

Panopticism review

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Panopticism Review The understanding of Foucault's panopticism requires a review of the analogies on which it is based. Foucault's idea was anchored on the need for societies to develop sound and effective mechanisms that could be used to discharge power more economically and more effectively. The central objective of panopticism is to achieve the highest levels of discipline and public morality within the society. The idea of panopticism was modeled from the image or structure of the panopticon as described by Jeremy Bentham (Veyne 51). Bentham's perspective revolved around the creation of a central tower that could be used to monitor the actions and movements of prisoners. The tower was to be made in such a manner that only the people operating it had the vantage view of the prisoners. The prisoners could not have any clear view of their jailers.

The organization of the panopticon increased the potency of power in the minds of the prisoners and made the control of the prison more efficient. In essence, the ideals of total control of the prison facility as imagined by Foucault borrowed from the quarantines against the plague as practiced in the seventeenth century (Veyne 54). The process of quarantine involved the determination of a range of processes that maintained some strict discipline in affected villages including locking people within their houses and keeping away the keys. The nature of discipline was regulated in ways that ensured easy control of the villages by the authorities. Threats of death were used to ensure compliance. Critics contend that the panopticon was modeled on the desire by the seventeenth century societies to protect civilizations from the scourge of the plague. Others contend that the objective was aimed at achieving a perfect society.

Some of the issues that continue to attend to the matters of society are largely determined by the desire by central authorities to design the codes of ethics for their subjects. Such objectives often come into conflict with the theories that reinforce the need for human freedom and liberty. Critics of panopticism argue that governments do not have the moral authority to suppress the liberties and freedoms of the governed. They add that the idea of a perfect society is illusory and defeatist in nature. As such, they seek to demonstrate ways in which the processes of governance can be moderated in ways that support the free reign of the will of the governed. Within a modern context, Foucault's panopticism could be conceptualized in terms of the structural organization of the law, which seeks to impose limits on human freedoms.

Such structures are evident in the legal frameworks of autocratic regimes, which combine them with the vigilance of the police to maximize the aspect of control. The rise of police states in some parts of the world is a clear illustration of the impatient of the governing authorities to impose strict controls on the lives of the citizenry. In another context, this concept could be applied to the increasing vigilance of countries on their own people in the wake of global terrorism. Some countries such as the United States have responded to the threat of terror by putting in place extra-judicial measures that increase the presence and surveillance of the government on the public. Such surveillance is consistent with Foucault's argument regarding the matters of public control, discipline, and morality.

Works Cited

Veyne, Paul. *Foucault: His Thought, His Character*. New York: Polity, 2010