

Exception? What exception? Foucault's state of convention

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Abstract

The notion of the 'state of exception' (i.e. the sovereign decision to suspend some or all of the suite of rights, freedoms and obligations associated with the social contract) understands that such rights and obligations normally exist and function as protections. Giorgio Agamben's work figures the contract suite's institutionalised presence in terms of this conceptualisation, and then contemplates a permanent state of exception. However, in Foucault's work on 'governmentality', the contract suite functions as a conceptual veneer, in the service of the state's self-preservation rather than as protection for citizens. This perspective has implications for the usefulness of the notion of the exception as a way of understanding modern political obligation and authority. It is in this context that anti-foundationalist synergies between Foucault, Hume and others will be considered, particularly with regard to the role of convention in a governmentalist understanding of the relation between citizens and the state.

Biography

Terry Eyssens is a doctoral researcher and teacher in philosophy at the University of Ballarat. His research is focused on the state's monopoly on politics and political positions in contemporary society, and on questions around the possibility of politics without the state. t.eyssens@ballarat.edu.au