



The social as a programme for governance: A Foucaudian perspective

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Abstract

In contrast to global theories of the state, certain thinkers have followed Foucault in seeking to reflect upon the nature of government within 'modern' societies. Linked to this is the idea of the emergence of 'the social' as a specific domain of government and a specific sector of practices, interventions, and knowledges. I attempt to get at the strategic notion of the state and governance that emerges from Foucault and others. It is also an attempt to consider how we might think about this 'social' sector as it appears in phrases such as 'social policy' and 'social welfare'.

Keywords: Governance; Foucault; social policy; social welfare.

Introduction

In contrast to global theories of the state, certain thinkers have followed Foucault in seeking to reflect upon the nature of government within 'modern' societies. Linked to this is the idea of the emergence of 'the social' as a specific domain of government and a specific sector of practices, interventions, and knowledges. I attempt to get at the strategic notion of the state and governance that emerges from Foucault and others. It is also an attempt to consider how we might think about this 'social' sector as it appears in phrases such as 'social policy' and 'social welfare'.

If one examines Foucault's works with aims of locating or defining the social, it emerges through the strategic notion of 'bio-politics of population' (1). The social could be conceptually seen as developing in the bio-politics of population as "a body of influences on individual lives that aims to administer, optimise, multiply it by subjecting individuals to controls and regulatory practices"(2). The social, in this view, could be seen as a disciplinary technique whereby specific sets of techniques, instruments, procedures and bodies of knowledge are utilised for the purpose of social control and the formation of a disciplinary society. Thus the social exists as a technique for ordering human life.

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How does the social act as a programme for controlling individual lives? This could be seen in the process whereby techniques of power are exercised with aims of development of collective habits, time-zoned life patterns and total/detailed surveillance on individual lives. The social acts as a control programme with aims of making individuals more useful in the production processes by the objectification of the individual to form a body of knowledge about themselves.

Thus the social can be viewed as reducing inefficiency of mass phenomena and making it more manageable by regulating movements thus reducing unpredictable ways to establish calculated distributions. Furthermore, the social also acts as a programme of social control by neutralising resistances to power especially for those who wish to dominate it. The social acts as a programme for social control as techniques of power could be exercised through it at the lowest cost economically over large majorities and in this process link the growth /extension of power with the output of institutions such as educational and medical. What is the link between the development of the social and the development of capitalism as distinct categories? Economic take-off in the west started with techniques for capital accumulation. These techniques for capital accumulation involved calculation and control of individuals: "administration of accumulation of men" (3). This is made possible by the formation of the social as a body of knowledge for control which created the technology of the subjection of individuals. As such, the division of labour is also produced by the social as a form of technique for individual subjection in the capital accumulation process. The social could be seen as providing a guarantee of the submission of forces and bodies under mass sovereignty and also allows individuals to become integrated into the political economy.

Donzelot identifies the social as referring to a set of phenomena which is used to a particular sector in which "diverse problems and special cases could be grouped together"(4); a sector comprising of specific institutions. This social sector is seen as existing alone and not merging with the judicial sector though it extends the field of judicial action. It also does not merge with the economic sector as the social is seen to invent an entire social economy which lays the foundations for "making the distinction between the rich and the poor"(5). Does the social react with the private/public sector? The social is seen as not merging with either since it also leads "to a new hybrid form of the public/private sectors and this produces withdrawals and interventions of the state"(6). Donzelot views the social as inducing new relationships between the public and the private sectors. The social is seen as acting across and reshaping existing and previous divisions. Donzelot further asserts that "the rise of the social and the crisis of the family are the two fold political effects of the same elementary causes"(7).

Minson sees the social as a regime of ethical truth such as moral ontology or as a kind of ethical thinking(8). The social as moral ontology provides the basis for value judgements and justifications. the social is primarily seen as an ethical entity in terms of assumptions of personalism in structuring ideologies, programmes, laws and policies which operate political values. Minson attributes the origins of the social in the emergence of political economy. The social is seen as development of certain kinds of knowledge concerning human conduct to able the processes of social administration and policy in the way in which social disorder is framed and also measures to deal with them. Minson is also of the view that the social, existing as patterns of reasoning, transforms human beings into political subjects by the process of objectification. The social, as a control programme, is viewed by Minson as "that exercised upon lower classes as relationships binding them into the political order" (9).

Polanyi views the social as "checks on the dynamics of modern societies as to the exact nature and causes of economic expansion"(10). The social is seen to act as a counter movement aided by legislature mechanics that are seen as "essential for the protection of society"(11). Polanyi treats the social as a form of Foucault's bio-power especially in terms of individual growth of possibilities and utility. Thus the social also becomes an organising principle in society with specific institutional aims and methods. Polanyi chiefly views the social as a "principle of social protection of society through calculative techniques with aims to conserve man/nature as well as the productive organisation as this relied on the working class"(12). It can be seen that the social becomes the Bentham principle of inspectibility for effective control by view of the social as a protectionist mechanism; a moral and intellectual advance for moral restraints of the population. Polanyi also views the social as acting through the private sector to later develop the political economy.

What is the Benthamian view of the social? It could be described as the scientific and economic treatment of the poor through the concepts of social mechanics as the intellectual main spring of the industrial revolution (13). The social is seen here as the eighteenth century "new social science of morals and legislation"(14) on the principle of utility which allows exact calculations. The social is also viewed as an attack on individualisation to forming collectives in the production process. The social is essentially viewed as a form of legislation to provide for individual solidarity and enhance social usefulness. The rise of the social is attributed to the industrial revolution "as having caused a social dislocation in people through the principles of social legislation"(15).

Gamble examines the rise of the social by an examination of the rise of capitalism (16). The social

here is positioned as "the need that industrialised societies placed at the creation of legitimate political institutions and government"(17). The social is seen as allowing governmentality as a programme of social control: "social control allows the rapid control of the masses for rapid growth of material wealth through the production process"(18). It is evident in Gamble's analysis of the social that with the increased emphasis on production generate great concerns about the character/control of the economy through conditioning people and also their resistance. The social is seen as conditioning individuals into calculated values to create consensus and the social is also responsible for the conditioning of the resistances of the working classes to social conditions by the deployment of knowledge and forms of self evaluation by objectifying societal relations on ethical and moral scales.

How does the governance of the economy and the political system work to link the social to anticipated effects in a particular form of society? It is through the principle of individualising whereby collective action through the state is used in the regulation of the economic system. The social is also viewed by social theorists as having effects that undermine individualism by the formation of collective identities and consensus of values in society via collective identities. Lukes views individualism as underlying the view that holds collective action through the state in the regulation of economic systems (in particular for welfare ends) as undesirable at certain established limits(19). This belief is based on the principle of individual liberty, methodological individualism and contingent claims about individual desires and motives.

The principles of individualisation are counteracted by the deployment of the social in the formation of collectives for aims of social control. Individualism also dictates that state interventions through social programmes should be kept to an absolute minimum. Nozick suggests that a minimalist state limited to the narrow functions of protection and enforcement of social contracts is justified; "that any more extension of the state in the name of social programmes especially in areas of morals, would violate individual rights and that the minimalist state is aspiring and right"(20). Furthermore, Nozick suggests that social programmes in the name of collective interests are "illicit"(21).

So far I have discussed definitions and operational structures of the social via social theories on the state and social control. I shall now examine the relationship of the social with forms of governance of the economy. Keynesianism, as a programme of governance that aims at representing reality as an economy that distinguishes without governmental intervention is in close relationship to the specific sector and practices of the social. The social is valued under Keynesianism and is treated as

programmes that seek to implement interventions into the market system for collective social interests such as social harmony, social peace, social co-ordination and in general providing solidarity. Keynesianism utilises the social along ethical dimensions to shape individual conduct and life. the social is utilised as a programme of techniques for interventions to: 1) regulate economic activity, 2) maximise the economic utility/potential for all (as the population is treated as a valuable resource that need not be wasted by social disintegration) and 3) state interventions to create possibilities for all as a form of collective growth. The ethical dimensions that Keynesianism displays by the utilisation of the social is that by government intervention, one could produce conditions that create equality of citizenship for collective peace and social unity.

Does Keynesianism establish the link between the economy and the social sector? The social is seen as a means of stimulating the economy by increasing demand through public expenditure. The social sector becomes a different sector from that of political economy. The social is viewed as good for the economy as the economic starts to fulfil social objectives such as full employment, jobs, access to education, standards of living and social security. Keynesianism and its close relationship to the social pose a major blow to the equilibrium theory of the economics of capitalism: the idea that in the long term the demand /supply for anything would be balanced by the price mechanism, so that resources would be used where needed most. But does the economics of capitalism solve the social programmes without any government intervention? Beveridge states that "the state must step in... the state cannot escape ultimate responsibility for the general direction of outlay by reference to social priorities and programmes"(22).

I shall now discuss the relationship of the social with liberalism as a programme of governance of the economy. Liberalism, as a programme of governance, seeks a limited role of governments through the notion of limited government. The view implicitly recognises that governments best serve the public interest by refraining from social interventions to achieve specific goals of its own and by limiting itself to the preservation of law and order. It is also held, under liberalism, that limited government is itself a necessary precondition of the revival of voluntary individual and e collective enterprise in all areas of life, not just the economy. There is the belief that the market, as a self-correcting mechanism, given time can spontaneously overcome its own mistakes in a way not open to government.

The position of the social as programmes of interventions is strongly undermined by the consideration of the market as a natural entity that needs to be left alone under liberalism. Social

programmes are seen as intrusions, wasteful of resources and as undermining the full utility of individuals to attaining their best economic potentials. What is the principle of individualism within liberalism that the social is deemed to counter-act? It is the notion of individual freedom: if the individual is free from all coercion by other individuals and from the state, then the individual will respond by exerting the self to the utmost limit of self potentials to the advantage of self and greater society.

The social as an interventionist programme, is seen as disruptive to the social fabric society by recognising that individuals have social rights. Powell writes "the translation of a want or social need into a right is one of the most widespread and dangerous of modern liberal societies"(23) and it can be seen here that the social as a programme of government is viewed as dangerous as it recognises individuals as having social rights: "it not only provides unlimited fuel for dissatisfaction, it also provides unlimited scope for fostering of animosities between one section of potential recipients and another"(24). Under liberalism, the position of the social is severely undermined and considered as an agent for disunity and social disintegration.

I shall now examine the relationship of the social to governance of the family. Donzelot identifies the family as both a "subject and object of government"(25). It is subject by virtue of the internal distribution of powers; the wife, children, head of family - this establishes the networks of solidarity and also blocks of dependence. The social could be seen here as inserting the family into the political economy through the processes of "acceptance of public order, stability, public authority and also public controls"(26). Thus the social as an administration programme is involved with the exchange of obligations and protections between public agencies and family authorities on themes of public order and control. It is through the social that public order is maintained: the state relies on the family for direct support.

How is it possible to ensure the development of social programmes of preservation of stability through the family while at the same time detaching it from direct political roles? This is also enabled by the deployment of the social as objectifying techniques and as methods of private interventions into family relations. Donzelot sees the social as a depoliticizing strategy for establishing the public sphere and to facilitate the development of a midway point between the private sector and the state.

What are the effects on the family by the utilisation of the social as distinct administration practices?

The family could be seen as becoming the point of support for individuals and the family, by the deployment of the social, also becomes a target by governments taking account of their complaints; families are made agents for conveying the norms of the state into the private sphere. The social, in relation to the family, could be viewed as systematically linked to control, surveillance and the development of morality for consensus aims of government policies.

Our current forms of political discourse are in danger of overlooking the importance of the social. What are our current forms of political discourse? This I would identify as ideologies which are economic rationalist. Hewitt defines economic rationalism as a conceptualising device that deals with the characterisation and definition of social realities as economic systems where social and political realities are expressed in terms of economic logic, often empirical and quantitative logic (27). The social, under economic rationalism, is subordinated by the use of economic logic whereby ethics and morality are undermined in society. Hurst suggests that under economic rationalism, the social programmes are seen as dysfunctional due to the prevalence of economic logic. The subordination of the social is defended by economic rationalists on grounds of economic logic as creating efficiency, flexibility and a more responsive society on the belief that 'true' realities can be located and addressed (28).

There is at present consensus favouring economic rationalism which is surviving the recession, and changes to policy direction can be detected. This is evident in the free-market policies of economic rationalism and micro-economic reforms, effects of which are the changes in role of governments by withdrawing many economic regulations, transferring ownership from the public to private sectors and reducing, or at least, stabilising the public sector's share of GDP. The subordination of the social is also evident in the contraction of the freedom of choice in areas of public spending, health care, education and social security. There is also a casual contempt freedom and privacy such as matters of national identity cards, tax file numbers, bank account regulations and bans on political advertising.

The extent to which economic rationalist policies are evident in our current political discourse is deep and this has the effect of subordinating the social (just as in liberalism) whereby the social is reduced to the economics of the market. The market is still seen as the arbiter of all values with minimal government restrictions. Under current economic rationalist ideologies, social programmes are measured by what the market would calculate its value to be and this appears to be the only criterion of social usefulness!

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