

SECURITY, TERRITORY AND POPULATION PART 2: INITIAL DISCUSSION OF SECURITY

The first lecture in the series Foucault calls *Security, Territory and Population* is primarily a discussion of security. Instead of a definition, Foucault gives two sets of examples. The first group involves penal statutes. In the simplest case, there is a prohibited practice (you shall not steal) and a punishment (amputation). In the second, the disciplinary case, the prohibition and the punishment are present, but in a more complex context, including a system of supervisions, inspections and checks to identify the likelihood that a person will commit a crime; and instead of a spectacular punishment like amputation or banishment, there are incarceration and efforts at transforming the person. In the third case, the first two remain in place, but we add a supervisory regime of statistics and other efforts to understand the problem created by the prohibited practice and to set up mechanisms that are cost-effective in trying to keep the prohibited acts at a tolerable level with cost-benefit analysis and other constructs.

The second set of examples concerns illness. In the Middle Ages, leprosy was dealt with using a strict protocol of separation. A bit later, the Plague was treated with a robust series of quarantines, inspections and other regulatory steps to prevent spread. In the third case, there is smallpox, treated with inoculations, so that the crucial questions are the effectiveness of the vaccine, the modes of insuring widespread inoculation, and other more formal statistical understandings.

Even without a formal definition of security we see the general outline: prevention of certain kinds of harm through concerted action.

Protection of the public from preventable harms is an important role of the sovereign, and almost everyone would agree it is a proper role. The goal is accomplished through exercise of power, including both overt violence in the case of some punishments, or the separation of the diseased in the first case and by teaching and correction in the disciplinary case. In the third and contemporary example, there is a widespread effort to understand the mechanisms of prevention and a more disciplined effort by government to achieve its goals, complete with measurements of both the steps taken and the results achieved.

Foucault then takes up a Seventeenth Century text describing the proper layout of a town. The design should accommodate the things that provide security as well. The streets should allow for circulation both of human and commercial traffic, and should allow for good air circulation to prevent miasmas. Of course to some extent this ease of circulation will benefit rioters and thieves, so that sets up the need to adjust to enable good policing. From this Foucault draws the lesson that the crucial thing is to provide a "milieu" which is conducive to pleasant and secure lives for all citizens. That lesson expands to a view of governing. The goal of the sovereign is to organize things in a way that is conducive to security.

The nature of the people taken as a whole changes in the three cases. In the first, the individual is an object of action. In the criminal case, the punishment serves as a warning to the rest of the population, but that is a side effect. In the second case, the individual becomes a participant in the disciplinary process. The goal is to persuade the criminal to become a decent member of society. In the third, the entire population becomes the subject of study, enabling the sovereign to design an entire system so that society can function in safety.

In the same way, in the case of leprosy, the point is simply to segregate the sick person from the rest to achieve security for the healthy. In the second, the goal is separation, but the people separated are carefully watched and given what care is possible, including food and shelter and medical care, in the hope that they might safely return to society. In the third, the goal is to figure out the best ways to insure safety through treatment in advance.

In each of these cases we can observe the some of the elements of power in action. In the first cases, there is direct and forceful action. In the second, there is a recognition that the individual has some capacity to improve enough to warrant return to society. In the third, there is a more subtle approach in which such things as costs and benefits are considered, and the government tries to minimize the value of bad or evil actions, and to increase the chances that the individual will see no reason to harm others.

The idea of territory comes up briefly. In every case, the sovereign exercises authority within a defined territory. There are spaces in the territory devoted to the outcast in the first case. In the second case, those spaces become more differentiated, but they remain spaces of segregation. In the third, those spaces remain, but they are not the focus. Instead, the overall layouts become the focus of thought and action; some spaces are still spaces of segregation, but other controlled spaces are more open.

Foucault doesn't see the three cases as successive iterations. In each group, the first and second steps remain as the third evolves, and in the actual settings, there are elements of all three present in each of the cases.

In general, we can see the idea that Foucault wants to discuss, the genesis of the idea that humans are a species that can be studied, and that the results of those studies can be put to work as elements of mechanisms of power to shape the behaviors of humans in a social setting.

Commentary

This first lecture seems fairly simple, but it illustrates the value of a formal statement of an issue. Simply by arranging things in order and providing well-chosen examples, we can start thinking about our current situation in a more organized way. Here are two of the ideas this lecture sparked for me.

1. Consider the first case, the law, the punishment. In this case, the individual confronts an impervious system that punishes those who transgress, without mercy or consideration of circumstances. From the standpoint of the system, there are no human beings with their own motivations and problems. There is only the fact: the rules were broken and the breaker was captured by the system. Perhaps this is the neoliberal vision: the individual confronts the market which renders judgments devoid of mercy or consideration of circumstances. The state is more or less indifferent to the outcome.

2. In order for case three to work, the people in charge have to get it right most of the time, and be flexible enough to change when they get it wrong. In addition, in our system, we require the assent of the population to the governing structure, by which I mean the aggregate of the public and private actors who create the milieu in which we live. That hasn't been happening. To take Foucault's example, look at vaccinations. There was a consensus about the value of these projects, a consensus created by the combined efforts of health care professionals, scientists, schools and government education projects, including frequently direct statements by the President and other political leaders. When the anti-vaxxers got traction, that consensus was undermined, and now we see the possibility of serious outbreaks of once-suppressed diseases. In the same way, Congress refuses to fund Zika research. The part of the milieu that protected us from infectious diseases has broken down in fits of

individualism. By exalting the individual at the expense of society, we have allowed the ignorant and the silly the ability to disrupt the security of all of us.