

Michele foucault biopower essay sample

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Michel Foucault wrote a book called History of Sexuality. In Part five of the book Right of Death and Power over Life, he discusses about the historical “Sovereign Power” where one is allowed to decide who has the right to live and who has the right to die. The sovereign uses his power over life through the deaths that he can command and uses his authority to announce death by the lives he can spare. Foucault then moves on to Disciplinary Power where he came up with the “Panopticon” where one is to believe they were under surveillance at all times. Such surveillance is still used in our everyday life such as schools, prisons, offices, hospitals, and mental institutes. Later in his life, Foucault discovered Bio-power. This bio-power is a technology of power where the government has total control of the population and characteristics and sexuality of the human being. It allows the government to have power over of the ideal characteristics, epidemiology, economic statistics, productivity level and the population size. China’s one child policy will fall into place with the power of bio-power. This policy consisted of an act where it allowed each family to have only one child.

Author, Maurizio Lazzarato publishes two articles after Foucault called, Biopolitics/Bioeconomics: a politic of multiplicity and From Biopower to Biopolitics where he discusses the works of Michel Foucault. In the Biopolitics/Bioeconomics: a politic of multiplicity he explains the economy and politics, liberalism as the government of heterogeneous dispositifs of power, populations/classes, discipline and security, and vitalpolitik. He specifies the genealogy of government and liberalism and recognizes the relation among economy and politics. Sovereignty was the power where the sovereign had the right to decide life and death. This came from the ancient

Roman law “Patria Potestas” where the father of a Roman family was given the option to choose whether or not his children and his slaves were able to live or not as he is the one to give life to them. Sovereign power of right of life and death eventually disappeared and this power was no longer allowed to be exercised towards his people of interest. It was only allowed when the sovereign became threatened and felt that his life was in jeopardy or if he felt like he was going to be overthrown that he can then “expose their life” without “directly proposing their death”. If one was to go against him and his laws, the sovereign can then apply a direct power over his life and the punishment will result in death.

Foucault emphasizes that in this structure, power is applied according to the form of “deduction, a subtraction mechanism, a right to appropriate a portion of the wealth, a tax of products, goods, and services, labor and blood, levied on the power” that “culminated in the privilege to seize hold of life in order to suppress it”. (Foucault) He then makes annotations to how wars have come to an end and carried out in the name of an individual ruler but rather for the protection and endurance of the whole population. He stressed that contemporary states use power in this approach, emphasizing life as they expose their victims to death. Foucault states “that the ancient right to take life or let live was replaced by a power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death. (Foucault, p. 138) Since power can apply its manipulation over life, he notes that “death is power’s limit”. (Foucault, p. 138) Foucault then goes on about “power over life evolved in two basic forms; these forms were not antithetical, however; they constituted rather two poles of development linked together by a whole intermediary clusters

of relations” where the first pole is “ centered on the body as a machine” where you will find in the military, education, workplace, and reaches out to generate a more closely controlled population, and the second is “ focused on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes.” (Foucault, p. 139)

This biological process that Foucault speaks of is “ propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity” such as demographics, ideology, riches and prosperity, and the rise for control of the population on a statistical level. This is where the regulatory controls such as bio-politics of the population take place. Foucault describes how this “ bio-power” has been influential to the rise and growth of capitalism. He was adamant that the triumph of this economic structure “ would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes”. (Foucault, p. 141) Since capitalism demands growth, such as establishment of new companies and the production of merchandises, “ it had to have methods of power capable of optimizing forces, aptitudes, and life in general without at the same time making them more difficult to govern.” The life of humans was seen to be a significant element to politics and history. How a person lived developed into an item of authority and knowledge and needed to be synchronized, understood, and managed.

The rules and regulations turned out to be less concerned towards threatening and making judgment, but became more concerned in stabilizing and making the conditions of life more effective. The new power that took control over their lives means that they were over controlled by the politics.

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In Lazzarato's article, Biopolitics/Bioeconomics: a politic of multiplicity he states that Foucault uses government to explain the "dispositifs of regulation and control of the sick, the poor, delinquents, the insane etc." This form of government is a form of "human technology" where the "government of souls turns into a government of men". The economy and the politics became a problem in the 18th century. Foucault's resolution for this is the political, economic, and the ethical can no longer be referred to as combination or a union. The juridical law, economic theory, or the law of the market is incapable of reconciling the heterogeneity. A new group or domain has to be created.

The relation among the economy and politics does not lean in the direction of a production, but a heterogeneous power system and that civil society has arise to act as an intermediary among the opposing frameworks and lineages in managing society. Lazzarato believes that "we still have a disciplinary vision of capitalism" whereas Foucault believes that "those who take precedence are the dispositifs of security". (Lazzarato) Foucault's disciplinary power is very common and can be found in many places today. He discovered the "Panopticon" which was first created to make a prisoner feel as if they were being under surveillance at all times. This type of security prevented the prisoners to avoid wrongful doing. Panopticism can still be found in our everyday life such as schools, airports, hospitals, prisons, and mental institutes. We are constantly under surveillance no matter where we go or what we do. Cell phones, computers, and technologies allow the government to keep us under surveillance at all times. Bio-power, sovereign power, and disciplinary power are all related to each other in some way.

Sovereign power gave the sovereign the power to control the life and death of a human being. This was changed after a while and sovereign power no longer had the right of life and death, the new power came into act where one would be punished for his wrong doings and may be sentenced to death depending on his crime.

Disciplinary power is a method of power that controls the actions of an individual in the social body. It is exercised by regulating the organization of space, time, people's activity and behavior, and enforced with the support of the complex system of surveillance. Foucault's disciplinary power gave authority the right to announce the right of death for a wrongful doing, as well as serving time in prison. The difference between these powers is that bio-power is a type of power that allows the government to manage the births, deaths, reproduction, and illnesses of a population. Without the punishment of the disciplinary power, bio-power would not be as effective. People would do as they wish, have babies whenever they please and cause the nation to be over populated. Resources would then be scarce, there won't be enough food and shelter for everyone and jobs would become limited. Bio-power comes into play when China decided to set the one child policy. This one child policy was made in 1971 which was proposed by a demographic scholar named Ma Yinchu, but was not carried out until 1978.

In 1949 when Mao Zedong also known as “ Chairman Mao” was in control of China, he believed that a larger population would be better for the nation. He decided to ban birth control and any type of oral contraceptive because “ he believed that it was a capitalist plot that would weaken the country and make it vulnerable to attacks.” (Hays, 2008) Mao even encouraged the <https://assignbuster.com/michele-foucault-biopower-essay-sample/>

people of China to have more children in fear of attacks from the United States and the Soviet Union. In result of this, the population of the country expanded and doubled in size. During the 1950's the demographer Ma Yinchu started examining the trends and concluded that if the population continued to grow, it would be unfavorable to the development of China. China would eventually have a hard time feeding its people. By 1970, China's population increased to more than 800 million people. This was about 300 million more people since Chairman Mao took control. It wasn't until then the government of China realized that this over population was harming the economy and social development. The country went from agriculture to industrialization. Then in 1971, the government decided to incorporate population policies for economic planning, and encouraged late marriages as well as later child births. This is when they started promoting the one couple, one child policy. At this time, this policy was still not mandatory yet; families were still allowed to have more than one or two child if they wished.

The Chinese understood the importance of this matter and a majority of the families followed it. Family planning and oral contraceptives then became available for free. Since then, the population of the birth rate had decreased. By the late 1970's when Deng Xiaoping took over the country, he believed that over population burdened the economy of China. This is when bio-power came into effect and the government made it a state policy to follow the one child policy rule. The control of the country's population was in effect. Family planning was strongly encouraged and family planning officials were enforced. Couples were only allowed to conceive after receiving a permit

from the officials and in order to be eligible; the couples must provide a marriage certificate along with residency documentation. These officials had every authority to decline you a permit and had the power to order an abortion and enforce serious fines. Doctors were not allowed to deliver a baby unless the family submitted a permit from the officials. Such offense could result in great fines and penalties. China's one-child policy eventually became a little more lenient.

A couple was allowed another child under certain circumstances. The family would be granted a second child if the first child was a girl or if they have a serious mental illness but there must be a certain amount of years in between both children. In order for the people of China to follow this bio-power, the government would grant these families who obeyed the rule with a "one-child glory certificate". This certificate would allow families to receive extra benefits where they may receive a month of extra salary every year until the child turns 14, better housing, interest-free loans, retirement funds and much more.

It was their way of pushing the one-child policy to make it as effective as possible. Families who did not obey the policy would result in punishment. By punishment, they would receive heavy fines anywhere from \$370 to \$12,800 depending on which part of China you were living. If such fines were not paid, the government had the right to take away your land. Bio-power and disciplinary power became even more strict in the mid 2000's. Homes with more than one or two child were raided and females were forced to get sterilized and if you were pregnant with the third child, you were forced to

have an abortion. Families who tried to help hide their relatives were punished by imprisonment until the hidden ones come forward.