

Foucault, Michel (1982): The Subject and Power

The objective of Foucault in this paper is to identify different modes of objectification in which human beings are made subjects in their culture and to create a history of these different modes. The main theme of his research is not power but the subject. He finds three main modes of power, these are: 1. Mode of inquiry that leads to a status of "science" (e.g. objectivizing the speaking subject in linguistics or the productive subject in economics or just the matter of being alive in biology). 2. Dividing practices, which divides the subject from himself or from others (e.g. the "mad" from the "sane", the "sick" from the "healthy" or the "criminals" from the "good boys"). 3. The ways humans turn themselves into subjects (e.g. recognize themselves as subjects of sexuality). In the following are the main points summarized from this work.

Why Study Power? The Question of the Subject

- Humans are placed in relations of production, signification and power.
- Need of a new economy of power relations.
- Role of philosophy is to keep watch over the excessive powers of political rationality.
- Goal is to analyze specific rationalities. → Taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as starting point & to bring to light power relations
- Characteristics of anti-authority struggles:
 - They are transversal and not limited to one country.
 - Question the status of the individual and asserting the right to be different.
 - Attacking everything which separates the individual from others and communal participation (= struggles against the government of individualization).
 - Opposed to deforming and mystifying representations imposed on people.
 - Have no dogmatic belief and ask the question "Who are we?"
 - Opposed to any form of power which makes individuals subjects.
- Three types of struggles:
 - Against ethic, social and religious forms of domination (prevailed in the feudal period).
 - Against forms of exploitation which separates individuals from production (predominated in the nineteenth century).
 - Against forms of subjectivity and submission which ties the individual to himself and submits him to others (reigns supreme today).

How Is Power Exercised?

- Derive from fundamental social and economic processes.
- Linked with the production of the truth – the truth of the individual himself.
- Christian institutions: "Knowing the insides of people's minds, exploring their souls, making them reveal their inmost secrets."
- State's power is both an individualizing and totalizing form of power as a new form of pastoral power (set of institutions and individualizing tactics).
- Problem is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are. → Get rid of simultaneous individualization and tantalization of modern power structures.

What constitutes the specific nature of power?

- Power implies that it is exercised by certain persons over others.
- Communication as very important part of power.
- Power exists only when it is put into action. → Power as set of actions upon others actions.
- To govern is to structure the possible field of actions of others.
- Freedom must exist for power to be exercised.
- Power as an "agonism" (implies reproduction).

How is one to analyze the power relationships?

- Analyze institutions from the standpoint of power relations: mechanisms that are designed to ensure the survival of the institution.
- Power relations are deeply rooted in the social nexus.
- Analysis must examine the system of differentiations which permit one to act upon others (determined by law, tradition, privilege, economics, culture, etc.).

Relations of power and relations of strategy

- Power relations cannot be reduced to a study of institutions.
- Power strategies are the totality of the means the implementation of power.
- Final moment of reaching power: "... when stable mechanisms replace the free play of antagonistic reactions."
- Winning strategy: No direct confrontation (subtlety).