

FOUCAULT AND CAPITALIST RATIONALITY: A RECONSTRUCTION

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I. Introduction

A certain understanding of capitalist rationality permeates Foucault's work. However the historical mode of Foucault's presentation makes it difficult to grasp the originality and the systematic nature of his analysis. In recent years, the work carried out by authors related to what has been dubbed the governmentality school has gone a long way towards repairing the situation (Burchell *et al* eds: 1991, Rose *et al*, eds: 1996, Rose: 1993). However, the emphasis of their work has been on liberalism rather than on capitalism.¹ The primordial relation between liberal modes of governance and capitalist rationality is not very clear in their work. It is the purpose of this paper to try to shift the emphasis of the analysis through reconstructing the framework of Foucault's conception of capitalism and its rationality.

I argue that understanding the double character of freedom is central to Foucault's understanding of capitalist rationality. The originality of Foucault's analysis lies in his realisation that capitalism manages individuals and populations (primarily) through freedom and not (primarily) through repression. I argue that freedom is the condition that makes possible the correlation between what Foucault terms as the accumulation of men and the accumulation of capital.

I would like to state a few disclaimers at the beginning. I am not going to discuss the work of governmentality theorists. Critiquing their work is not my aim. Rather, I treat their insights as my starting point in order to develop a certain reading of key Foucauldian texts. Secondly I am not going to reconstruct the Foucauldian concept of capitalist rationality as a whole. My aim is more modest and more basic. My aim is to point towards the condition(s) that make(s) possible capitalism as an order.

A few words are called for on the terms used. Foucault uses capitalism in an historical sense. It is in an historical sense that Foucault investigates the meaning and conditions of capitalism. Foucault understands three different things through the term capitalism: a) A political order which accumulates individuals and populations in a certain manner. Foucault calls this the regime of the accumulation of men. b) On the other hand Foucault understands capitalism to mean an economic system that is geared towards the accumulation of wealth. Foucault calls this the regime of the accumulation of capital.² c) Thirdly capitalism means for Foucault an order³ that is the basis of the two regimes mentioned above. Here capitalism is not just a political or an economic system; it is primordial and is the condition of the possibility of both. At this level accumulation is understood in a primordial sense. It is not yet differentiated into accumulation of wealth (economy) and accumulation of men (polity). It, rather, provides the condition for any such a differentiation.

I use the term primordial (*Ursprünglichkeit*) in a Heideggerian sense.⁴ It is meant to convey a simple but often neglected fact. We understand particulars only in the context of a 'whole'. However the whole does not reveal itself to us directly. It remains implicit. It requires a special effort to make it explicit (Brandom, 1994, Brandom, 2000). The 'whole' is the condition in the context of whose implicit awareness we approach particulars. We never encounter the 'whole' as such. However, we can make the 'whole' explicit through approaching particulars with this specific purpose. In our case *a* & *b* are particulars which are understood in the context of *c* however *c* is not explicit. It remains implicit. By concentrating on *a* or *b* or both, with the purpose of making *c* explicit we can make the sense of capitalism as a 'whole' explicit. One of the purposes of the present essay is to make *c* explicit. However *c* can only be made explicit by either concentrating on *a* or *b* or on both.

Lastly I use the term necessity and contingency in entirely historical terms. It was one of the innovations of Foucault to give us the notion of historical necessity. An idea or a relation may be necessary today but it can lose its necessity tomorrow and can become a contingency. Foucault claimed that historical practices are both empirical and transcendental. They are empirical as far as they are (in principle) "always surpassable" (Veyne, 1997: 228). However they are transcendental and hence necessary and "constitutive as long as they are not effaced" (*ibid.*) - as long as they are our present. Thus when I claim that the relation between the regime of the accumulation of men and that of capital is necessary I mean by that historical necessity and not any other sort of necessity.

II: Accumulation of Men and Accumulation of Capital

Foucault's analysis of the relationship between the regimes of the accumulation of men and the accumulation of capital provides us the space to reconstruct the condition(s) of the possibility and continued sustenance of capitalism as an order. It is normally understood that Foucault studies the strategies of the accumulation of men as the function of the problem of governance but what is seldom understood is that Foucault treats the problem of governance not in isolation but in relationship to the problem of the accumulation of capital. The problem is not just the governance but the *type of governance* that provides the space in which

hindrances to capital accumulation are the least while its possibilities are being utilised to the maximum. Thus the problem is not just one of producing docile bodies but one of producing docile bodies which are also useful. The purpose of producing docility is to maximise utility. The type of docility that hampers utility is unacceptable. Therefore the problem of governance in Foucault is the problem of the governance for capital accumulation (and for nothing else). According to Foucault, disciplines, which are "the 'techniques' for assuring the ordering of multiplicities" and enhancing governance, have the purpose of increasing "both the 'docility' and the 'utility' of all the elements of the system" (DP: 218). Foucault in general terms makes it clear that:

"The two processes – the accumulation of men and the accumulation of capital – cannot be separated; it would not have been possible to solve the problem of the accumulation of men without the growth of an apparatus of production capable of both sustaining them and using them; conversely, the techniques that made the cumulative multiplicity of men useful accelerated the accumulation of capital . . . Each makes the other possible and necessary; each provides a model for the other" (DP: 221).

However the problem is not just of showing how the system of producing docility is correlated with the system of utility maximisation and how the techniques used in one system could be projected on to and used in the other. Foucault's analysis points to a level deeper and subtler than this. Foucault's analysis points towards the fact that *how prior to this correlation and as the condition of the possibility of this correlation* there exists a more primordial relationship between the system of the accumulation of men and the system of the accumulation of capital.

It is not the case that there is one system for the production of docility - of governance and there is another system for the production of utility - of capital, which are then correlated and reinforce each other. Prior to this and as the condition of the possibility of this correlation and reinforcement, there exists, so to speak, a *primordial order* which is at *once* the way of governance and capital accumulation. The polity in capitalist order is already a capitalist polity. It is not just an instrument in the hand of capitalists. No wonder Foucault defines disciplines as "the *unitary* technique by which the body is reduced as a 'political' force at the least cost and maximised as a useful force" (DP: 221 emphasis added). Thus the capitalist government and the capitalist system of productivity and exchange are two sides of the same coin (HS: 140-141). In a capitalist system both polity and economy are geared towards the singular aim of simultaneously producing utility and docility. The polity and economy are equally productive in a capitalist order. In a capitalist system wealth and men are equally treated as capital. They are geared towards accumulation in a manner that maximises utility and docility of both simultaneously. Not only men need docility wealth also needs docility. Both men and wealth need to be bared from accumulating in non-capitalist forms.

III. Regime of the Accumulation of Men

Foucault says that "... the economic system that promotes the accumulation of capital and the system of power that ordains the accumulation of men are, from the seventeenth century on, correlated and unseparable phenomena . . ." (FR: 67). My purpose in the rest of this essay is to try to find out what makes these two processes inseparable. Since Foucault does not study the process of the accumulation of capital in any detail our only window to this is to concentrate on the process of the accumulation of men which is analysed by Foucault in considerable detail in his works. In what follows I shall concentrate on the constituent elements of Foucault's analysis of the accumulation of men with the sole purpose of answering the question

raised above. I hope that this will also provide the answer to our question concerning the condition of the possibility of capitalism as an order.

III.1 Capitalist Subjectivisation Regime

"Subjectivity" is defined by Foucault as a form of "organisation of self consciousness" (PPC: 253) implying that there may be forms of organisation of self-consciousness other than subjectivity/subject. I define manageable subjectivity as a subjectivity that has two characteristics; it has some degree of freedom/diversity and secondly this diversity is amenable to organisation under a singularity. We cannot talk of a manageable subjectivity without the presence of these two elements. Management techniques are not operable on individuals who are not allowed freedom. One cannot talk of managing slaves in this sense. Hence Foucault asserts "power is exercised over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free" (SP: 221 emphasis provided). Similarly one cannot talk of manageable subjectivity if diversity cannot be traced back to a singularity. Diversity that cannot be traced back to a singularity leads to "dangerous subjectivity" (PPC: 125-151), a subjectivity that is not manageable.

The apparent paradox of capitalism is that in order to increase the utility and productive capacity of individuals and populations it requires continuous expansion in the ambit of freedom and diversity. But in order to make individuals docile and hence governable, it needs to limit this diversity. It is on the maintenance of this delicate balance between diversity and singularity that the sustenance and continuity of the whole capitalist system rests. Curbing freedom and diversity would decrease utility and productivity and hence slow down the motor of production and innovation on whose ever-increasing speed the legitimacy of the whole system depends. On the other hand expansion in the ambit of freedom and diversity to the extent that it becomes untraceable to a singularity would de-link diversity from capital accumulation. It would become ungovernable (hence creating a crisis of governance) in the sense that it would no longer be a capitalist governance i.e. governance for capital accumulation. (and it alone)

Thus curbing freedom is not what capitalism requires. The continued existence of capitalism requires the continued expansion of the sphere of freedom. However, capitalism requires that this expansion be geared towards the single end of. capital accumulation. The problem of capitalism is not freedom but the intransigence of freedom, the possibility that freedom may take forms that are not traceable to the singularity of capital accumulation. Thus the problem of capitalism is neither servitude nor freedom per se, the problem of capitalism is the problem of the intransigence of freedom (SP: 221-222).⁵

Freedom is central for the functioning of a capitalist system not only as the precondition for enhancing utility and diversity but for its double role as the precondition for enhancing diversity and imposing singularity on multiplicity (SP: 221). Historically freedom has played the role of "imposing" singularity over multiplicity through the process of subjectivisation, through the creation of a subjectivity/subject. Two key concepts, which have been operationalised to create and justify capitalist subjectivity, have been very important, viz.: the notion of identity (in the natural law tradition) and morality (in the Kantian tradition).⁶

The notion of identity provides the focal point to which all diversity and multiplicity refers. In the natural law tradition freedom is defined in terms of being one's true/authentic self. The formation of capitalist subjectivity is closely related to the notion of identity to the extent that Foucault defines the meaning of the term subject in terms of the notion of identity: "There are two meanings of the word subject: subject to some one else by

control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to" (SP: 212 emphasis added). The form of power Foucault mentions here is the power of management. It manages individuals and populations by tying their activities to their identity, by referring back all diversity to identity and hence 'imposing' singularity over multiplicity. As Foucault puts it: "This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorises the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognise in himself" (SP: 212). This double game that freedom plays in the system can be understood as conceiving freedom as a centre from which rays emanate in every direction, only to converge back to the centre. Identity provides the basis of this convergence. The notion of identity and self-subjection are very important in this context because through them singularity is imposed not from above but emerges from within. It is important because if power is (solely) imposed from above, it can hamper utility and would defeat the purpose of the whole exercise.⁷

In the Kantian tradition morality plays the same role. Through Kant's conception of morality as self-determination room is provided for diversity but through the conception of categorical imperative singularity is 're-imposed' on this diversity. Self-determination is moral only to the extent that it can ultimately converge back to this singularity. Foucault considered the "form of a morality acceptable to everyone... as catastrophic" precisely because it is the imposition of a singularity over diversity. Similarly Foucault praised Greek morality because it lacked the conception of imposition of singularity over diverse moral experiences, in diverse domains concerning diverse strata of population. There was no single morality for all. Foucault praises Greek morality for having "several forms of freedom" (PPC: 245). In Greek morality there was "no one single domain that would unify all moral domains" (PPC: 261). Christianity effected this change by introducing the notion of morality as a singularity: "(a)mong the great transformations that Christianity was to bring about was the notion that the ethics of flesh was suited for women as for men. In the ancient morality, on the other hand self control is a problem only for the individual who must be master of himself and master of others and not for those who must obey others. That is why this ethics concerns only men and does not have exactly the same form when applied to relations with one's own body, with one's wife, or with boys" (PPC: 261-262). Modern capitalism derived its conception of morality from Christianity and applied it (with modification of course) to manage the ever-growing diversity that is the hallmark of capitalist societies.

The important thing to note is that the conception of morality provides the means to manage individuals and populations from within by creating a criterion of propriety within each and every individual. This is important again because it provides the basis for the management of individuals, and the diversity of their desires with the minimum use of overt oppression. This facilitates the minimisation of any negative impact on their productivity.

III.2 Capitalist Truth Regime

Foucault's overall conception of truth is fairly Heideggerian. The notion of universal truth is a dangerous chimera as it is a tool to impose singularity in the name of objectivity. It is a chimera because human finitude leaves no room for the transcendence of the sort that goes hand in hand with the notion of objectivity. Truth for Foucault on the other hand is 'produced' within discourse and it is meaningless to speak of truth outside discourse. As Foucault puts it, "... the problem does not consist in drawing a line between that in a discourse which falls under the category of scientificity or truth, and that which comes under some other category, but in seeing how historically effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor

false" (FR: 60, emphasis added).⁸ Thus truth is always an embodied and embedded truth. It is embedded in the overall discursive structures and is produced and reproduced through this very embeddedness.

The 'general politics' of truth establishes what would be counted as truth and what would be counted as untruth in a society (FR: 72). This 'general politics' of truth imposes singularity over the multiple truths accepted in any society. But what distinguishes the 'general politics' of truth in capitalist societies from other societies is its unique blend of diversity and singularity, docility and utility. The same double bind operates here which we saw operating in the subjectivisation regime. On the one hand the requirements of productivity and utility entail and demand increasing profusion and diversity of the multiple forms of truths but the requirements of capitalist governance demand that this multiplicity be traceable to the singularity of capital accumulation. All the diversity and multiplicity must converge to this single truth that defines all truths (FR: 72-73).

The capitalist truth regime plays an important role in this regard. The 'objective' truths, that are compatible and conducive to the singularity of capital accumulation, are constantly produced, reproduced and circulated about the individual, his body and soul so as to standardise/normalise his ways of acting and being (in the context of the diversities that are allowed). The capitalist truth regime ensures that only those ways of acting, behaving and being are considered normal and hence rational that can be subsumed under the singularity of capital accumulation. All other subjectivities are labelled/stigmatised as unnatural, abnormal, delinquent and hence irrational and are rigorously excluded and marginalized (FR: 73-74).

The particular function that the capitalist truth regime plays in this regard is two fold. First it standardises and normalises behaviour. It then presents that behaviour as the 'correct' and 'right' behaviour. Hence making sure that individuals accept it from within and it is not seen as imposed from above. Secondly, it invents/evolves procedures/techniques to gain access to individuals and populations. The purpose is to render them manageable. The capitalist truth regime creates the normative truth about individuals and populations. However it also provides the resources needed to have access to their factual truths. The truth of individuals and populations in both senses is needed to maintain their productivity and manageability at the same time.

The central theme of the techniques of correction and education is self-discipline. This is the essence of disciplinary technologies and discipline is impossible without self-discipline. Self-discipline is made possible through the production of a soul within every individual. This soul is the effect of the production of the truth of an individual (in both senses) and of the employment of the techniques of observation, surveillance and correction. The truth regime is productive in this sense and is directly related to capitalist production.

The capitalist soul is not a chimera or illusion but a real effect of the microphysics of punitive power and the general form of power derived from it. The capitalist soul is produced through a privileged access to the truth of individuals. The truth regime literally produces capitalist individuality. The capitalist soul is what makes possible self-surrender to the logic of capital (DP: 29-30). As Foucault puts it: "The man described for us, whom we are invited to free, is already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself. A 'soul' inhabits him and brings him to existence, which is itself a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body. The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body" (DP: 30, emphasis added). The capitalist truth regime through the production of the capitalist soul pre-structures any exercise of freedom from within hence fulfilling the dual needs of maximising utility and docility.

III.3 The Capitalist State

The state may be defined as the structure of legitimate obediences. Foucault uses the word state in two senses: limited and broad. The limited sense of the word state corresponds to the ensemble of coercive and administrative institutions, what Foucault calls "institutions of power" (HS: 141 emphasis retained). But Foucault claims that these great "institutions of power" are supplemented by and depend upon "the rudiment of anatomo – and bio-politics created . . . as techniques of power present at every level of the social body and utilised by very diverse institutions (the family and the army, school and the police, individual medicine and the administration of collective bodies). . ." (HS: 141 emphasis in original). Foucault's insight is that the structures of legitimate obediences are not only saturated in the 'institutions of power' but on the other hand are permeated throughout the social body. The penetration of these structures (relations) of legitimate obediences was made possible by the invention of what Foucault interchangeably calls society and population. Population is defined as "a group of beings living in a given area" (PPC: 83). Thus society can be understood as individuals in their relations.

The innovation of the bourgeoisie was to create these concepts and turn them into the object of government. It was said that "government not only has to deal with a territory, with a domain and with its subjects, but that it also has to deal with a complex and independent reality that has its own laws and mechanisms of reaction, its regulation as well as its possibilities of disturbance. This new reality is society" (FR: 242). The society and population as the object of government provide the way of penetration for the structures of legitimate obediences (power relations) deep into the social body. In capitalist societies "power relations are rooted in the system of social networks" (SP: 224). It is through these power relations rooted in the system of social networks and its allied micro institutions such as the school, the hospital, etc, that the state has been able to have access to and the ability to structure relationships (SP: 224). In a similar fashion it is through the power relations rooted in the system of social networks that the state has been able to have access to and structure relations between self and self i.e. to individualise (SP: 214).

It is here that we arrive at the second and broader conception of the state. In this broader sense the state would include both the state in the restricted sense and the whole system of social networks. This can be further elaborated/understood with reference to the concept of government. While state in the limited sense corresponds to the restricted sense of government as an institution (SP: 224), the state in the broader sense of the word corresponds to the broader sense of the government to include both the government of the individual (government of individualisation) and the government of population. The state in the broader sense is not an institution but a particular rationality of government, a form of political power (PPC: 24). It is to this broader sense of the state that Foucault is referring when he writes: ". . . since the sixteenth century a new political form of power has been continuously developing. This new political structure . . . is the state" (SP: 213). It is in this sense that the state has been the condition of the formation and development of capitalism and can be termed as the capitalist state.

The capitalist state is a totally new phenomenon in the known history of statehood. The way this is so can be understood by contrasting the capitalist state with the forms of state that existed before.

As against feudal societies where the state was essentially separated from the individual and society, in the modern period this separation between state and society cannot be maintained. In feudal societies the state functioned largely in negative terms in the sense that its basic relationship with individuals and society was that

of prohibition and inhibition (HS: 135). The state in feudal societies did not possess nor did it need the power over individuals and the social body that is the hallmark of the present times. The power the state possessed over the individual and society was essentially negative (HS: 136). The feudal state swings between the two extremes of taking life or letting live, it has no power over life in its positivity. Nor has it any interest in seeking such a power. The feudal state's relation to life has been pure negativity (HS: 136).

A new form of state has, however, emerged in the capitalist era. If the previous form of state swung between extremes of taking life or letting live this new state assigns itself the task of life administration (HS: 136). Power in the capitalist state is not exercised "in the name of the sovereign who must be defended" but in the name of "the existence of everyone", in the name of the "entire population". The modern capitalist state takes the responsibility for and "guarantees" the "individual's continued existence" by assuming the right to manage life. Thus modern state power is "exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large scale phenomenon of population" (HS: 137). While the feudal state was centred on the phenomenon of death, the capitalist state is centred on life; it legitimises itself as the manager of life (HS: 138).

The change in the nature of the state mentioned above has widened its ambit to include 'life' in its totality. In this sense the capitalist state includes 'every thing' [this corresponds to the early modern concept of 'police' as found in Cameralism and German *Polizeiwissenschaft* (PPC: 79)]. Thus the capitalist state is a 'totalising' force in the manner the feudal state was not. It must administer life as a whole. What Meszaros has written about the totalising character of capital is equally true of the capitalist state⁹: "(T)he capital system is (the) first one in history which institutes itself as an unexceptionable and irresistible totaliser . . ." (1995: 41).

Capitalist "state power", Foucault writes, "is both an individualising and a totalising [read socialising] form of power. Never, I think, in the history of human societies-even in the old Chinese society – has there been such a tricky combination in the same political structure of individualising techniques, and of totalisation procedures" (SP: 213). Nothing escapes the capitalist state.¹⁰

IV. Conclusion

There are two possible ways of understanding the relationship between the regimes of the accumulation of men and the accumulation of capital. One view is that relations are external to concepts and hence contingent. According to this view we would not have to conceptually look further than describing historically how these two different regimes interacted throughout history. This is not a Foucauldian perspective. Foucault's analysis points towards primordial relation between the two regimes - the relation that makes their contingent historical relation possible.

Our brief survey of the regime of the accumulation of men, as analysed by Foucault, points to a single conclusion. *Freedom is the condition that makes possible the primordial link between the regimes of capital accumulation and the regime of the accumulation of men.* The subjectivisation regime works on the condition of freedom. A capitalist subjectivity cannot be constituted without freedom. The management of this subjectivity is also impossible without freedom. Freedom is the means to produce a subjectivity which is capable of maximising utility without making it too difficult to manage. Similarly the capitalist truth regime works on the assumption that discipline must be ultimately based on self-discipline. Otherwise individuals and populations cannot be managed without hampering productivity. Once again freedom seems to be the central condition of the whole process. And finally, the state does not control through repression. It does not control through deduction. It manages through dissemination and multiplication. It is based on the strategy of

life enhancement and empowerment rather than curtailment. It curtails through enhancement and empowerment. Here again freedom seems to be the condition of the working of the modern capitalist state. It manages individuals and populations on the condition that it will increase their freedom and it presupposes that they are already free. Only then is it possible to develop populations that are maximising their utility and productivity and are manageable at the same time.

If my account above is correct it makes the correlation between the regime of the accumulation of capital and the accumulation of men clear. Capitalism is both a political and an economic order. It is based on the condition of freedom because freedom provides on both sides an indispensable element that is the condition for making the dual elements of productivity and manageability, utility and docility possible. It is true for both the regime of capital accumulation and the regime of the accumulation of men. Markets work on the premise of freedom but they need to be managed so that this freedom is used to maximise utility without making the whole system unmanageable. Similarly the regime of the accumulation of men needs to accumulate individuals and populations without making them unmanageable. Freedom is needed to manage both markets and populations from within. As Foucault clearly saw these two systems are interrelated and conditioned on each other. However this correlation is possible only because both regimes are based on, and conditioned upon, something primordial. That something is freedom.

NOTES

1. Or to be more precise even when they discuss the 'capitalism' side of the equation they tend to focus their analysis on the 'regional' aspects hence avoiding grand themes like capitalism. A tendency which certainly has basis in Foucault's own writings.
2. On a & b see DP: 137-138.
3. On Foucault's views on order see, OT: xxi-xxii.
4. For Heidegger's conception of primordially see BT and also Inwood (1999: 150-153).
5. This is why radical democracy is impossible within capitalism.
6. I am not implying here that these traditions are exclusive. In fact Kant provides a link to both.
7. Obviously this is not to imply that in a capitalist system power is never imposed from above. This is not the case. What I am trying to argue is that this is not the primary and basic mode of management in a capitalist system.
8. This is Heidegger pure and simple. Cf. BT sections 43-44 and Mulhall, 1996: 94-104 for lucid and excellent exposition of Heidegger's basic insight on this.
9. This is due to the fact that the underlying rationality is the same.
10. This is the ambition of this state, its nature.

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