Foucault, Disciplinary Power, and the 'Decentring' of Political Thought: A Marxian View

1. Two of the theories Foucault criticised when he wrote, lectured, and conversed about discipline, normalisation, and power, are Marxism and what he called the juridical theory of sovereignty (which he held to be a core element of much modern liberal or social democratic thought). Foucault wanted to think of power in a distinct way, distinct from the way both liberal political theorists and Marxists do. In Foucault's view liberals and Marxists, however different they are from each other, have glossed over the workings of power in our everyday lives. Many commentators have suggested that Foucault has given us a new way of critically examining our social relations. We are now, they have claimed, in a post-Marxist (and perhaps post-modern) age in which the old categories have exhausted their critical potential. Are these 'old' theories with their 'old' categories (such as 'class' or 'sovereignty') rival or complementary to what has been called Foucault's "interpretive analytics of power"? (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983) It is not clear whether Foucault had a settled view on this, but he sometimes treated them as if they were rivals. Many of his commentators do as well, in some cases much more than Foucault himself.[1] In his 'Two Lectures', Foucault was more explicit than usual about his way of analysing and interpreting power relations and about how this differed from, and was (he thought) in certain respects better than, Marxist and 'juridical' --or, as Deleuze referred to the latter, "bourgeois"-- conceptions and theories.[2] Again, many of Foucault's commentators have been sympathetic with Foucault on these matters, that is, on what seem to be his criticisms of Marxian and 'juridical/sovereignist' theories and conceptions.[3] I will argue here that Foucault's account of disciplinary power, and his attempt to 'decentre' our thinking about power and politics, should be understood in a way that is complementary, not rival, to Marxian analysis and critique. The two should be understood as strengthening, not competing with, each other. With Foucault and Marx in combination, we have the potential for a more compelling critical perspective on modern society than if we used neither or only one of them. Foucault, I will argue, has provided the basis for an interesting elaboration of a Marxian functional analysis and critique of class society, while a Marxian framework provides just the sort of 'global' background that gives Foucault's 'micro-analyses' of 'local' power relations in modern society their ring of plausibility.

2. I will start by characterising Foucault's conception of Marxism's view of politics and power. The Marxian view of power, according to Foucault, characterizes political power primarily "in terms of the role it plays in the maintenance simultaneously of the relations of production and of a class domination which the development and specific forms of the forces of production have rendered possible." (Foucault, 1980a, 88-9) Power relations are thought to be rooted primarily in the economy and they are analysed functionally as serving, primarily, the interests of the bourgeoisie (in capitalist societies). While Marxists, apparently like Foucault, do not accept more mainstream liberal or social democratic conceptions of the role or the legitimacy of the state in a capitalist society - the 'capitalist state' as many Marxists call it - they, like liberals and *apparently* unlike Foucault, do believe that power has a 'centre' or 'focal point', that power, however pluralist modern society may be, is concentrated in some institutions with the result that some relatively small number of people have lots of power and exercise their power in such a way as to have a great impact on people's lives, including their everyday lives; only for Marxists the most crucial basis of power is control over productive resources and dominance in the relations of production, not the allegedly sovereign state. Marxian theorists and historians then try to explain the exercise of power in many other areas of social life (including state power) primarily in terms of the needs of the dominant class - the class owning or effectively controlling the major means of production. They emphasise the role of ideological mystification in securing general obedience and acceptance of the social order, and the role of repression - whether violent or not - in maintaining the relations of production and, in effect, the dominance of the ruling class or classes. (On Marxist conceptions of ideology see Nielsen, 1989.) They think power cannot, generally, be exercised legitimately until and unless capitalism is overthrown and working people, the majority, gain a substantial measure of control of the means of production; there has to be, in that way, a real social ownership of the means of production. That is central to the socialist ideal, whatever we may say about the idea of market socialism.

Foucault suggested that 'traditional' liberal and Marxist political perspectives misunderstand, or pay insufficient heed to, the nature of *disciplinary* and *normalising* power. I turn now to Foucault's account of what he regarded as this distinctively modern form of power.

3. As mentioned above, Foucault's 'Two Lectures' give us some sense of his conception of power relations in modern societies and of his views on how they might be fruitfully studied. In the second

of these lectures, Foucault outlined five "methodological imperatives or precautions" guiding his research - it is this second lecture that will occupy our attention here.

Consider Foucault's first 'methodological precaution'. Foucault believed that, for his purposes - namely, to come to terms with how power is exercised in modern society - the analysis of power "should not concern itself with the regulated and legitimate forms of power in their central locations", but "with power at its extremities, in its ultimate destinations, with those points where it becomes capillary, that is, in its more regional and local forms and institutions"; not with the general social role of some central institutions, nor with the principles which are supposed to justify that role and the power (or powers) associated with it, but with "the point where power surmounts the rules of right which organize and delimit it and extends itself beyond them, invests itself in institutions, becomes embodied in techniques, and equips itself with instruments and eventually even violent means of material intervention."(Foucault, 1980a, 96).[4] (Future page references to the 'Two Lectures', throughout this essay, will be indicated after the quote without reference to the year of publication.) "To give an example", wrote Foucault, "rather than try to discover where and how the right of punishment is founded on sovereignty, how it is presented in the theory of monarchical right or democratic right, I have tried to see in what ways punishment and the power of punishment are effectively embodied in a certain number of local, regional, material institutions, which are concerned with torture or imprisonment, and to place these in the climate - at once institutional and physical, regulated and violent - of the effective apparatuses of punishment."(p. 97) In other words, rather than theorise about when punishment is and isn't justifiable, legally or morally, or when state power exceeds its legitimate jurisdiction, Foucault wanted to study the actual practice of punishment. The practice of punishment has included techniques, rules, instruments, procedures, norms and strategies which are usually ignored by philosophical musings about sovereignty, the rule of law, and just and unjust punishment. Such typically liberal musings tend to divert attention from the exercise of power "at the extreme points of its exercise, where it is always less legal in character."(p. 97)

Foucault wanted, as he dramatically put it, to "reverse the mode of analysis followed by the entire discourse of right from the time of the Middle Ages."('Two Lectures', 95.) The "essential role" of this "discourse", "from medieval times onwards, was to fix the legitimacy of power"; specifically, to try to justify and/or criticize, and to delimit the power (or powers) of the sovereign authority or state. Foucault regarded this discourse as typically combining philosophical, legal and moral (and often religious) considerations in ways that have concealed "the fact of domination" in social life, "both its latent nature and its brutality", and this he thought to be as much the case - actually more so - when sovereignty is conceived in terms of modern democratic political institutions as when it was linked to monarchy.(p. 95) In the case of monarchy, the juridical theory was elaborated "to show the nature of the judicial armoury that invested royal power, to reveal the monarch as the effective embodiment of sovereignty, to demonstrate that his power, for all that it was absolute, was exactly that which befitted his fundamental right."(95) From a different angle, the "discourse of right" was oriented "to show[ing] the necessity of imposing limits upon this sovereign power, of submitting it to certain rules of right, within whose confines it had to be exercised in order for it to remain legitimate."(95) Again, Foucault held that this juridical/sovereignist discourse has endured into the present era even though its articulators (and practitioners) no longer uphold or even bother to criticise the divine right of kings.

What, in particular, has endured in modern public discourse is the assumption that power is to be understood as primarily residing in, emanating from, or possessed by a central sovereign authority or authorities; only now the sovereign is a liberal democratic state with law-making and law-enforcing powers and the power (and the right and duty) to protect citizens from external enemies and, at least in principle (it is often assumed) the potential to facilitate, democratically, through the free consent of citizens, the resolution or negotiatiation of the major disputes and conflicts among those citizens. The "spirit of sovereignty" is typically associated with the liberal democratic state.[5]

In Foucault's view one problem with this picture of sovereignty is that it tends to involve some misleading assumptions about power in modern societies, reflecting a narrow understanding of political and social conflict. Related to this, but distinctly, he considered this picture of sovereign power as having a latent (generally unacknowledged) function, namely, that of disguising or otherwise supporting the development of what he called disciplinary power "in its more regional and local forms and institutions" - clinics, asylums, prisons, schools, families, factories, armies, hospitals, etc. By fixing its normative gaze on the sovereign at the supposed 'centre' of political life the "discourse and techniques of right" - the language of rights and sovereignty and some of the dominant uses of this language, particularly in the domain of the law - tends to distract us from the manifold relations of power elsewhere, at the supposed 'periphery'. With closer scrutiny of the uses of norms in practices and institutions at the 'periphery', we might come to see our societies (and our lives) differently, to see that power relations pervade our lives in ways we hadn't imagined and much more than we tend to believe; but, Foucault hypothesised, that we might do so is part of the reason modern peoples are typically 'educated' or indeed disciplined into focusing, critically or uncritically, intelligently or unintelligently, on the sovereign at the 'centre' - that is, if and when we think about politics and power. He maintained that the theory of sovereignty, even after its utility for criticizing monarchy was exhausted, has persisted "as an ideology of right and an organizing principle" of Western legal codes partly because this has "allowed a system of right to be superimposed upon the mechanisms of discipline in such a way as to conceal its actual procedures, the element of domination inherent in its techniques, and to guarantee to everyone, by virtue of the sovereignty of the State, the exercise of his proper sovereign rights."(105)

The following passage suggests that Foucault was (contrary to the anti-functionalist strain in both his and his sympathetic commentators' writings) gesturing towards a form of functional analysis and critique:

> ...once it became necessary for disciplinary constraints to be exercised through mechanisms of domination and yet at the same time for their effective exercise of power to be disguised, a theory of sovereignty was required to make an appearance at the level of the legal apparatus, and to re-emerge in its codes. Modern society, then, from the nineteenth century up to our own day, has been characterized on the one hand, by a legislation, a discourse, and organization based on public right, whose principle of articulation is the social body and the delegative status of each citizen; and, on the other hand, by a closely linked grid of disciplinary coercions whose purpose is in fact to assure the cohesion of this same social body. Though a theory of right is a necessary companion to this grid, it cannot provide the terms of its endorsement.(106)

With that last sentence, it seems Foucault was saying (a) that a "theory of right" cannot provide the legitimating rationale for the domination involved in modern discipline, and (b) that it is nevertheless a "necessary companion" to the latter in virtue of its *disguising* and *depoliticising* function. There is a sense in which (a) is more problematic than (b), if (a) is understood as Foucault seems to have meant it. He seems to have meant (at least at this stage of his intellectual career) that it is virtually a category mistake to think that an appeal to human rights or to some ideal of democratic sovereignty or freedom can have any force when it comes to justifying disciplinary power, to providing 'the terms its endorsement', or conversely, to resisting it. Foucault stressed that disciplinary power does not employ such terms - rights, sovereignty, liberty, etc. - but is more entwined with scientific or pseudo-scientific categories or norms, 'normalising' terms and discourses rather than liberal/juridical ones. Thus, Foucault declared: "If one wants to look for a non-disciplinary form of power, or rather, to struggle against disciplines and disciplinary power, it is not towards the ancient right of sovereignty that one should turn, but towards the possibility of a new form of right, one which must indeed be antidisciplinarian, but at the same time liberated from the principle of sovereignty."(108) Something other than an appeal to liberal democratic values and ideals, including the ideal of popular sovereignty, is required; some other values or ideals need to be invented, Foucault seems to have been saying, but not socialist values either, since these have too much in common with the liberal ones, they are part of the same Enlightenment tradition which has so valorised science and used science as an instrument of domination.

It is precisely on this point that Foucault has been subject to criticism by such writers as Walzer (1988), Taylor (1986), Habermas (1987), Rorty (1991), Eagleton (1990), and Fraser (1989, 31 ff.). I will not be concerned here with these sorts of moral/conceptual criticisms or with the topic of Foucault's alleged 'normative confusions' (as Fraser put it). In the interest of more constructive engagement with Foucault's work, here I will focus more on point (b) above -- the claim that appeals to liberal democratic values and principles tend to disguise and depoliticise 'local' power relations.

Consider Foucault's claim that "right (not simply the laws but the whole complex of apparatuses, institutions, and regulations responsible for their application) transmits and puts into motion relations that are not relations of [democratic] sovereignty, but of domination."(95-6) This sounds like a Marxian claim about prevailing tendencies in modern capitalist 'democracies'; but this is followed by some remarks which are much less recognisably Marxian (or liberal):

> Moreover, in speaking of domination I do not have in mind that solid or global kind of domination that one person exercises over others, or one group over another, but the manifold forms of domination that can be exercised within society. Not the domination of the King [that is, the state or the government] in his central position, but of his subjects [that is, the citizens or the people] in their mutual relations: not the uniform edifice of sovereignty, but the multiple forms of subjugation that have a place and function within the social organism.

There is a kind of 'decentring' of politics here. Does Foucault's analysis of power provide an alternative to, rather than a micro-elaboration of, a Marxian theory of class domination?

4. Recall that in Foucault's view, the juridical view of power prevents us from adequately understanding the exercise of power in modern societies. He argued that, since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a "new mechanism of power" emerged which was "possessed of highly specific procedural techniques, completely novel instruments, quite different apparatuses", a form of power which cannot be captured "in terms of the relationship sovereign-subject".(104) The following is Foucault's account (from the 'Two Lectures') of this historical rupture. It is a long and difficult

passage, but I present it here because it is one of Foucault's most succinct accounts of disciplinary power and perhaps it will allow the reader to pick up on some insights, or even some mistakes, which I will miss, ignore, or misunderstand.

> This new mechanism of power is more dependent upon bodies and what they do than upon the earth and its products. It is a mechanism of power which permits time and labour, rather than wealth and commodities, to be extracted from bodies. It is a type of power which is constantly exercised by means of surveillance rather than in a discontinuous manner by means of a system of levies or obligations distributed over time. It presupposes a tightly knit grid of material coercions rather than the physical existence of a sovereign. It is ultimately dependent upon the principle, which introduces a genuinely new economy of power, that one must be able simultaneously both to increase the subjected forces and to improve the force and efficacy of that which subjects them.
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> This type of power is in every aspect the antithesis of that mechanism of power which the theory of sovereignty described or sought to transcribe. The latter is linked to a form of power that is exercised over the earth and its products, much more than over human bodies and their operations. The theory of sovereignty is something which refers to the displacement and appropriation on the part of power, not of time and labour, but of goods and wealth. It allows discontinuous obligations distributed over time to be given legal expression but it does not allow for the codification of a continuous surveillance. It enables power to be founded in the physical existence of the sovereign, but not in continuous and permanent systems of surveillance. The theory of sovereignty permits the foundation of an absolute power in the absolute expenditure of power. It does not allow for a calculation of power in terms of the minimum expenditure for the maximum return.
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> This new type of power, which can no longer be formulated in terms of sovereignty, is, I believe, one of the great inventions of bourgeois society. It has been a fundamental instrument in the constitution of industrial capitalism and of the type of society that is its accompaniment. This non-sovereign power, which lies outside the form of sovereignty, is disciplinary power. Impossible to describe in the terminology of the theory of sovereignty from which it differs so radically, this disciplinary power ought by rights to have led to the disappearance of the grand juridical edifice created by that theory. But in reality, the theory of sovereignty has continued not only to exist as an ideology of right, but also to provide the organizing principle of the legal codes which Europe acquired in the nineteenth century, beginning with the Napoleonic Code.(104-5)

Insofar as I think I understand Foucault, he seems, in part, to have been saying something like the following - keep in mind that this is a deliberately minimalist reading.[6]

Before the emergence of industrial capitalism in Europe, power was generally conceived (among elites?), more or less appropriately, as a relation between a central institution or authority, such as a monarch, and his subjects. The sovereign authority was bolstered by, among other things, a legal system that helped to ensure a certain distribution of land and of the products of the subects' labour. The exercise of sovereign power was primarily geared towards control of a territory ('earth' was Foucault's word) and to a certain way of allocating the items produced by serfs, peasants and other people on that territory. But this occurred with little or no scientific concern for such matters as demographic processes, reproductive patterns, the people's 'health' and 'welfare', the 'efficiency' of the labour process, infant mortality, life expectancy and many other more or less mundane matters. These concerns were closely linked, in practice, to the development of statistics and to the emergence of a conception of the 'population' and its rhythms as a manageable 'social body'. Controlling the producers of the products was not, in the days of sovereign power, the regular and intricate pastime it has become in modern times (the era of disciplinary power). In the heyday of royal power (in France at least, though Foucault surely meant to generalize to other parts of Europe) the sovereign had to be visible, in a sense, to be effective. The subjects were kept in line, at least in part, by intermittent, visible acts of coercion - extremely brutal punishments, for example - on the part of the sovereign, often surrounded by much ceremony and heavily clothed in religious symbolism linking social hierarchies to cosmic hierarchies. (Similar practices do occur, of course, in parts of the world even today.) Power was also exercised through the imposition and collection of taxes, and various legal obligations were constructed and imposed on the subjects. Insofar as there was moral reflection and debate on the legitimacy of existing hierarchical social relations, the tendency was to treat the 'sovereign-subject' relation as the central form of power in human communities.

But those were the old days. Slowly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and more rapidly during the nineteenth century with the development of industrial capitalism - when "bourgeois society" came into its own - power came to be exercised in much more subtle and diverse ways, though this was not accompanied by a decline of pre-modern or early modern ways of understanding and legitimising relations of power in terms of sovereignty - in terms of the rights and obligations of the sovereign state and of citizens in the context of such a state. So long as modern political discourse remains fixed upon matters relating to parliamentary politics (parties and elections, for example) or upon the constitutions, laws, institutions, and policies characteristic of the modern 'democratic' state - the new sovereign - we will miss what is most distinctive in modern power. In the modern era, Foucault stressed, people have been and are controlled, disciplined, and ‘normalised’ in all sorts of ways, in various settings and with varying degrees of success.

For Foucault, power in the modern era is exercised, not only by the state through legal codes and other, repressive means - though these ways of exercising power haven't disappeared or withered away - but also, and pervasively, in many other ways: for example, through the architectural designs of prisons, schools, factories, and hospitals; through so-called scientific disciplines - in the human or social sciences - implicitly, sometimes explicitly, dedicated to sharpening methods of social and political control; through the creation and perpetuation of norms that contribute to excluding and marginalizing some and to making others, the 'normal' ones, into conformists more or less obedient to authority, 'docile and useful bodies'; through administrative manoeuvres, techniques, and guiding strategies for 'conducting people's conduct'; through framing discussions in ways that ignore or marginalize the concerns and desires of vulnerable groups - those often stigmatised as dangerous or pathological in the context of an otherwise 'healthy' society; through the often subtle authority of psychiatrists, social workers, doctors, teachers, and others who are, due to 'scientific' training, deemed experts - people other than capitalists and politicians; through techniques of constant surveillance which help foster, among other things, pernicious forms of self-discipline -- what Foucault sometimes called "observation-domination"; and -- taking into account Foucault's ‘genealogical’ tracts -- through many other techniques and strategies of social control which have drawn upon or reinforced prevailing conceptions of health, sex and sexuality, morality, human nature, sanity and insanity, normality and abnormality, reason and unreason, responsibility, disease, and so on. It is not so much the sovereign at the 'centre' that has to be visible for the exercise of power to be effective; rather, it is the 'citizen-subjects' who have become increasingly visible. Increasingly since the dawn of modernity people are investigated, analysed, psycho-analysed, classified, registered, regimented, meticulously observed, judged, trained to 'look within ourselves' and to scrutinise ourselves to locate the key to our problems, again in various ways. To have a non-superficial understanding of social and political power in modern societies, Foucault insisted, we need to examine many overlapping factors: it's more complicated than the juridical theory (or Marxism) would have us believe. What we need to do is to examine in detail the tactics and techniques of organization, management, surveillance, and control of populations and individuals, including the forms of discourse employed in such processes. When philosophers and others meditate on the legitimacy of the state and the just society, when political discourse in general focuses on the state, attention is diverted from these new forms of control.

5. Nothing in Foucault’s account of disciplinary power seems to conflict with the idea of class domination under capitalism; indeed Foucault maintained that disciplinary power was ‘one of the great inventions of bourgeois society.’ But we need to consider Foucault's metaphorical conception of power as being 'capillary' as distinct from 'centred'; this idea at least *seems* to conflict with the Marxian focus on class. Power, Foucault suggested, "is not to be taken to be a phenomenon of one individual's consolidated and homogenous domination over others, or that of one group or class over others."(‘Two

Lectures', 98.) Rather, Foucault held, power "is employed and exercised through a net-like organization" and individuals "are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power." They are "not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation", "the vehicles of power, not its points of application."(98)

Although Foucault was not denying the reality of class domination or of state power, he believed that so long as leftists only focused on the distinction between oppressors and oppressed, rulers and ruled, exploiting and exploited classes, they would be overlooking the more 'immediate', everyday workings of power, the power that members of the non-ruling classes or non-elites exercise 'in their mutual relations'. (That may be a sensible bit of advice in some contexts; yet one might reasonably ask, how does talk of class domination and exploitation blur, rather than make more intelligible, the everyday exercise of power in, say, factories and offices?) At any rate, here is one writer's elaboration:

> Power is not simply what the dominant class has and the oppressed lack. Power, Foucault prefers to say, is a strategy, and the dominated are as much a part of the network of power relations and the particular social matrix as the dominating. As a complex strategy spread throughout the social system in a capillary fashion, power is never manifested globally, but only at local points as 'micro-powers'. Power is not something located in and symbolized by the sovereign, but permeates society in such a way that taking over the state apparatus (through a political revolution or coup) does not in itself change the power network. (Hoy, 1986, 134).

Power is not, for Foucault, just a matter of some dominant group or class (via the state or in some other way) directly repressing or coercing or oppressing everyone else. Often people, without being directly coerced or repressed, participate in practices which contribute to reproducing oppression or domination - of other people and/or of themselves. In this way many people are not *just* victims. When, without being forced (in some nonvacuous sense of 'forced') people adopt or acquire attitudes and ways of thinking which make them comfortable with, or complicit in, forms of power and domination in their own lives and in their own societies - not to mention other societies - it makes sense to say that they/we are not just victims and to see them/ourselves as agents as well, actively participating in cultural, economic, and political practices that contribute to, or reinforce, patterns of oppression and domination. Foucault stressed that most people are agents and not just passive victims of the powerful few; in Hoy's terms, that the 'dominated are as much a part of the network of power relations and the particular social matrix as the dominating'.

This is part of what Foucault meant in referring to power as both 'capillary' and 'productive'. He believed that coercion, control, manipulation, and the like, are ongoing, pervasive features of social life, emanating even from places and institutions other than official economic and political institutions, and that there are lots of interconnections between the various networks of power. Power is not simply a matter of these political and economic institutions running our lives. We are all more or less involved in coercive relations, more or less agents as well as victims.

What is unfortunate, in my view, is that Foucault, in making these suggestions, tried to distance himself from the view which he attributed to liberals and Marxists, that there is something like a centre to power.

The latter notion suggests that there are some people with disproportionate power controlling, to a significant extent, the lives of lots of other people, that power is concentrated among the few. Foucault, as we have seen, regarded this as true but also as simplistic. Power in modern society is much more complicated than that. Many of us are complicit in power relations, both coercers and coerced, victims and victimisers. As Foucault put it (here criticizing the juridical/sovereignist view),

> between every point of a social body, between a man and a woman, between the members of a family, between a master and his pupil, between everyone who knows and every one who does not, there exist relations of power which are not purely and simply a projection of the sovereign's great power over the individual... (Foucault, 1980a, 187).

Foucault's stress on the 'capillary' nature of modern power, remember, was also directed against the Marxian focus on class power, not only against 'juridical/liberal' conceptions of the sovereign state. Without denying or minimising the importance of Foucault's point, I think this also needs emphasising: the claim that most of us are both exercisers of power and the target of its exercise, and the related conceptions of power as 'capillary' and 'productive', provide no basis whatsoever for rejecting (or even downplaying) the idea that power is concentrated in the state and/or the corporate-financial sectors, or the idea that power is concentrated as a result of the class structure of modern societies. To understand why Foucault sometimes at least seems to have been presenting his conception of power as an antidote to the view I have just stated, we should, as Martin Kusch suggests, take heed of "the French context of the 1970s, a time when structuralist Marxism loomed large" - in some French intellectual circles. According to Kusch, "the very term 'power' had been reserved for the abstract level of class relations and structures" by people greatly influenced by Louis Althusser. Kusch says "the Althusserian Nicos Poulantzas" distinguished "between 'pouvoir' as the higher-level and genuine form of power of one class over another, and 'puissance' as the uninteresting and politically irrelevant omnipresent relations of power between individuals." Foucault "was making a point, not stating the obvious" by proposing, in this context, "that higher-level and lower-level powers are interrelated enough to be referred to by the same concept." (Kusch, 1991, 141).

Again, Foucault wasn't denying the existence of class power; rather, he was trying to show that, and how, class power (or elite power, for that matter) isn't *all* there is to 'genuine' power relations between human beings, and doesn't entirely explain *all* the important power relations between human beings. This is surely reasonable (particularly in the Althusserian context to which Kusch refers). It is surely right to say, for example, that a husband who is exploited by his employer and daily controlled and manipulated by managers, may also abuse his wife - whatever her employment status - and exercise power over her in all sorts of ways. And both may in turn be excessively coercive and abusive with their children. The children, in turn, may be involved in power relations in the classroom and schoolyard with other children. And the schools may be more or less disciplinary institutions moulding a new generation of docile and useful conformists, with teachers, school trustees, and so on, playing specific roles in a network of power. These things happen; they are in fact pervasive features of modern life.

Yet, I would hasten to add, this gives us no good reason for downplaying the power of a ruling class or ruling elite or to downplay the fact that they are in some important respects dominant. This may seem obvious, but, whether or not it is obvious, it counts against the idea that Foucault has provided a basis for overturning the 'old' categories in virtue of some new insight regarding the 'capillary' and 'productive' nature of modern power. But let me now argue this more thoroughly.

6. In another passage, Foucault claimed that

> the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state's institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries. (Foucault, 1983, 218).

What needs resisting or reforming or transforming, then, is not just the ways in which state institutions function to subvert human freedom, but also the very self-identities, the 'types of individualization' or 'forms of subjectivity' which are 'linked to the state' and which have been 'imposed on us for several centuries'. To give a better sense of what Foucault was saying here, I will put it in the context of his conception of modern power as 'productive' as distinct from repressive.

Foucault distinguished between repressive and productive power and regarded the latter as characteristic of modern industrialised societies. He thought the juridical/political theory of sovereignty and, in somewhat different ways, Marxian and Freudian theories --and combinations thereof-- were too centred on the notion of repression and were thereby obscuring the productive side of power.[7] Were they 'thereby' doing that? There are reasons for doubting this. At a *general* level, Foucault's idea that power is productive as well as repressive, probably is not quite as novel or even as theoretically pathbreaking as some of his commentators have suggested. What is novel, perhaps, is Foucault's application of the idea, his examples and his thick descriptions showing how power is 'productive' in specific social settings in specific historical circumstances. But it seems to me that there is nothing there, and nothing that is right or plausible in Hoy's account (see above) that somehow undermines, or diminishes the political relevance of, any coherent Marxian theory.

One sense in which power is productive, for Foucault, is in its relationship to knowledge. Walzer nicely elaborates on this -- while mocking Foucault's apparent pun on the word 'discipline':

> ...social life is discipline squared. *Discipline makes discipline possible* (the order of the two nouns can be reversed). Knowledge derives from and provides the grounds for social control; every particular form of social control rests on and makes possible a particular form of knowledge. It follows that power isn't merely repressive but also creative (even if all it creates is, say, the science of penology)...Penology is "constituted" by the prison system in the obvious sense that there could not be a study of prisoners or of the effects of imprisonment if there were no prisons. One form of discipline generates the data [including categories of people, for example 'delinquents'] that makes the other possible. At the same time, penology provides both the rationale and the intellectual structure of the prison system. There could be no exercise of discipline, at least no sustained and organized exercise, without disciplinary knowledge. (Walzer, 1988, 205)

Minson, in a more sympathetic discussion, refers to Foucault's "symbiotic conception of the relationship between power and its targets", a conception which focuses on the "mutually informing and determining nature of the relationships between a way of exercising power and its objects". (Minson, 1985, 47). What he means by this is that power, for Foucault, is often exercised in such a way as to 'create' or 'produce' forms of resistance which, despite themselves, reproduce or play into the hands of power. One example is the formation of the category 'homosexual'. In *The History of Sexuality: Volume One*, Foucault noted that homosexuals were medically categorised as perverse personalities; this, in turn, led to a 'counter-discourse' in which the very idea of a homosexual personality was used to bring about a greater degree of social acceptance on the grounds that homosexuality was, though pathological, natural, like other diseases and afflictions. (Foucault, 1980b, 101) Minson comments: "To characterize homosexuality in such terms today is the hallmark of reactionary anti-homosexuality" but "in the 1890s, the progressive sexologist Kraft-Ebbing successfully campaigned for the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Austria on these grounds." (Minson, 1985, 47) Minson also suggests that, in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault "illustrated in the case of the failure of imprisonment to eliminate delinquency, [that] unsuccesses in the exercise of power cannot be simply registered as such if, as a concomitant of this failure, the prison system played an important part in depoliticising crime." (1985, 48) The general point is that forms of discipline and disciplinary knowledge, under the guise of a scientific objectivity, have been integral to networks of social control even when they have been deemed progressive or independent of power.

This sense in which power is productive (or much more productive than during pre-modern times) is important. *Inter alia*, it reminds us that knowledge and power are intimately connected in modern industrial societies, often feeding off each other, and Foucault has substantially contributed to our knowledge of how this works in some important cases. Foucaultians, Marxians, and liberals as well, can agree on this *general* point. The significant disputes will not be here; disputes are more likely over details concerning the extent of the complicity of knowledge and power, and over the sort of analytical or theoretical framework best suited to a coherent interpretive, explanatory, and critical account of modern society. So the disputes are more likely to be over the details of the actual history of prison reform or of psychiatry (for example) or about how best to conceive the role of the state and of class conflict in these developments.

Consider an example directly relevant to Marxism. Foucault argued that power, in its modern disciplinary form, is not essentially a 'negative' phenomenon in the sense that it works by saying 'No' or by simply prohibiting certain types of action or by preventing people from doing what they want - through legislation, confiscation of goods or wealth, or violent state repression, for example. He noted that Marx's depiction, in *Capital*, of the use of labour and machinery in capitalist industry gives evidence of the productive side of modern power. 'Efficiency' was enhanced by coordinating human labour power through managerial supervision and techniques for channelling human energies in certain directions. (Foucault, 1977, 163-4) Minson puts it well:

> This [managerial channelling of human energies] allows the production process to be freed from political interruptions as well as technical obstacles to continuous flow production schedules. Disciplinary mechanisms, inside and outside the workplace, do not merely crush or alienate working-class people; they equally attempt to *produce* a particular class of person; 'the worker' is precisely a reconstructed character who will work for a capitalist.
>
> Not just any type of person could or would submit to factory discipline. The 'labouring classes' had to be distinguished from the 'dangerous classes' of the populace, or the *lumpen-proletariat*. Thus we see that behind [Foucault's] contrast between repressive and productive models of power, there lies a further contrast: between, on the one hand, treating the subjects of power as basically a *datum*, on which power comes to bear in its oppressive way and, on the other, treating them as basically constructed in and through the exercise of power. (Minson, 1985, 43)

While agreeing with the gist of these remarks, what Marxists might wish to add is the fact that, 'constructed' or not, workers are *treated* as commodities and as costs of production - as 'basically a datum' in that sense - in managerial calculations, and they do actually occupy certain positions in a class-structured world, even if, as Foucault suggested, they are continually disciplined to do so. The working classes *were*, at least partially, a product of power, in the sense that people had to be moulded and disciplined in many ways in order routinely and efficiently to work the capitalist's machinery. We can also see these processes at work when capitalist industries have moved into largely peasant societies outside Europe. These industries have had to take into account the specific exigencies of turning peasants into punctual, efficient industrial workers - a task that has not usually been performed without direct repression and coercion as well (without the powerful saying 'No', to put it in Foucault's more euphemistic terms).[8]

It is not the case, however, that Foucault has shown how power is productive, as distinct from repressive, in a way that is not readily captured from a Marxian point of view. Given the similarities between Foucault and Marx to which Minson draws attention, regarding the ways in which the working classes are, and always have been, subject to both productive and repressive forms of power, the significant differences between Foucaultians and Marxians on power surely cannot be about the very fact that power is 'productive' as well as 'repressive', at least not in the senses of these terms that I have been attributing to Foucault. The similarities between Foucault and Marx on claims about the working classes show that they both had an understanding of the 'productive', as distinct from repressive, exercise of power. This should not be surprising, for the idea that power is productive (as well as repressive) is, at least implicitly, recognized by almost any important thinker who has reflected on how social order is maintained and reproduced. Typically no regime, no matter how authoritarian, succeeds in maintaining itself *simply* through repressive methods. Repression may be necessary but it is almost never sufficient to maintain a stable form of rule. Even the Nazis, when they were busy establishing a police state, implicitly recognised the need for something more than repression when they also usurped control of the ideological institutions.

7. When I discussed Foucault's conception of power as 'capillary' as distinct from 'centred', I gave an example of a 'network' of power relations involving employers, managers, husbands, wives, children, teachers, and school boards. In order to stick close to Foucault's ‘interpretive analytics of power’, I did

so in a way that avoided any 'simple' imagery of a top-down exercise of power, or of a pyramidal structure somehow 'grounding' the chain of power relations. I want now, in concluding this discussion, to stress the inadequacy of that picture of modern power. What I want to stress is that the employer, the manager, the husband, the wife, the children, the teachers, and the school boards, participate in these power networks in a hierarchical, class-divided, as well as a more or less patriarchal, more or less racist society. Given that broad social and political context it is, I think, reasonable to ask: Would these power networks have the shape they do, or be nearly as harsh or oppressive, in a society that wasn't largely dominated by a relatively small property-owning class that, in effect, lives off the backs of workers - women and men of all colours, blue-collar, white-collar, pink-collar, paid or unpaid (as with the domestic labour of women)? Would people relate to each other so pervasively in such strategic, instrumental ways as they seem to do under capitalism? (Is the ‘will to power’ an intrinsic part of human nature?) Would schools be quite the disciplinary, normalising apparatuses of coercive socialization they are --as Foucault believed-- if the dominant economic institutions were meaningfully brought under democratic control? Could there be some causal connections here? Marxists think so, but Foucault, Foucaultians and many others as well, simply beg this question, as if it were not even worth asking, as if the very asking of it and taking it seriously were to engage in metaphysical fantasies, fanaticism, conspiracy theories, or some other perceived pathology. It seems to me that questions such as these ought to be taken much more seriously than is usually done in our intellectual life. Instead the questions are begged, and so people are diverted from pursuing reasonable lines of inquiry.

But isn’t there a danger in so decentring our analysis of power in the modern world? It is important, at least, not to lose sight of certain disturbing features of this world that combine to produce a concentration of power. (After September 11, 2001, with the Bush administration’s foreign and domestic policies, it almost seems ridiculous even to entertain the idea that ‘power has no centre’.) For example, it does seem no less true (indeed it seems more the case) today than ever that our major social and economic institutions are so arranged that the major decisions regarding the distribution, investment, and use of a society's productive resources are made, more or less undemocratically, by a very small minority of the population within an oligarchic market economy; and that this lack of economic democracy is accompanied by a political system in which periodic elections decide which oligarchs (or which of their favourite politicians) will be running the official political show for the next few years. In an age in which values such as democracy, freedom, and equality are constantly invoked in the public sphere, such a political-economic system is not likely to work without a great deal of population control, including ideological manipulation, and without various forms of divisiveness that stand in the way of concerted, organized opposition to the dominant institutions. Indeed it seems fair to assume that Foucault actually took this theory-laden hypothesis for granted rather than discarding it, again contrary to the usual interpretations. It is part of the (vaguely articulated) background of many of his more detailed accounts of 'disciplinary power' in more 'local' settings, and it is, I think, this 'global' background that gives his critical historical analyses their ring of plausibility. (Indeed, in the ‘Two Lectures’, Foucault maintained that, while the bourgeoisie “could not care less about delinquents, about their punishment and rehabilitation, which economically have little importance”, the bourgeoisie is *very* interested in utilizing “the complex of mechanisms with which delinquency is controlled, pursued, punished and reformed, etc.” [p. 102] It is at least partly because of their advantage to the bourgeoisie, Foucault was suggesting, that various techniques of social control have “come to be effectively incorporated into the social whole”. [101]) One need not say that all power relations can be explained in terms of their service to the bourgeoisie; but, broadly speaking, the rise and particularly the *persistence* of disciplinary power in modern societies does seem to be not only functional for the system of class domination but also, partially, amenable to being functionally explained in these terms. For why else would disciplinary power ‘come to be effectively incorporated into the social whole’? If Marx was right in thinking that members of the bourgeoisie directly or indirectly dominate most of the social and cultural institutions in capitalist society, it does not seem far-fetched to hypothesise that this dominance tends to give them veto power over the types of disciplinary mechanisms that come to prevail in these institutions. They may not consciously exercise this power but that is not essential to functional explanation (indeed functional explanations make more sense when conscious planning is absent).

Let me put the point another way: the fact that everyone is, as Foucault believed, involved in coercive relations in one way or another, is to be expected, *given* the top-down command structures of our economic institutions, highly autocratic structures that play no small role in shaping our lives, including the way we see the world, including our relations to each other; and *given* the market discipline to which, in varying degrees, the lives of most people, but not the very rich, are subject - not when they rely, as they often do, on massive state subsidies, protectionist measures, government contracts, and various forms of regulation and 'fine-tuning' of the economy by an interventionist state. (Then there are such things as tax breaks and loopholes for the rich, regressive taxation, and so on.)

These political-economic realities surely play a massive role in peoples' lives, in their 'local' settings no less. We live in an era, for example, in which hundreds of millions are sacrificed on the altar of 'free trade'. The idea of 'free trade' and 'free markets' has, since the dawn of industrial capitalism and European imperialism, been a useful device for the wealthiest corporations to keep wages down, to acquire a larger share of the world market, and to divert attention from their own operations and towards the state as the source of social ills. No country in the era of capitalism has ever substantially developed an industrial base or improved its average standard of living without heavy state involvement in the economy (including protectionist policies) and state spending. It is only when countries thus develop that the doctrine of 'free trade' or 'free markets' is pushed on weaker countries and on the populations of the rich countries.[9] What sort of human relations should we expect to obtain in such a world? Given a realistic understanding of the inherently hierarchical and exploitative structures of capitalist society, and given a non-evasive understanding of the historical development and expansion of capitalism globally, is there any good reason for thinking that, so long as we live under this system, we will be able to create a world without a great deal of alienation and suffering, without a lot of nastiness produced by a more or less fiercely competitive labour market and a culture of greedy individualism? In the face of the pervasive decentring of political thought, let me emphasise that the dominant socio-economic order in modern times is one that, even when things are going relatively well, even when the economy is 'booming', crushes people's dreams and hopes for a better life on a regular basis. It is neither 'nature' nor 'cultural backwardness' that does it; rather, it seems to be just the normal workings of the capitalist system.

These, at any rate, are the sorts of considerations that, in my opinion, should lead one to avoid construing Foucault's conception of power relations as 'capillary' and/or 'productive', as offering insights that are somehow being covered up by Marxian theory. Rather, it makes more sense to be more Gramscian here, to see Foucault as making a point, perhaps unwittingly, about just how pervasive power relations are *in a class-divided society*. What Foucault really draws attention to is the ongoing discipline, coercion, manipulation, and divisiveness that functions to keep those at the top comfortable - even though this often requires more subtle methods of social control than strictly repressive methods. It makes more sense, that is, to see Foucault's conception of power as 'capillary' and 'productive' as cohering nicely with what Marxists for a long time have been saying about the nature and functioning of social institutions in class-divided societies, especially where the dominant class is a small minority of the population; and especially in modern societies where 'the masses' have achieved some level of political influence and, as a result, the powerful must at least pay lip service to democratic ideals. In this situation, ‘productive’ power has, surely, acquired a central role in the maintenance of the social order.

It might be said that I have missed the point of the many criticisms of class reductionism - whatever that phrase is supposed to mean. In everything I have been saying so far it is just assumed, is it not, that class structure and class relations are always primary in social explanations? Or, to give another reading to 'reductionism', have I not been assuming that every form of social and poltical conflict, despite appearances, is really a form of class conflict? Moreover, it might be added, Foucault's point wasn't to deny the significance of class altogether, but to deny that every form of oppression, every kind of power relation between human beings, can be explained in terms of class or the economic structure of society. To these and similar charges of reductionism, I would remind the reader that my argument was not that class explains everything, or every important thing; nor did I assume or claim that all forms of conflict are, despite appearances, disguised forms of class conflict; nor did I claim or assume that class oppression is morally more important than all other forms of oppression. Rather, I argued (a) that Foucault's notion of power as capillary and/or productive perhaps makes more sense within a framework of class analysis than it otherwise would (it both strengthens and is strengthened by such a Marxian framework); and, minimally (b) that class analysis, a central element of Marxian theory, is not inherently in conflict with Foucault's notion of power as capillary and/or productive. I did so because these conceptions have often been put forth, sometimes by Foucault himself, as a way of diminishing the metaphor of social power as having a centre and as a way of averting our critical eyes from the persistent, deeply consequential concentration of power that is the hallmark of a system of class domination.

NOTES

1 Hoy (1986), Hindess, (1996), and Kusch, (1991) are only three examples. But most of the authors in Gordon, Burchell, and Miller, eds. (1991) and in Caputo and Yount, eds. (1993), either assume or contend that Foucault's accounts of power and of the 'constitution of subjects' more or less undermine 'traditional' liberal and Marxist theoretical perspectives. This view of the significance of Foucault has certainly influenced, or at least been accepted by, many post-modern writers. See, for example, Deleuze's work on Foucault (Deleuze, 1993, 23-43). One exception to the common anti-Marxian reading of Foucault is Gold (1990). My argument is similar to Gold's in that I try to show how Foucault's account of power meshes nicely with a Marxian theory of class domination even if all the power relations which Foucault wrote about cannot be functionally explained in terms of their beneficial effects on the mode of production. Nevertheless, I do not rule out the possibility of such a functional explanation of the *persistence*, as distinct from the origins, of such power relations. Functional explanations do not necessarily explain every genealogical detail of modern practices involving power, but they may, nevertheless, explain why such practices persist and become integrated into the broader society. This seems to me more important than explaining every detail about the origins of these practices. Also, unlike Gold I argue that Foucault himself can be understood as deploying a functional analysis and critique. Foucault may have been critical of functional Marxism, but this is not because Foucault was opposed to all forms of functional analysis. He used functional analysis and even functional explanations himself; or so I will argue.

2 These lectures were delivered in France in January, 1976, the year after the French version of *Discipline and Punish* was published. They were first published in Italian in 1977 and then translated into English by Kate Soper. See Foucault (1980a, 78-108).

3 Merely one example is Pringle and Watson (1992, 53-73). But see the references in footnote 1.

4 In the first quoted sentence 'legitimate' probably means constitutionally sanctioned forms of state authority, not morally justified or justifiable state authority.

5 See Hindess (1996) on Hobbes's and Locke's conceptions of sovereign power, conceptions which Hindess then criticizes from a 'Foucaultian' perspective.

6 Other than Foucault's writings, I found the following sources helpful: Minson (1985), Philp (1990, 67-81), Fraser (1989), Walzer (1988), Caputo and Yount (1993, 3-26), and Butler (1993, 81-100).

7 On this point see Foucault (1984, 61 ff.), and the first of 'Two Lectures' (1980a, 92-5); also Foucault (1980b), and Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983, 128-33).

8 A Marxian scholar mentioned that fact in some comments on a rough draft. He also pointed out - what he called an "unFoucaultian point" - that "the very disciplining which is so humanly oppressive is the very thing Marxism cites as potentially *empowering* the industrial working class...to act collectively in an effective manner" to reform and eventually to challenge and revolt against capitalism in favour of a new, socialist organization of economic life. He maintains that "it is Marxism's dialectical advantage to see how something good can result from evil." One may doubt, as I do, that 'seeing how something good can result from evil' is a particularly *Marxian* virtue or insight, while agreeing with the claim that Marx had a better grasp than Foucault of certain ways in which the forms of discipline to which the working classes are subject at least may, potentially, be empowering. A relevant passage from Marx is in the second last chapter of *Capital. Volume One*, where Marx writes about the industrial working classes eventually becoming "disciplined, united, organised by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself." (Marx, 1978, 438.)

9 I do not assert these things just out of the blue or without concern for accuracy. There are many good sources in which there is argument and evidence for these claims. Here are some examples: Gershenkron, (1962); Chomsky (1993, 3 – 118); Chossudovsky, (1998); Amin (1990); Moore Lappe (1986, 77 – 94); Seabrook (1991); Manley (1991); Semmel (1970); and George (1992).

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