

SECURITY TERRITORY AND POPULATION PART 4: CONCLUSION OF DESCRIPTION OF SECURITY AND POPULATION

The third lecture by Michel Foucault in *Security, Territory and Population* begins with a discussion of the systems of law and discipline considered from the standpoint of "norms". In the system of law, norms are the acceptable behaviors, derived from sacred texts or societal customs or the will of the sovereign. They are then codified and made mandatory. In disciplinary systems, the goal is to identify the best way to do some act, and the people are taught those actions and punished or reeducated for not doing them. In a security system, the ideas of the new sciences of understanding of the nature of the human species are brought to bear on the problem, with the goal of freeing people from the problem, or channeling their behavior into the best known forms. Normalization in the security regime consists in recognizing a problem, and working out solutions using analysis and planning.

He illustrates the latter with a detailed discussion of the introduction of inoculation and the related advances in medicine, administrative controls and statistics, showing that the basic idea of security as a method of government is to treat the population as a whole. There is a nice example of this here. In fact, once you get used to thinking about government as Foucault describes it, you see examples everywhere.

In a law regime, the determination of norms is based on the will of the sovereign, or some sacred text or long-established custom. In a

disciplinary regime, the determination of norms is made to fulfill the desires of the powerful, including the sovereign. The examples given, how to load guns, how to form up for a battle, make this clear. Foucault does not discuss the way that norms and the process of normalization are derived in the security regime. How is the decision made as to what problem should be solved, or what behavior should be encouraged or discouraged? These decisions are made through relationships of power, so perhaps we will get more on this later.

Foucault then draws several conclusions.

1. The issues became more important because of the rise of towns as centers of economic and social activity. This changed the relation between sovereigns and their subjects, and required changes in the nature of government.
2. One of the central problems of the town is circulation, not only of humans walking the street but of goods and services moving about, the need for the careful control over the circulation of money, the need for circulation of air and so on. Towns operate on the basis of circulation, which was always an issue, but becomes central as the nature of economic activity changed.
3. One critical difference is that under a security regime, there is no attempt to "... make use of a relationship of obedience between a higher will, of the sovereign, and the wills of those subjected to his will. Security doesn't depend on "... the exercise of a will over others in the most homogeneous, continuous, and exhaustive way possible. It is a matter rather of revealing a level of the necessary and sufficient action of those who govern."
4. In a mercantilist state, it becomes clear that the power and strength of a nation are dependent on the activities of the population as a whole. The first source of strength is the merchant and manufacturing elites, but the entire population is also crucial. The strength

of the state depends on the agricultural workers and factory laborers both for their work and for their numbers, which keep wages low. For the mercantilists, the population is seen as a productive force, and not much more.

5. The function of the population under a regime of law is to create wealth for the sovereign. In a mercantile system, a regime of discipline, the goal is still the creation of wealth in the hands of the sovereign and a few others. In both cases, the people are seen as the objects of direct action by the sovereign and the elites.

This changed in the mid-1700s according to Foucault. He argues that once the population becomes an object of study, it becomes apparent that it cannot be changed by the will of the sovereign or by decree.

To say that population is a natural phenomenon that cannot be changed by decree does not mean, however, that it is an inaccessible and impenetrable nature, quite the contrary. ... [T]he naturalness identified in the fact of population is constantly accessible to agents and techniques of transformation, on condition that these agents and techniques are at once enlightened, reflected, analytical, calculated, and calculating.

A population cannot be coerced into some new behavior, but it can be indirectly channeled and prodded. The example Foucault gives is currency: money must flow throughout the territory to encourage the people in the countryside to work on farms.

The one thing common across the individuals who make up a population is desire. "Every individual acts out of desire." Nothing can be done about desire, but if everyone is allowed to act out of desire, according to the Physiocrats the natural outcome is the greatest good for the society. Foucault identifies this as the

“matrix” of the utilitarian philosophy.

Foucault notes that he is using the term sovereign less and the word government more as the notion of the population emerges. The government is more than the power of the sovereign. It is a thing in itself, one addressed in much more detail in the next lecture. Foucault says that it is the interplay of the techniques of power and their object that carves out the population as a new reality, and as the object of the techniques of power.

Commentary

1. The first three lectures seem to roam around in circles, adding details as we repeat the loops. This is frustrating, and difficult to follow. It helps to realize that an introduction to a new framework has to start somewhere, and the ideas have to be repeated, developed and explained from several different perspectives. This is how we come to grips with most new ideas, but especially abstract ideas.

2. The idea of political economy, or the economy as an object of study, emerges in this lecture. This economy is driven by Desire. This idea hadn't appeared in either of the first two lectures, and it appears here with no preparation and no explanation, simply as a fact. This idea deserves more analysis; and it seems odd that Foucault drops it so casually into the discussion.

3. I quoted a section about changing the population through “agents and techniques of transformation”. The gloss Foucault adds “on condition that these agents and techniques are at once enlightened, reflected, analytical, calculated, and calculating” could be misleading. It certainly does not mean that the agents must be decent humans with the best interests of society as a whole in their hearts. It's simply a matter of technique, which can be used for any purpose.

4. Obviously these are not the only techniques that work to change society, or at least large

parts of the population. Trump is a good example, and there are plenty of others whose techniques are good at changing things. In any event, the old techniques are not lost. Consider policing as we see it in Baltimore and Chicago. It sounds just like the law regime Foucault describes.

5. One way to understand this the changes in regimes is by size of population. Large populations cannot be governed in the same way as small populations. For example, we like to say that today's large populations have a role to play in determining the goals of government and of society. Foucault has not mentioned this change.

7. Taking these last points together, the question becomes why increases in wealth and power are the only goals.