MICHEL FOUCAULT

Abnormal

Lectures at the Collège de France 1974–1975
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Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976
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want to do differs from this and a number of other works written along the same lines not exactly in its method, but in its point of view. There is a difference in what these analyses and my own analysis presuppose and imply in their theory of power. It seems to me, in fact, that the principal, the central notion in the analyses to which I refer is the notion of “repression.” That is to say, in these analyses there is an implicit reference to a power whose major function is repression, which is effective essentially at a superstructural level, is part of the superstructure, and whose mechanisms are essentially linked to ignorance and blindness. I would like to suggest a different conception of power, a different type of analysis of power, through the analyses I will be undertaking of the normalization of sexuality since the seventeenth century.

To clarify things straightaway I will take two examples that seem to me still to disturb contemporary analyses. You will see immediately that with these two examples I call into question my own earlier analyses.  

Everyone knows how lepers were excluded at the end of the Middle Ages, or even throughout the Middle Ages. The leper’s exclusion was a social practice that included first of all a rigorous division, a distancing, a rule of no contact between one individual (or group of individuals) and another. Second, it involved casting these individuals out into a vague, external world beyond the town’s walls, beyond the limits of the community. As a result, two masses were constituted, each foreign to the other. And those cast out were cast out in the strict sense into outer darkness. Third, and finally, the exclusion of lepers implied the disqualification—which was perhaps not exactly moral, but in any case juridical and political—of individuals thus excluded and driven out. They entered death, and you know that the exclusion of lepers was regularly accompanied by a kind of funeral ceremony during which individuals who had been declared leprous were declared dead (which meant that their possessions could be passed on) and they departed for the foreign, external world. In short, there were practices of exclusion, of casting out, of “marginalization” as we would say today. I think we still describe the way in which
power is exercised over the mad, criminals, deviants, children, and the poor in these terms. Generally, we describe the effects and mechanisms of the power exercised over these categories as mechanisms and effects of exclusion, disqualification, exile, rejection, deprivation, refusal, and incomprehension; that is to say, an entire arsenal of negative concepts or mechanisms of exclusion. I believe, and I continue to believe, that this practice or this model of the exclusion of lepers really was a model put to work in our society even later than the Middle Ages. In any case, when, toward the middle of the seventeenth century, the great hunt for beggars, vagabonds, the idle, libertines, and so forth began—with the sanctions of either driving this floating population from the towns or confining them in the hôpitaux génér-aux—I think it was still this model of the exclusion of lepers that the royal administration put to work. However, there is another model of control that seems to me to have enjoyed a much wider and longer success.

It seems that the model of the “exclusion of lepers,” the model of the individual driven out in order to purify the community, finally disappeared roughly at the end of seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries. However, something else, a different model, was not established but reactivated. This model is almost as old as the exclusion of lepers and concerns the problem of plague and the spatial partitioning and control (quadrillage) of plague-infested towns. It seems to me that essentially there have been only two major models for the control of individuals in the West: one is the exclusion of lepers and the other is the model of the inclusion of plague victims. And I think that the replacement of the exclusion of lepers by the inclusion of plague victims as the model of control was a major phenomenon of the eighteenth century. To explain this I would like to remind you how quarantine was enforced in a town in which the plague had broken out. A certain territory was marked out and

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* The manuscript says: “It may be that this model was historically active at the time of the ‘great confinement’ or the hunting down of beggars, but it went into permanent decline when it was taken over by another model that seems to me to have had…”
closed off: the territory of a town, possibly that of a town and its suburbs, was established as a closed territory. However, apart from this analogy, the practice with regard to plague was very different from the practice with regard to lepers, because the territory was not the vague territory into which one cast the population of which one had to be purified. It was a territory that was the object of a fine and detailed analysis, of a meticulous spatial partitioning (*quadrillage*).

The plague town—and here I refer to a series of regulations, all absolutely identical, moreover, that were published from the end of the Middle Ages until the beginning of the eighteenth century—was divided up into districts, the districts were divided into quarters, and then the streets within these quarters were isolated. In each street there were overseers, in each quarter inspectors, in each district someone in charge of the district, and in the town itself either someone was nominated as governor or the deputy mayor was given supplementary powers when plague broke out. There is, then, an analysis of the territory into its smallest elements and across this territory the organization of a power that is continuous in two senses. First of all, it is continuous due to this pyramid of control. From the sentries who kept watch over the doors of the houses from the end of the street, up to those responsible for the quarters, those responsible for the districts and those responsible for the town, there is a kind of pyramid of uninterrupted power. It was a power that was continuous not only in this pyramidal, hierarchical structure, but also in its exercise, since surveillance had to be exercised uninterrupted. The sentries had to be constantly on watch at the end of the streets, and twice a day the inspectors of the quarters and districts had to make their inspection in such a way that nothing that happened in the town could escape their gaze. And everything thus observed had to be permanently recorded by means of this kind of visual examination and by entering all information in big registers. At the start of the quarantine, in fact, all citizens present in the town had to give their name. The names were entered in a series of registers. The local inspectors held some of these registers, and others were kept by the town’s central administration. Every day the inspectors had to visit every house, stopping
outside and summoning the occupants. Each individual was assigned a window in which he had to appear, and when his name was called he had to present himself at the window, it being understood that if he failed to appear it had to be because he was in bed, and if he was in bed he was ill, and if he was ill he was dangerous and so intervention was called for. It was at this point that individuals were sorted into those who were ill and those who were not. All the information gathered through the twice-daily visits, through this kind of review or parade of the living and the dead by the inspector, all the information recorded in the register, was then collated with the central register held by the deputy mayors in the town’s central administration.14

You can see that this kind of organization is in fact absolutely antithetical to, or at any rate different from, all the practices concerning lepers. It is not exclusion but quarantine. It is not a question of driving out individuals but rather of establishing and fixing them, of giving them their own place, of assigning places and of defining presences and subdivided presences. Not rejection but inclusion. You can see that there is no longer a kind of global division between two types or groups of population, one that is pure and the other impure, one that has leprosy and the other that does not. Rather, there is a series of fine and constantly observed differences between individuals who are ill and those who are not. It is a question of individualization; the division and subdivision of power extending to the fine grain of individuality. Consequently, we are far from the global division into two masses characteristic of the exclusion of lepers. You can see also that there is none of that distancing, severing of contact, or marginalization. Rather, there is a close and meticulous observation. While leprosy calls for distance, the plague implies an always finer approximation of power to individuals, an ever more constant and insistent observation. With the plague there is no longer a sort of grand ritual of purification, as with leprosy, but rather an attempt to maximize the health, life, longevity, and strength of individuals. Essentially, it is a question of producing a healthy population rather than of purifying those living in the community, as in the case of leprosy. Finally,
you can see that there is no irrevocable labeling of one part of the population but rather constant examination of a field of regularity within which each individual is constantly assessed in order to determine whether he conforms to the rule, to the defined norm of health.

You know that there is an extremely interesting body of literature in which the plague appears as the moment of panic and confusion in which individuals, threatened by visitations of death, abandon their identities, throw off their masks, forget their status, and abandon themselves to the great debauchery of those who know they are going to die. There is a literature of plague that is a literature of the decomposition of individuality; a kind of orgiastic dream in which plague is the moment when individuals come apart and when the law is forgotten. As soon as plague breaks out, the town's forms of lawfulness disappear. Plague overcomes the law just as it overcomes the body. Such, at least, is the literary dream of the plague. But you can see that there was another dream of the plague: a political dream in which the plague is rather the marvelous moment when political power is exercised to the full. Plague is the moment when the spatial partitioning and subdivision (quadrillage) of a population is taken to its extreme point, where dangerous communications, disorderly communities, and forbidden contacts can no longer appear. The moment of the plague is one of an exhaustive sectioning (quadrillage) of the population by political power, the capillary ramifications of which constantly reach the grain of individuals themselves, their time, habitat, localization, and bodies. Perhaps plague brings with it the literary or theatrical dream of the great orgiastic moment. But plague also brings the political dream of an exhaustive, unobstructed power that is completely transparent to its object and exercised to the full. You can see that there is a connection between the dream of a military society and the dream of a plague-stricken society, between both of these dreams born in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. From the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries I do not think it was the old model of leprosy that was important politically, the final residue or one of the last major manifestations of which was no doubt the great
"confinement" and the exclusion of beggars and the mad and so forth. Another, very different model replaced the model of leprosy in the seventeenth century. Plague replaces leprosy as a model of political control, and this is one of the great inventions of the eighteenth century, or in any case of the Classical Age and administrative monarchy.

Broadly I would say that the replacement of the model of leprosy by the model of plague essentially corresponds to a very important historical process that I will call, in a word, the invention of positive technologies of power. The reaction to leprosy is a negative reaction; it is a reaction of rejection, exclusion, and so on. The reaction to plague is a positive reaction; it is a reaction of inclusion, observation, the formation of knowledge, the multiplication of effects of power on the basis of the accumulation of observations and knowledge. We pass from a technology of power that drives out, excludes, banishes, marginalizes, and represses, to a fundamentally positive power that fashions, observes, knows, and multiplies itself on the basis of its own effects.

I would say that generally the Classical Age is praised because it succeeded in inventing a considerable number of scientific and industrial techniques. We know that it also invented forms of government; it developed administrative apparatuses and political institutions. All this is true. But, and I think less attention has been given to this, the Classical Age also invented techniques of power of a kind that ensured that power did not function by means of deduction, but by means of production and the maximizing of production. It invented techniques of a power that does not act by excluding but rather through a close and analytical inclusion of elements, a power that does not act by separating into large confused masses, but by distributing according to differential individualities, a power that is linked not to ignorance but rather to a series of mechanisms that secure the formation, investment, accumulation, and growth of knowledge. [The Classical Age invented techniques of power] that can be transferred to very different institutional supports, to State apparatuses, institutions, the family, and so forth. The Classical Age developed therefore what could be called an "art of governing," in the sense in which "government" was then understood as

2. To understand Foucault's allusion, we must remember that Sophie Rostochine, the Countess of Séguir (1799-1874), was the author of a number of works for young people that were written in the childish language of mothers. A. Q. Fouquier-Tinville was public prosecutor in the revolutionary court during the Terror. J. E. D. Esquirol (1722-1795) was the founder, along with P. Pinel, of clinical psychiatry and was head doctor at the Maison Royale de Charenton in 1825.

3. On Pierre Rivière, cf. lecture of January 8 and lecture of February 12, both in this volume. Georges Rapin murdered his mistress in the Fontainebleau forest on 29 May 1960. He was defended by René Floriot, was condemned to death and executed on 26 July 1960.


5. An order of canons regular established in 1120 and subject to Augustinian rule. It was suppressed during the Revolution.


11. These rules of exclusion, drawn up in councils from 583 on and taken up by a capitulary of Charlemagne in 789, appear frequently in customary law texts and synodal statutes from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Thus, around 1400-1430, in some dioceses of northern and eastern France, lepers had to undergo a ceremony officially putting them outside of society. Led to church to the singing of *Libera me*, just as for the dead, the leper listened to Mass hidden beneath a catafalque before undergoing a simulated burial and being accompanied to his new residence. The extinction of leprosy led to the disappearance of this liturgy after 1580. See A. Bourgeois, “Lépreux et maladriers,” in * Mémoires de la commission départementale des monuments historiques du Pas-de-Calais, 14/2* (Arras, s.1., 1972).


