the latter, the recognition of our responsibility to end life at the right time could be interpreted as an escape from biopower. Foucault himself recognises the challenge that an active pursue of death would be for biopower—centred in administering life—:

... it testified to the individual and private right to die, at the borders and in the interstices of power that was exercised over life. This determination to die, strange and yet so persistent and constant in its manifestations, and consequently so difficult to explain as being due to particular circumstances or individual accidents, was one of the first astonishments of a society in which political power had assigned itself the task of administering life (Foucault, 2013a, p. 44).

Although Foucault was speaking about suicide, his words perfectly fit our current understanding of

the duty to die. The acceptance of a personal duty to die could be comprehended as an empowering decision for the individual who does not accept to die when biopower deems it appropriate to let her die, but when she decides so. After all, death occupies a specific position within any biopolitical account of power; sovereignty is exercised by controlling mortality, by willingly and knowingly letting people die so others can continue living. The autonomous and self-imposed duty to die could imply defiance to this form of exercising control and power.

Ultimately, the duty to die could unveil the biopolitical procedures and biopower's control over life and the regulation of death by letting people die. Žižek's reading of *Antigone* and her desire to pursue death is very illustrative to our discussion (Žižek, 2013). He figuratively asks if Antigone's pursuit of death is not political, albeit negative act; it could be understood as a sidestep from the biopolitically accepted as proper behaviour. Within biopower's realm of control, persons are pushed to live as long as possible by incorporating healthy habits into their routines; thus, people who seek death after recognising of their duty to die, so they could improve the lives of others, would escape biopower.

Following Hanafin (2009), an autonomous choice to die, letting the body decide its end instead of the legal/medical expert, is an affirmation of one's life, in opposition to the politics of mere biological survival. This individual choice to die in a self-chosen manner is a refusal to submit to the biopolitical order; it is a mode of being as if already gone, although not allowing death to be a limit for our thinking. Law, as well as its forbidden practices in relation to death (e.g., euthanasia), is used by biopower to impose a unified and absolutising notion of life which has its final objective to sustain a delusive sense of community. The right to die, and assisted suicide, are perceived as threats to the established state's order, for a struggle between individuals who attempt a self-styled death and public officials who aim to maintain the status quo can be observed. The alternative is to attempt to change contentious social issues by leading self-artistry, which can result in a transformation of accepted notions of rights. The duty to die could be understood as an act of self-artistry where an individual autonomously chooses to acknowledge the end of their life and thus as a challenge biopower.

There is an alternative interpretation of the duty to die as a defiance of biopower, following Hardt and Negri's reading of Foucault. They distinguish between biopower, understood as the production of specific subjectivities which conform to exist-

ing power over life, and biopolitics, an alternative production of subjectivities that resists biopower and seeks autonomy from it. Biopolitics is thus interpreted as an event of freedom (Hardt and Negri, 2013) where the subject is able to produce new powers of life and create alternative subjectivities which would challenge biopower. I will now explain in detail how the duty to die fits perfectly within their understanding of biopolitics.

First, biopolitics produces new powers of life, creating affects and languages through social interaction and cooperation. The wide acceptance at a societal level of the duty to die counts effectively as a shared ethical responsibility that emerges from a collective understanding of life in society. It can be regarded as the ultimate act of cooperation within a group of people, or a larger society, where some accept that their existence has arrived at an end so others can enjoy the goods that life might bring, not having their existence compromised by others' decisions¹. Another productive power of life consists of the invention of new forms of relation to oneself and others. It is here where the duty to die becomes an effective moral responsibility that defies biopower and resists it. A personal configuration of the self that includes the recognition of the duty to die—as a moral mandate if/when the time arrives—is an innovative construction of selfhood, external to biopower's control and regulations. Foucault (1987) offers a similar understanding of death as a practice of freedom in the context of the care of the self, which requires, despite its apparent contradiction, a power relation of domination and mastery over one's self. Proper care of the self will make us care for others. It also implies a conversion of power, in the form of limitation and control, which impedes its abuse, for it conveys the acceptance of death as a way of caring for others. As a result, it is easy to see how the duty to die could be understood as care of the self and, thus, a practice of freedom.

Second, the creation of new biopolitical subjectivities has two key characteristics at its core: resistance and de-subjectification. The constitution of the subject occurs within specific practices of power and games of truth. A subject is a form, not a substance, which adopts a different type of relation to oneself depending on the context. Different

practices of the self are found by the subject in her culture, society, and group. In the process of the self's constitution, the subject is immersed in a multitude of power relations, which are only possible if subjects are free and which also need the possibility of resistance, or otherwise, there would be relations of total domination. The only escape from domination that is possible is to play the same games of power and knowledge differently (Foucault, 1987).

The duty to die could be interpreted as a way of playing those games of power and knowledge in another way, and it also contributes to creating alternative resisting subjectivities because deciding when and how a person wants to die becomes a paramount act of resistance that challenges biopower's administration of life. Similarly, the acknowledgment of the duty to die contributes to the de-subjectification of individuals governed by biopower's imperatives over life and death, which is so because the duty to die is motivated by the bonds created with other members of society through the aforementioned acts of collective cooperation. To conclude, biopolitical events are events of resistance that destroy ruling norms, inaugurating an alternative production of subjectivities, and revealing the existing link between power and freedom (Hardt and Negri, 2013). The main consequence is an understanding of life as formed by constitutive actions, where the ultimate constitutive action would be choosing our own deaths after the recognition of a personal duty to die: "Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are (...) We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries" (Foucault, 1982, p. 785).

The duty to die can be seen as a new way to construct our individual subjectivity, as a struggle against the "governments of individualisation" (Foucault, 1982, p. 781), for it asserts our individual right to be different while defending the importance to maintain the relations with the community and with others, bonds characterised by love and care. This new type of subjectivity, of the construction of ourselves as subjects, as individuals, becomes a new form of resistance of biopower and its imposition of a concern to stay alive. The duty to die is the specification of a refusal to be the kind of subject biopower expects one to be, it is an attempt to show and prove that life is much more than biological life, to demonstrate that life, even when understood in all its complexity, must not be uncritically prolonged

¹ It is important here to acknowledge that these reflections applied characteristically to Western cultures and their background. For, in many other regions and diverse cultural understandings of the family, the only way of paying respect to the elders in need is to provide them any kind of support required. The implications of the duty to die in these contexts are beyond this paper's scope.

per se, but the importance of acknowledging its end, its finitude, has to be considered.

3.2. *The sublimation of biopower's control*

However, there is also the possibility of another reading, an opposite one, of the duty to die within biopolitics, for it could be viewed as the utter sublimation of biopower's control over life by its incorporation into the biopolitical procedures of letting individuals die so others can live. Under this view, the acknowledgement of a personal duty to die, regardless of its motives, would serve biopolitical interests by regulating populations and reinforcing biopower's ultimate hegemony over life. The duty to die could be regarded as the biopolitical finest procedure to control who is allowed to die and who should continue living. Similar to Foucault's argument on the biopolitics of racism (Foucault, 2013b)—where he understands that racism is the biopolitical way of exercising the power of death by the fragmentation of the biological continuum upon which biopower exercises its control, thus deciding who should (be allowed to) die for others to keep on living—, it could be argued that the duty to die is a biopolitical procedure to justify that the elderly lives are less worthy and should be allowed to die to make life, in general, healthier by saving resources that could be employed in younger generations.

A similar perspective could be inferred from Esposito's (2008) reading of the Nazi's eugenics project, where the State had the right to put an end to life, to give death, with the ultimate objective of its own preservation and health. "Where the health of the political body as a whole is at stake, a life that doesn't conform to those interests must be available for termination" (Esposito, 2008, p. 133). While separating ourselves from the Nazi's ideology, and the specifics of such a political regime, the biopolitical reading offered could be applied to our discussion on the duty to die. Under this lens, the moral obligation to die would be also interpreted as the perfection of biopower.²

It is not difficult to imagine a society where the duty to die has become a widespread practice, regarded as a moral responsibility that must not be fled from. Individuals would have accepted that their lives must end when a certain age has been reached, becoming themselves sanctioning subjects within biopower's network of control over the population, compelling others who think differently to accept their duty, and actively seek their

deaths. Furthermore, the pressure would not only come to the individual from external instances but would have been systematically internalised. This idea gains strength when considered together with the devaluation of unproductive lives in neoliberal societies, as we will see in the next section.

4. *BIOPOLITICS, NEOLIBERALISM, AND DEATH*

A second alternative to interpreting the duty to die from a biopolitical perspective requires a closer look at the relations between biopower and neoliberalism. While acknowledging the controversies of the term, the working definition of *neoliberalism* for the purposes of this paper will be to understand it as "a politico-economic doctrine that embraces robust liberal capitalism, constitutional democracy, and a modest welfare state"³ (Vallier, 2022). On the other side, albeit briefly described, biopolitics contributes to neoliberalism by the insertion of bodies into production and the populations' adjustments to economic processes (Foucault, 2013a). Deeper reflection on the topic is offered by Montag (2013), who explains that the market regulates life, rations it, by demanding that some individuals are allowed to die to restore overall equilibrium and, thus, by supporting (the) life (of the entire population) again. When a minimal portion of the population is allowed to die, the saved resources can be redistributed to achieve better usage of them in the rest of society which is likely to benefit more from it. His premises are two: first, he defends that collective labour is what makes human life possible; and second, the market is understood as the sphere of production and reproduction of human life. The market's limit is to keep its worker's bare life, so they can keep producing. Thus, in the contest between workers and their masters, the latter can lower their wages with the only limit mentioned above. So, when problems arise, the government intervenes enforcing the law to make people accept their rationing of life by the market. Law enforcement consists in exposing those individuals to death, letting them die. Finally, the market (free trade) is conceived as the lesser evil to ration food shortages and avoid famine, for it is the most reasonable way to maintain the life of the population for longer (Montag, 2013). Paolo

Virno's thesis perfectly complements the one just analysed. Virno (2013) considers labour-power, understood as the potential to produce, at the centre of biopolitics. The true object of exchange in

² Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out the importance of this.

³ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out the relevance of this issue.

capitalist societies is not the final product obtained from the worker's labour, but their ability to work, to produce, to generate capital, a potentiality that is incarnated in labour-power. Since what is sold is the possibility itself, this is inseparable from the living body, for it is the substratum of labour-power, hence neoliberal's worry about life. The living body needs to be governed, not for its intrinsic value, but because it is the substratum of what truly matters for neoliberalism: the worker's potential to produce.

4.1. Resistance to economic mandates

A direct consequence is a neoliberal interpretation of Foucault's concept of governmentality (Kenny, 2015). Health becomes a place for investment where the subject is perceived as an entrepreneur of the self⁴ whose individual responsibility is to maximise her life/time. Now that the importance of a living body as a potentiality for labour-power is understood, we can also comprehend that biopower encourages individuals to enact health-maximising behaviours to maintain at optimal levels their embodied attributes that make them economically productive. Closely related to these ideas is Braidotti's (2007) notion of bio-ethical citizenship, where access to basic social services like healthcare is dependent on own's ability to act responsibly in accordance to conducts that minimise risks linked to the wrong lifestyle. Again, the individual is responsible to take care of her own genetic capital. Health is the most valuable human capital that both society and the individual have: for the first, it permits longer and more productive participation of subjects in the dynamics of production, for the latter, it is perceived as a revenue stream that will allow her to enjoy the market and non-market activities for a longer period. Although I will soon address in detail his perspective on death and health, it is important to indicate now Ivan Illich's similarities with the presented perspective. For he defends that there is a current duty of the individuals to take care of themselves and get physicians examinations periodically to check for any possible illness symptoms that would require clinical treatment. There is a constant reminder that death could be awaiting us around the corner, and we must elude it. Similarly, neoliberalism strongly relies on lengthening the

lives of those individuals who are otherwise not productive for society, e.g., the elderly, for they are dependent on the consumption of products and services that the contemporary market offers as a guarantee to preserve a healthy lifestyle.

As previously indicated, Illich (1974) offers a complementary insight to help us gain a better understanding of the relations between biopower and neoliberalism. His initial assumption states that any society's image of death is determined by the prevalent concept of health within that same society. This relation's direct result is that new ideas of the end of life, that is, of death, condition and determine novel medical activities. Our modern understanding of medicine, whose defining purpose is the restoration of health together with the prolongation of life, has been generated by institutions that have the power to create expectations about medicine's abilities that it cannot, by definition, meet. That is, medicine is nowadays viewed as the paramount discipline that provides societies with the tools to fight and postpone death until it is socially deemed to be an acceptable and adequate time to die. Today, every condition receives therapy, and thus requires lifelong clinical care. Death, and with it inevitably health, enters the sphere of social justice. The right to equal access to healthcare is formulated as the "claim to equal consumption of social products" (p. 14). Here is when the connection between biopower, to the extent that it is concerned with the life of individual subjects, and neoliberalism is forged. Workers become health-consumers, which is the ultimate mechanism of social control, as we have seen with Montag and, especially, Kelly. Although it initially served workers' claims to fight injustice, for society was the culprit of unequal distribution of health resources and hence the 'unnatural' (earlier than the average) death of many workers, it soon became the "ultimate justification of social control" (p. 15).

In this context, the duty to die could destabilise both neoliberalism and biopolitics from within. On one side, it would undermine the neoliberal adjustments of life which revolve around production. The final years of life after a lifetime of production are seen as the desired reward once one is retired, so why would one commit to a life of production regulated by neoliberal standards if a duty to die might arise later? Why not attempt to find meaning and live differently, outside the neoliberal and biopolitical reach? On the other hand, the recognition of the duty to die could imply the destabilisation of biopolitics because it would be an internal danger. Acknowledging our duty to die could challenge the paradigm by removing power over life and

⁴ This notion was already pointed out by Foucault when reflecting on the neo-liberal notion of *homo oeconomicus*: "being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings" (Foucault, 2008, p. 226).

death from biopolitics and giving it to the subject. Following Kenny (2015), death could be perceived as an investment that has failed, an economic catastrophe. The person who dies has failed to invest in strategies to self-optimize her health, thus her death would be regarded as unsuccessful entrepreneurial management of herself. Here, an active pursuit of death, which arises from moral responsibility and acknowledgement that one's own time to die has arrived, radically collapses with, and challenges the role death acquires in neoliberal societies. Similarly, Ivan Illich understands death as the "ultimate form of consumer resistance" (1974, p. 16). Because in death, a person becomes useless both as a producer and as a consumer. The recognition of a personal duty to die could be read here as an active resistance to biopower's demands and control.

4.2. Fulfilling neoliberal interests

The individual becomes pertinent for the state insofar as he can do something for the strength of the state (...) sometimes what he has to do for the state is to stay alive, to work, to produce, to consume; and sometimes what he has to do is to die (Foucault, 1988, p. 152).

However, there is still another possibility of understanding the duty to die as fully integrated within the biopolitics of neoliberalism. For, it could mean succumbing to neoliberal demands, which utterly devalue unproductive lives, e.g., elderly lives. Like the argument presented at the end of the previous section, the duty to die could imply that there is no value in life after one becomes unproductive, in a neoliberal understanding of the term, for society.

Foucault's (2008: 14 March 1979) reflections on the theory of human capital explain how labour acquired a central role in neoliberal economic analysis, which represents two interrelated processes. First, economic analysis is extended to a previously unexplored domain, i.e., labour, and therefore, this previously thought to be a non-economic sphere, can be now strictly interpreted in economic terms. Second, the worker will not be conceived anymore as an object within economic analysis—the passive object which supplies and demands in the form of labour power—, but becomes an active economic subject. As such, the worker's labour could be interpreted as a machine/stream complex. On one side, the worker's ability to produce is his capital, his value within a neoliberal understanding of

economics, hence he is conceived as a machine. On the other side, as a reward for his labour, the worker will gain an income, or wage, the worker's earning stream. And here is the relevant aspect of the machine/stream construct for our discussion:

In reality this machine has a lifespan, a length of time in which it can be used, an obsolescence, an ageing. So that we should think of the machine constituted by the worker's ability, the machine constituted by, if you like, ability and a worker individually bound together, as being remunerated over a period of time by a series of wages which, to take the simplest case, will begin by being relatively low when the machine begins to be used, then will rise, and then will fall with the machine's obsolescence or the ageing of the worker insofar as he is a machine (Foucault, 2008, pp. 224-225).

The duty to die could be the red switch of that machine to put an end to its existence, hence complying with its obsolescence. The worker's life becomes useless for the neoliberal system once he is unable to make significant contributions to production. However, it could be counterargued, there will be a period through which the worker will continue to be valuable, albeit only as a consumer. The overall impact of the worker in this neoliberal understanding will nevertheless reach a threshold when the likelihood of needing expensive medical treatment will not be enough compensation, in economic terms, for his remaining worth as a consumer. In other words, the duty to die cannot completely disappear, for it would linger until the worker acknowledged his lack of utility within the system and opted to exit it.

5. PSYCHOPOLITICS AND THE DUTY TO DIE

As a criticism, but at the same time a continuation, of Foucault's ideas of biopolitics, Byung-Chul Han (2015) proposes the notion of neuronal power, governed by a dialectic of positivity, contrary to Foucault's biopower⁵. The latter was a type of immunological response characteristic of the disciplinary society, hence negative repression. The main trait of Han's neuronal power, or smart

⁵ For the purposes of the present paper, it is enough to indicate that psychopolitics, in Han's words, is a continuation of the Foucault notion of biopower, covering those spheres that biopolitics is unable to account for: "Foucault evidently did not appreciate that biopolitics and population—which represent genuine categories of disciplinary society—are unsuited to describing the neoliberal regime" (Han, 2017, p. 23).

power (Han, 2017), is the inclusion of a new kind of violence, a positive one, violence that saturates and exhausts. The way smart power functions by the deployment of subtle invisible technologies of control, becoming a permissive power, and not a coercive one, which exploits the subject's necessity of it, for its standard rests in personal-organisation and self-optimisation. Through this new perspective, the subject continues to be understood as an entrepreneur of themselves, for achievement reigns at a societal level. There is a socially unconscious drive to maximise production, which has no limit, and results in achievement-subject failure and their inability to cope with the nevertheless permanent pressure to produce at optimal standards. Consequently, contrary to what could be initially thought, the subjects' presupposed freedom to act accordingly to their own standards becomes new restrictions, "as an entrepreneur of himself, the neoliberal achievement-subject engages in auto-exploitation willingly—and even passionately" (Han, 2017, p. 28). Like Foucault, Han also offers a reading of the subject as a performance-machine, whose main and only goal is to maximise production without any disruption:

... auto-exploitation is significantly more efficient and brings much greater returns [...] Achievement society is the society of self-exploitation. The achievement-subject exploits itself until it burns out. In the process, it develops auto-aggression that often enough escalates into the violence of selfdestruction (Han, 2015, p. 47).

The result is tired, exhausted subjects. But it is a solitary tiredness, for it separates us from others, it implies division from other subjects who are engaged in the same isolating practice of self-exploitation. The main consequence of the latter for our argument is that this solitary tiredness destroys everything that is common or shared, making it impossible to create intensive bonding. Moreover, a life dictated by the demands of self-exploitation utterly lacks the capacity to obtain or give meaning to other practices, thus bare life becomes one of the fundamental aspects for the subject embedded in smart power. Health is a necessary condition for the subject to continue in an optimal physical condition to be part of the neoliberal machinery of production, thus health acquires a divine status.

What reading could be offered, then, of the duty to die in psychopolitical terms? There are, again, two possible understandings of such duty. First, its absorption by the dominant neoliberal psychopolitical regime, where the duty to die becomes the

final personal recognition of the subject's inability to maintain the productivity levels required, the acceptance of the body's decline and deterioration. In a life deprived of other forms of meaning besides the ones obtained through production, the subject's health worsening implies their subtraction from the neoliberal machinery and thus the creation of an insurmountable void in a meaning-deprived existence. The acceptance of the subject's responsibility to die becomes the direct consequence of this reasoning. Second, there is the possibility to interpret the duty to die as a subversive tool against psychopolitics. On one side, the recognition of the duty to die could help the subject create familiar and societal bonds with other members of the community, for the acknowledgement of such duty arises specifically from the recognition of one's duties to those we love and could benefit from them. In this sense, the duty to die could contribute to the creation of intense bonding between subjects, as a counterpower to smart power's solitary tiredness mentioned above. On another side, the duty to die, an autonomous recognition of our responsibility to end life, could be interpreted as an *event*, "when it occurs, an *entirely new state of affairs* begins. The *event* brings into play an *outside*, which breaks the subject open and wrests it from subjection" (Han, 2017, p. 77). Thus, as a practice of freedom, as de-psychologization, the duty to die could inaugurate a new form of subversion against current neoliberal smart power, and a new art of living, where mutual care and aid predominate over self-optimisation and productivity.

6. CONCLUSION

The aim of the present paper was to offer both a biopolitical and a psychopolitical understanding of the duty to die and its relations to neoliberalism. Although discussion is far from concluded on the different interpretations of the moral responsibility to die within both approaches, this research set out to establish the two main different readings that can be done: the defiance to neoliberal mandates of productive lives, and the absorption of the duty to die by biopolitical and/or psychopolitical mechanisms. This paper provides deeper insight into the controversial notion of the duty to die, offering a distinctive and hitherto unexplored approach to the notion from a different discipline than bioethics. Consequently, the research is limited by the lack of information on the bridges between biopolitics/psychopolitics and bioethics. Further research might explore the possibility to clearly discern which of the two alternatives offered prevails in different societies.

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