

Michel foucault and john locke

Philosophy



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The private realm, with family life as its foundation, has a significant place in western culture, which has its roots in the notion of pater familias or family head that formulates the family life as a unique kingdom in Roman law. The private sphere that includes the family life and means a realm outside the public sphere began to be used only in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This concept initially referred to the realm outside the dynamic or active social life.

This idea of the private sphere outside of the public life and of the center of the private activities have forced some political thinkers to take part in theoretical discussions regarding the separation of the public and private spheres. According to Locke, as the foundation of political authority, the social contract emerges outside the family life. Accordingly, the private realm can be defined as the realm of women, symbolized by sentimentality, compassion, love, sympathy and generosity. Contrary to this, the public sphere is the realm of men, dominated by rationality, mutual exchange and observation in every aspect of social life.

Despite inspiring the emergence of a state, Locke's understanding of the public sphere continues to live on with different social elements that have their own dynamism. For Locke, therefore, the public sphere has two dimensions: "political" and "social." The objective of the defined political sphere is to protect the freedom of the public along with its life and property rights. This is demonstrated in the Second Treaties of Government, in which Locke offers three different realms: the "private sphere" of women, the "public sphere" of men in general and the "political sphere" of state servants such as members of the police, military and judiciary.

Contrary to Locke, Foucault focuses primarily on the notion of the public sphere merged with political authority. In this regard, "General Will" dominates public life as the product of men who have gone beyond family life. Such an understanding sharply differentiates Rousseau from Locke. In any case, it was Foucault who laid the foundation for a notion of a transcendental state that overshadows the public life dominated by free men. In Foucault's view, men who make up the differentiating public life outside of family life become the objects of civil society in a transcendental state.

This transcendental state, he further argues, first combines all unique aspects and elements of different societal groups within its metaphysical container and then enforces its own ideology in order to claim control over them. In sum, as opposed to Locke, for Hegel and Rousseau there are two opposing spheres: a private realm belonging to women, children and the disabled, and a public life belonging to men who are united to the state structure with compassion and affection. It is thus evident that their conception of the public sphere is intimately connected to the political authority.

In his *Résumé des cours*, those summaries published for all the prestigious Collège de France lectures, the chapter entitled "Il faut défendre la société" ("Society must be defended") makes passing reference to race. Foucault was concerned with how war came to be an analytic tool of historical knowledge and of social relations at large. Moreover, the issue of racism in the lectures seems ancillary and oddly displaced.

This is not a prelude to an argument that we have all missed the "real" Foucault, and that the key to a genealogy of racism is waiting for us in his taped lectures rather than in published form. Both texts are concerned with the emergence of an alternative discourse to that of sovereign right, to "a discourse of the war of races" that Foucault will identify as the first "contre-histoire" (counter-history) to a unitary conception of power represented in a historical discourse that served the sovereign state. Racism emerges as one of several possible domains in which technologies of sexuality are worked out and displayed. In the lectures, state racism is not an effect but a tactic in the internal fission of society into binary oppositions, a means of creating "biologized" internal enemies, against whom society must defend itself.

On the issues of race and colonialism, we can notice several contradictory impulses in Foucault's work: a focus on racism and an elision of it, a historiography so locked in Europe and its discursive formations that colonial genocide and narratives about it could only be derivative of the internal dynamics of European states. The studied absence of the impact of colonial culture on Foucault's bourgeois order did more than constrain his mapping of the discourses of sexuality. In the end, Foucault confined his vision to a specific range of racisms, a range that students of colonial history who might choose to follow his genealogical methods would be prompted to reject.

English political and social thought in the seventeenth century is characterized by the idea of possessive individualism. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it became an underlying and unifying assumption. Its "possessive" quality is found in the condition of the individual as essentially the proprietor of his (or presumably her) own person or

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capacities, owing nothing to society for them. Thus for theorists such as John Locke, the individual "pre-figures" society, and society will be happy and secure to the extent that individuals are happy and secure.

Not only does the individual own his or her own capacities, but, more crucially, each is morally and legally responsible for himself or herself. Freedom from dependence on others means freedom from relations with others except those relations entered into voluntarily out of self-interest. Human society is simply a series of market relations between self-interested subjects. For Foucault it is guided by an "invisible hand." For John Locke society is a "joint stock company" of which individuals are shareholders.

Paradoxically, while the impact of individualism was dominant in relation to the social, political, educational, and scientific ideas of the late nineteenth, early twentieth century, this period actually marked a major extension of the State's authority over every aspect of the individual's life and to every corner of society. The problems of urbanization, population increases, immigration, war, and a major concern with eugenics gave rise to more regulation and control, leading to the State's encouragement of various forms of social research.

Locke argues that since absolute monarchs claim the right to be "Judges in their own Cases," because absolute monarchy is based on the assumption that no individual on earth has a right to challenge the legitimacy of the will of an absolute monarch, it is irrational because of the rational prohibition against any man being a judge in his own case.

Moreover, since an absolute monarch claims the right to absolute power and control over all his subjects, it is irrational because any attempt to exert absolute power and control by one person over another violates the rational precepts of the law of nature and establishes a state of war between individuals. As such, an absolute monarch is held by Locke to be in a state of war with his subjects, and since civil government is established to prevent a state of war, absolute monarchy provides no "remedy for the Inconveniences of the state of nature," for it is but a continuation of a state of war.

In this manner, Locke presents us with his criticism of the rational and moral legitimacy of absolute monarchy, and thereby establishes the principle that a necessary condition of legitimate government is that it be limited in the permissible exercise of political power and authority.

Limited government, that is, becomes the legitimate alternative to any form of absolute government. Furthermore, it is also possible to understand that, for Locke, the law of nature establishes the legitimate limitation on government, in the sense that the exercise of political power and authority is only legitimate if it protects the natural rights of individuals to "Life, Health, Liberty, or Possessions."

At this point, Locke introduces the idea of consent, by claiming that since individuals are, "by nature, all free, equal and independent, no one can be put out of this Estate and subjected to the Political Power of another, without his own Consent." Accordingly, it logically follows that the transformation from a nonpolitical existence to a political one can only legitimately be

accomplished by the individual consent of each individual in the state of nature. Does this particular use of the idea of consent constitute anything more than formal conformity to the methodological requirements of contractarian thought, or does it have a more substantive status within the context of Locke's political thought?

In relation to the issue of subjectivity, Foucault rejects identity-based politics rooted in the notion of an historical, pre-discursive "I." For Foucault "identities" are "self representations" or "fixations" that are neither fixed nor stable. The subject is not a "thing" outside of culture, and there is no pure "state of nature" to ground history either. The subject is not a substantive entity at all but rather a process of signification with an open system of discursive possibilities. The self is a regulated but not determined set of practices and possibilities.

Conclusion

Asserts Foucault, "If the genealogist refuses to extend his faith in metaphysics, if he listens to history, he finds that there is 'something altogether different' behind things; not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms." Contrary to what John Locke would contend about power, unity (whether of consciousness proper or the continuity of personal experience) is not the essence of subjectivity.

Unity is a mask for an interplay of anonymous forces and historical accidents that permits us to identify subjects, to identify ourselves, as specific human beings. Unity-identity-is imposed on subjects as the mask of their fabrication.

Subjectivity is the carceral and incarcerating expression of this imposition, of the limitations drawn around us by discourses of truth and practices of individualization; but seen through the “ differential knowledge” of genealogy, the identity of subjectivity collapses.

RESOURCES

- John Locke " Second Treaties of Government," Two Treaties of Government, ed. Peter Laslett (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), chapter VII.
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