

Humanitarian reason

Presentation of Chapter 1 from Fassin's Book «Humanitarian reason. A moral history of the present»

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Overview and focus



Humanitarianism is a mode of governing that concerns every situation characterized by precariousness.



The case study in Chapter 1 attempts to account for the policies and actors in France.

Quotes

«[...] what interests me here is **the form of government that translates social inequalities in terms of psychic suffering and proposes listening to the distress of working-class people as a response to their social difficulties.**

Toward the end of twentieth century **a new language** emerged in France **to describe social problems, their effects** on individuals, and the **possible solutions** for them. **The problems were related to exclusion, th effects were interpreted in terms of suffering, and the solutions** put forward revolved around the **activity of listening.**»

«Exclusion, suffering, and listening constitute just such a **semantic configuration** for the 1990s, one which we might qualify as **compassion based.**»

Critical questions

Research questions

- How has suffering become so firmly, yet so easily, established in our semantic world?
- What are the consequences of this representation of the world through pain?

Core questions

- Is language affecting the reality of viceversa?
- Horizontal vs vertical structure of classes: from the 90s, excluded vs included
- Psychiatrization of the victims of inequalities?

Questions provoked to me

- Geopolitics
- Right wing in Italy → politics of «help them at their original country»
- Not all the people from all foreign countries is victimized in the same way.
- Therapy is not a prescriptive approach. Locus of control is one of the major issues that can be faced with patients who suffer. Not all the poor need it. What about occupational therapies?
- Agency

Connections

Fassin refers to suffering as a wide and omogeneous feeling at the same time or at least he never address its aptitude in this French case.

Logic of exclusion might follow a certain pattern → 3 types of stigma: physical deformities, character blemishes and tribal stigmas → social distancing behaviours [Goffmann, 1963]

Omogeneity vs disomogeneity (criminals, violence, poverty, stigma)

Implications

1. I would claim that poverty is not always leading to suffering, but the lack of agency does indeed.
2. What if inequality was an higher interpretation of suffering?

Pain as a symptom of the social distress and not just a semantic configuration, but a simplification that later on, as an higher understanding of phenomena and processes, society would recognize as inequality?

Materials

- Didier Fassin 2012. «Humanitarian Reason. A moral history of the present.» Preface, Introduction, Chapter 1: 1-43. University of California Press.

Thank you

for your attention!

