

An examination of Foucault's life politics by historical materialism

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Abstract: Today, with the continuous development of social productive forces, society continues to form more complex social relations and production relations. Life politics criticism is a kind of life politics based on Foucault's political economy criticism as an interpretation path. This interpretation path inherits Marx's theoretical resources and combines the current characteristics of The Times, and uses the critical paradigm of political economy to excavate the current life politics issues, to achieve the purpose of life politics criticism. As a theoretical paradigm for analyzing social existence, life politics presents us with a new perspective on the formation and operation of the basic principles of modern society. This paper explores the current life politics issues, so as to achieve the purpose of criticizing life politics, in order to enrich the content of Foucault's vital-political theory as a theoretical complement to analysing and understanding the way in which modern society operates, and to explore the contemporary value of historical materialism in this dimension, and to stimulate the criticality of historical materialism.

1. Marx laid the foundation for the life politics thought

Foucault once said, "I often quote Marx's concepts, sentences and articles, but I do not think it is necessary to quote the source in the footer and attach an irrelevant comment... For this reason I am considered not to quote Marx. Do physicists feel the need to quote Newton or Einstein when studying physics?". It can be seen that Marx had a profound influence on Foucault, and many ideological elements in Marx's concept of historical materialism also laid the foundation for Foucault's life politics.^[1] The influence is multifaceted.

Marx's critique of political economy contains the birth of the critique of life political economy, which is mainly reflected in the "theological governance" dimension of religious criticism and the "population" dimension of political economy criticism. Although there is a big difference between Marx's critique of life politics and political economy criticism, the former takes "the logic of life power" as the object of criticism. While the latter criticizes "the logic of capital power". But Foucault's life politics is centered on critical power, and the fundamental point of the formation of this right is based on Marx's criticism of religion and capital, and Marxist criticism of religion provides important enlightenment for the formation of life politics.^[2] The first is the criticism of religion, "the criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism". Marxism emphasizes religion as an ideological tool, which is used to maintain the existing social order and cover up class contradictions.^[3] Through

deconstructing religion, Marx reveals how religion affects individual lives and behaviors. Foucault's views on the politics of life further developed this idea, and his study in a missionary school made him more concerned with how the body is disciplined and controlled by religious and ethical concepts. In Foucault's life politics, Foucault showed that power gradually tamed individuals by shaping their moral values and norms of behavior, making them easier to file and manage. This view implies Marx's criticism of religion, and at the same time, it is integrated with his own experience to further focus on the life and management of individuals, laying the foundation for his later in-depth study of power, knowledge and social institutions.

In addition, the critique of political economy, Marx's political economy, provides a certain theoretical basis for the politics of life. After ending his criticism of religion, Marx began to turn to political economy criticism. "After the divine image of man's self-alienation was exposed... The criticism of heaven becomes the criticism of earth, the criticism of religion becomes the criticism of law, and the criticism of theology becomes the criticism of politics. Marx, with political economy as its core, takes labor as its starting point and explains that the real source of wealth is surplus value, fully revealing the core of capitalism.^[4] It is formally remunerated at its full value, but in reality it is exploited; Formally "free", in fact enslaved, in form isolated, in fact social labor. At the same time of Marx's criticism of the capitalist, showing the capitalist's exploitation and exploitation of the laboring worker, and the capitalist's management of the worker is the worker as an alienated person and the abstract concept of population placed in the logical relations of capital for analysis. This kind of Marx's exploration of production and production relations in capitalism, social structure in economic system and the logic of capital power can be seen in Foucault's life politics similar analytical path.^[5] Similar to Marx's political economy, life politics reflects how the relations of production in capitalist society profoundly affect the lives of individuals through the management of individual body, health, fertility and other aspects. Foucault's view reveals that in the capitalist economic system, individual life becomes the product of production relations and market competition, and once labor force becomes a commodity, it means the beginning of the domination of capital. People begin to lose their humanistic characteristics and become just an abstract concept "population" in the logic of capitalism, and then become the object of social control and discipline. The transformation of the problem is also gradually shifting from the criticism of political economy to the criticism of life politics. Foucault's theory of life politics inherited Marx's thinking on the relationship between the social foundation and the superstructure, and also expanded the application of this thought in power relations.

In the comparison between political economy and Foucault's theory of life politics, we can find that political economy provides Foucault with an economic foundation theory in terms of macro structure, while Foucault gradually delves into the relationship between individual body, life and power. In Foucault's in-depth exploration of Marxism, we can see the detailed analysis of life politics as a power operation. Inspired by Marx's thoughts on religion and political economy, Foucault focused on the relationship between individual body, life and power, which made the life politics theory more comprehensive and profound. Through the revelation of this relationship, we can better understand the operation of power in modern society and the complex situation of the individual in it, and also inject more profound connotation into the Marxist view that the economic basis determines the social structure through the life politics theory. It can be seen that Marxist theory and vita political criticism have a deep historical origin.

2. Marx's vision of the interwoven relations of power and production

Marx had a profound prescience about the interweaving of power and relations of production in Foucault's life politics. The fundamental factor of society lies in the relations of production. In capitalist society, the relations of production are the foundation on which society is constructed. The

change of class antagonism, mode of production and relations of production are the foundation of society, in which the entanglement between power and relations of production is the core of social change. In capitalist society, the interweaving of power and production relations is manifested incisively and vividly. Capitalists control the private ownership of the means of production and the wage-labor force in order to achieve dominance over the production process. The whole structure of society is formed in the manipulation of these relations of production by wage-labour for profit, and the natural opposition between capitalists and the proletariat is thus formed.

Foucault dug deep into this integration of power and production relations in the theory of life politics. He not only paid attention to how social power affects the economy, but also how power affects individual life through various forms, which formed a continuation and deepening of Marx's concern for the capitalist mode of production. Marx's analysis of the state also explains the connection between power and production relations. In capitalist societies, the state is seen as an instrument of class rule, at the service of capitalism. Through legal and political means, the state protects the property of capitalists and maintains social order. To a certain extent, the state serves the capitalist system, which to a certain extent also demonstrates the close relationship between power and production relations. Foucault also paid some attention to the change of national intelligence. He emphasized that the function of the state shifted from the legal and political fields to the economic and civil society fields, which meant that the state began to shoulder the responsibility of caring for life. The shift in focus from political power to the micromanagement of individual lives resonates harmoniously with Marx's analysis of state functions, creating a vision of the integration of power and production relations in the social structure.

Marxist historical materialism provides insight into the interweaving of power and relations of production in capitalist societies. This insight is echoed and extended in Foucault's theory of life politics, which together provide us with a profound reflection on modern society, the state and life politics. Both historical materialism and biopolitics, to a certain extent, provide us with a prescription for understanding the complexities of society.

3. Political economy questions the thought of life politics

Political economy, mentioned by Adam Smith in the *Wealth of Nations*, is the economic science that politicians or legislators need to study, whose fundamental aim is to provide the people with sufficient income and livelihood, or rather to enable the people to provide such an adequate income and livelihood for themselves. The second is to provide the state and society with sufficient tax revenue to enable government action to be carried out. The difference between this and ordinary economics is that it starts from the government, that is, from the people in power. Instead of considering whether certain aspects of revenue or market are good or bad, it takes the country as a unit to consider whether the overall economic form is healthy and whether the people can get a better living condition. Therefore, the research direction of political economy coincides with that of life politics. In *The Birth of Life*, Foucault considers, what goal political economy proposes for itself? It sets the wealth of nations as its goal. It has as its aim a simultaneous, corresponding and appropriately consistent increase in population and livelihoods. For Foucault, the conceptual discussion of population in isolation from the state makes no more sense than ants in isolation from the existence of ant colonies. "The concept of population will be established by means of a machine arranged to make the state function rationally. This machine is public administration." Foucault examined population from the point of view of the state.^[6] In his opinion, the population in the governance paradigm can never appear in the form of pure freedom. Only with the intervention of power can population constitute the concept of population, rather than a mere collection of people. And power means thinking about what population means to it, whether it helps or harms it economically, militarily or

politically. Population is a resource that needs to be controlled by power, like a dashboard displaying numerical values on an economic instrument. For example, China has implemented strict family planning laws for many years before, and has vigorously encouraged production in recent years, which is a living example of the power that needs to implement population control policies for its own interests. The role of population in governance is not only reflected in the number, but also about the kind of population. As early as the Middle Ages, the Church used theocracy to train obedience and unity in the population. After the Black Death, human medicine was developed, and quarantine management of the epidemic began to be widely used in medical behaviors. Later, Pasteur discovered the impact of bacteria and microorganisms on human health, and those in power realized the impact of bad hygiene habits on population health, and standardized personal living habits began to spread through government coercion and discipline. For example, public excretion or dumping of excrement was widely prohibited in European cities. Later, the quarantine and germ concepts used in medicine were extended to political management. For example, schools would segregate disobedient students to the back of the classroom or in front of the lectern alone, just as lepers are isolated. The Nazi government would also isolate and kill Jews in the concentration camps set up in the suburbs as if they were exterminating a virus. Instead of public corporal punishment or humiliation, as practised by teachers in the 1970s, or street beheadings, as practised by emperors, punishment became more covert and its purpose changed from alerting and intimidating others to isolating and eliminating "abnormal" elements. The primary consideration of politicians changed from the obedience of the population to the health of the population, which is important for labor production, military service, reproduction and social stability. Based on the absorption of medical ideas, politicians defined "abnormal" as unhealthy, and for the unhealthy, they adopted the practice of isolating or treating leprosy patients to restore them to "health". Which is also the value of the modern prison system.

In Foucault's view, the pursuit of political economy boils down to a productive state and a "healthy" population. The mechanism of power replaces the system of "requisition-violence" with a milder and more efficient system of "gently-production-profit". Under the new system, the vast machinery of the state begins to produce all the necessities of human production and life more efficiently. As a result, the goal of "enriching the people" put forward by Adam Smith has been fulfilled.

In the analysis and criticism of political economy, Marx is undoubtedly an important dialogue object and mentor for Foucault. Foucault analyzed and refined his life politics theory from a modern point of view based on the mode of production in Marx's *Capital*, and put forward a novel perspective for the contemporary criticism of political economy. In *Punishing Society*, Foucault elaborated the development history of capitalism and political economy, and its foundation is a struggle similar to the class struggle. Foucault is never shy of Marx's influence, which is why there is always a lot of coupling in their views.^[6] In *The Birth of the Politics of Life*, Foucault gave a new and different definition of political economy, arguing that political economy is not only a method of analyzing the circulation of wealth, but also "the whole method of governance to ensure the prosperity of a nation-state". At this point, he connected the politics of life with political economy. Foucault sees political economy as a mode of administration and a mode of limitation, which is to govern the population, and he quotes Bentham's prison to describe how this discipline of administration permeates every aspect of society. The restriction is to restrict the violent image of power in the past, such as the death penalty as the capital punishment from the mutilation of the head to the destruction of humanity, which is also an important symbol of the image of modern power. Different from the liberal understanding of political economy, Foucault defined political economy as a science, a type of knowledge, and a pattern of cognition that people who conduct self-government should pay attention to. Foucault took Frankfurt School a step further. He restored power to the mode of production and the mode of production to economic practice. On this issue, Foucault has quite the legacy of Marx.

Under the political economy of capitalism, labor force is reduced to a commodity, workers lose their freedom and are exploited by capitalists physically and spiritually, and labor is alienated by capital. Therefore, capitalism is inherently harmful, irrational and irreconcilable with class contradictions. Its demise is a historical inevitability. Under political economy, workers appear to be in a free market, free to sell their labor power as a commodity, while the other reality is that they seem to have nothing to sell but labor power. This is the lie created by private ownership in a free market, where the exploitation of the haves and have-nots is hidden under a plausible and fair trading system. Under the law, buyers and sellers seem to be in an equal relationship, but in reality, holders of money are not in an equal relationship with commodities. The trick of political economy is the trick of dehumanizing people. For workers, political economy refers to the "state wealth" and "people wealth", the people wealth is only a lie to alienate them into inhuman commodities, the real wealth is only the owners of private property, and the "state wealth" is a big lie, just like Marx mentioned in the "Communist Manifesto" "proletarians have no motherland", proletarians should see the "motherland" as a tool to exploit them. A strong and unified capitalist state would be a complete disaster for the proletarians, who would be subjected to more violent and explicit repression and coercion by the state machine with the surplus-value extracted.

4. The impact of immaterial labor and the "autonomous Marxist politics of life" on capitalism

Under the background of the development of information technology, non-material labor increasingly begins to occupy an important position in labor production. The development of both has given birth to new labor patterns and production relations in capitalist countries. "Immaterial labor is a very vague term. The new form of hegemony is best understood as 'biopolitical labor, 'that is, labor that creates not only material goods but also relationships and, ultimately, social life itself. Thus, the term 'biopolitical production' suggests that traditional notions of the relationship between economy, politics, society and culture are becoming increasingly blurred." Immaterial labor causes the life politics to change from defending capitalism to resisting capitalism, forming the life politics of autonomous Marxism.^[7] According to Hart and Negri, the disciplining society is only an intermediate mode of society, and its transcendence will decline with the advent of the information society, and because the classes and Spaces of the Internet society become transparent, the soil for disciplining people through isolation, isolation and system will no longer exist. Primary schools, junior high schools and high schools in the Internet era are good examples. In the school model of training places, teachers have become more and more difficult to discipline students.^[8] For example, the problem of puppy love among students in recent years is unavoidable. The management of the discipline society has become more and more weak. In addition, the non-material labor created by the Internet society has led to the emergence of life and political forces that resist capitalism.

Immaterial labor is often in the dominant position in the labor production of modern life, and traditional industrial labor is gradually reshaped by immaterial labor, which often plays an important role in the social production with capital appreciation as the goal. Therefore, the capitalists also give great support and resource inclination to the non-material labor. Non-material laborers often do not need to engage in repetitive work ordered, but can work freely as Marx hoped, realize themselves through labor creation, and even enjoy their income relatively freely. Therefore, it is reasonable for some scholars to regard the independent and non-material labor of capital as the "autonomous Marxist life politics" against capitalism. According to these scholars, if immaterial laborers can work independently of capital, they can give birth to a new life political subject, and this subject is the mass. Unlike factory labor in the capitalist system, they argued, the agents of production are automated machines, and the workers are only the fuel and consumables for the machines. The non-material laborers independent of the capital system are engaged in cooperative and innovative labor, and the

laborers themselves become the subject of labor, just as Marx said that they work for the transformation of the external world. The immaterial labor is not a subsidiary labor of capital, but independent and cooperative with capital operation. Under such conditions, non-material laborers naturally have the nature of resistance to capital, and their resistance promotes the evolution of capitalist life politics into Marxist life politics. These scholars believe that the revolutionary mode of the immaterial laborers is different from the revolutionary mode of historical materialism, but a "Marx-Deleuze" model of revolution, the cornerstone of the revolution is not the economic structure, but the "subjective-desire" of Foucault and Deleuze.^[8] The subject of the revolution is not a class, but the masses. And the means is also non-violent, but by reforming the relations of production of capital, against the discipline of capital on man. In short, the belief in "autonomous Marxist life politics" describes a "revolution without revolution", in which the laborer uses labor itself to break the inherent relations of production, the space of production and the role of production defined by capital.

5. Conclusion

Through the above analysis, this view is full of little Bourgeois utopian ideals and petty sentiment without regard for the lives of others. The so-called non-material labor refers to advanced brain workers or network workers, such as streamers, video bloggers, programmers. Among them, the advanced brain workers are individual talents, not objects that can be popularized by the general public, and they are almost all integrated into the circle of capitalists and power dominators, rather than "operating independently of capital", more generally, they rely on their own talents to become new capital. In addition, as more people begin to engage in network work, low-level network workers, such as low-level programmers, small anchors, small designers and editors, are no different from ordinary workers in their living conditions and working patterns, and are newly attributed to the capital operation system. And the big anchors, either wag their tail toward the capital for food, or scramble to become the new exploitative capitalists, such as the rise of the new network live broadcast sales and so on. It is difficult to see the natural anti-capital nature in the behavior of these so-called non-material laborers. The new Internet model has only provided new opportunities for society and created a new class of capitalists. These only grasp the social opportunities, but people with faith cannot expect them to become an effective force against capitalism, let alone lead a "non-revolutionary revolution". Capitalism empowered by life politics is full of resilience and the ability to change. Today, in the face of challenges to the discipline system, capitalism flattery like people compromise, once defined by the discipline system as abnormal and affecting the health of the population, in people's resistance can be redefined as normal or even heroic, such as drug abuse, homosexuality, promiscuity, infidelity, puppy love, violence and so on. In order to control the cost of its rule, capitalism under the life politics will always make generous concessions to the changing social environment, and give up many of its moral and public security responsibilities in the name of freedom. As a result, the survival and development of capitalism in the free and open Internet era will not cause too many obstacles, and even the "wind of freedom" brought by the Internet is a harmonious relationship with the life politics capitalism. This is not an era in which capitalism can be overthrown by tricks. Only with a thorough understanding of Marx's values of historical materialism can we lead to equality for all and the path of free self-development.

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