

Foucault and criticism essay sample

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This essay discusses the philosophy of Michel Foucault (1926-1984) the well known French philosopher and historian. Specifically, the essay considers his concept of the purpose of criticism, and offers an explanation of the biopower / biopolitics kritik argument. With regard to the latter, the essay discusses its strengths and weaknesses, and suggests an appropriate response.

According to Phillips (2002), Foucault did not want his criticism “ mistaken for thought or the work of transformation,” but as an instrument to trigger the process of thought. In his view criticism helps to provoke the thought process by creating uncertainty and difficulties when trying to make the subject reflect on the past, and brings to light inadequacies of the present (p. 339). In his view, real transformation can only occur after thoughts are provoked; otherwise the transformation is merely superficial. And that can only occur if the present is seen as a problem that is not easy to resolve (p. 339). And his criticisms, couched in his historical writings, tended to render different “ truths” to the accepted versions of events, which Foucault confessed was his intention (p. 340). In his view, contrary to those he rather scathingly refers to as “ universal intellectuals”, the crucial element of criticism is the provocation of thought that might facilitate the invention / creation of alternatives (p. 340).

Butler (2001) offers a perspective on what Foucault means by critique. She suggests that when seeking to define critique, Foucault manages only a number of approximations, because critique depends on the objects being appraised, but they in turn must define what critique means. In addition the main purpose of critique is not the evaluation of those objects, but to highlight the framework of the evaluation process. Butler offers a quotation <https://assignbuster.com/foucault-and-criticism-essay-sample/>

by Foucault in this context, when he states that critique is “ a means for a future or a truth that it will not know nor happen to be, it oversees a domain it would not want to police and is unable to regulate.”

As regards the biopower / biopolitics kritik argument, the SDI Encyclopedia provides some explanatory detail of these Foucault concepts under the title “ Biopower/Biopolitical” (n. d.). The article defines biopower as the “ power or control over life” while the term biopolitical describes specific forms of either control or power that are seen as exercises of biopower. The concepts were central to Foucault’s career in which essentially he sought to expose examples of biopower in our society. The article cites Foucault’s early writings on the subject of madness as his attempt to show how categorizing someone as mad is effectively implementing control over their life, because the subject - the “ mad” person - experiences the effects of being so categorized in the form of the decisions made by others in the shape of those in authority, and by the interpersonal relationships with individuals who know the person as being mad. In the context of debate, biopower is most usually “ the impact to a kritik argument.” Some examples of biopower links in that context suggested in the article include doing things “ in the name of the population.” One such could be to make a decision in the interest of national security. Another might be to implement policies under the name of disease protection, so protecting the population from epidemic via government action. A third could be to protect against a terrorism threat; control measures such as establishing detention camps, etc. The article does make the point that not all biopower is a bad thing and that it can be a productive force for good by providing protection from violent acts.

Vatter (2009), from the School of Social Sciences, University of New South
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Wales, states that in Foucault's view, biopolitics defines "the inseparability of biological life and political life in late modernity, such that biological life ceases to be part of an unchangeable, natural presupposition of human politics." Further, he claims that when politics is primarily concerned with the government of the living, "the traditional categories under which it had been thought are shattered and must be renewed" (p. 2).

Dimock (Apr 2012), discusses these topics in an online lecture entitled "NFL Continuing Education Unit Lecture Biopower/Biopolitics." He begins by stating that biopower is generally interpreted as power over life, but not power over death. He cites the function of prison as an exercise in biopower, defining its purpose as exercising traditional power, based on the premise of "thou shalt not" (what one is not permitted to do) and is designed to "produce docile bodies." He also cites the extensive use of IBM technology by the Nazis in order to locate and then capture and exterminate the Jewish populations in Germany and occupied Europe during World War II as an extreme example of biopower.

Regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the biopower kritik, its main strength is that it does seem to bear out what happens in the "real" world; i. e. how in our society we are governed and therefore controlled with little real say in matters affecting our everyday lives, whether we like it or not. Of course that situation does ensure the observance of law and order in society (for the most part), which should probably be considered overall as a positive, although it does mean there is very little practical freedom for individual actions that fail to comply with what has been decided by others is "for the best." In contrast, the weakness of the biopower kritik is that it appears to conflict with the logic that biopower should – in a democratic <https://assignbuster.com/foucault-and-criticism-essay-sample/>

society – be subject to improvement by the electorate to become more a measure for overall good.

This writer's response to the biopower kritik argument would be that it is an interesting and thought-provoking concept, which does to a considerable extent reflect reality in today's society.

References:

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