

Foucault's contributions for understanding power relations in British classical political economy

Danielle Guizzo^{a,*}, Iara Vigo de Lima^{b,1}

^a Graduate Program of Public Policy, Federal University of Parana (UFPR), Brazil

^b Department of Economics, Federal University of Parana (UFPR), Brazil

Received 18 February 2015; received in revised form 19 June 2015; accepted 20 June 2015

Available online 8 July 2015

Abstract

This paper analyzes the strategic role played by British classical political economy in constructing new technologies of power. Michel Foucault drew attention to a change that political economists promoted concerning the role of the state, which has been overlooked by historians of economic thought. This paper explores the main arguments provided by the most important British political economists of the 18th and 19th centuries on what concerns population management, State's role and economic dynamics in order to examine Foucault's considerations. Although British classical political economy consolidated the mechanism of markets and economic individuality, thus creating a system of truth that changed economic norms and practices, its discourse also established a political conduct that was responsible for creating mechanisms of control that disseminated new forms of power relations.

© 2015 National Association of Postgraduate Centers in Economics, ANPEC. Production and hosting by Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

JEL classification: A12; B12

Keywords: British classical political economy; Genealogy of power; Liberal art of government; Biopolitics

Resumo

Este artigo analisa o papel estratégico desempenhado pela economia política clássica britânica na construção de novas tecnologias de poder. Michel Foucault chamou a atenção para uma mudança promovida por economistas políticos com relação ao papel do Estado, fato que foi ignorado por historiadores do pensamento econômico. Este artigo explora os principais argumentos fornecidos pelos principais economistas políticos britânicos dos séculos XVIII e XIX no que diz respeito à administração da população, ao papel do Estado e a dinâmica da economia a fim de examinar as considerações de Foucault. Apesar de a economia política britânica ter consolidado o mecanismo dos mercados e o individualidadena esfera econômica, criando assim um sistema de verdade

* Corresponding author at: Rua Dr. Roberto Barrozo, 1790 Sb. 02 – Mercês, CEP: 80810-090, Curitiba/Parana, Brazil. Tel.: +55 4196751157/4130291157.

E-mail addresses: danielleguizzo@gmail.com, guizzo@ufpr.br (D. Guizzo), iaravigo@ufpr.br (I.V. de Lima).

¹ Address: Av. Lothário Meissner, 632, Térreo, Sala 03 – Jd. Botânico, CEP: 80210-170, Curitiba/Parana, Brazil. Tel.: +55 4184491752. Peer review under responsibility of National Association of Postgraduate Centers in Economics, ANPEC.

que modificou as normas e práticas econômicas, seu discurso também estabeleceu uma conduta política responsável por criar mecanismos de controle que disseminaram novas formas de relações de poder.

© 2015 National Association of Postgraduate Centers in Economics, ANPEC. Production and hosting by Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

Palavras-chave: Economia política clássica britânica; Genealogia do poder; Arte liberal de governar; Biopolítica

1. Introduction

This paper analyzes the strategic role played by the British classical political economy in the process of creating new forms of power relations between the state, population and economic reality. The aim is to understand how political economy was relevant for rationalizing and consolidating a form of power that French philosopher Michel Foucault designated as “biopolitics”.² The paper takes Foucault’s writings regarding economic ideas and re-establishes them into a critical analysis of the history of economic thought in order to comprehend how political economy was responsible for the emergence, strengthen and consequences of biopolitical practices.

Whereas most historians of economic thought interpret classical political economy – especially the British school – as a way of understanding and creating a system of liberal political economy designed to limit the power of the sovereign, this paper demonstrates that classical political economy actually served to constitute new powers to the state and to other institutions related to it, such as educational, health, financial, statistical, psychological and urban.

Michel Foucault’s genealogy of power examined economic thought and other human sciences to understand how individuals became subjects in the modernity. Inasmuch Foucault realized that power is not only repressive, but rather productive (produces subjects, conducts and patterns), he shifted his analyses from disciplinary power to biopolitics.³ Foucault defined biopolitics as a specific technology of power that emerged in the end of the 18th century and aimed to deal with biological elements of human beings, such as: birth, mode of living, prosperity, health, reproduction and death.

Foucault had to approach the classical political economy of the 18th and 19th century – especially the British one – because a different rationality of State became a central issue in the analyses of the first thinkers of that school, insofar as they were concerned with national economic growth and opulence of population. It was also for this reason that this school first had to question the mercantilist doctrine in what concerned with the centrality of State, later addressing a critique of the sovereign, since the State should have a less interventionist role in managing society.

Foucault’s notion of biopolitics can be investigated from a perspective that connects economic discourse and practice with power relations. Although some works written by [Tribe \(1978\)](#), [Amariglio \(1988\)](#) and [Lima \(2010\)](#) made valuable connections between Foucault’s writings and economics, all of them made reference to Foucault’s early archeological writings and the epistemic formations of economic theory and discourse, thus not approaching extensively Foucault’s notions of biopolitics and its consequences to constituting new power relations.

This paper first outlines Foucault’s ideas regarding power relations and his genealogical investigation method, showing how the concept of biopolitics emerged. Secondly, the paper emphasizes how British classical political economy emerged, establishing a line of thought from a critique of mercantilism to Ricardo’s and Malthus’s ideas. This section is followed by a critical reading of the classical economic thought in terms of power relations, taking Foucault’s arguments to stress the emergence of a liberal art of government and, as a consequence, biopolitical practices. Lastly, the final remarks regarding this theme are presented.

² However, the term *biopolitics* was not created by Foucault. Rudolph Kjellén, a Swedish intellectual, was perhaps the first to make use of this word, but Foucault’s theoretical developments regarding biopolitics and biopower have been considered more extensive and accurate than those ones of his predecessors ([Esposito, 2008](#), pp. 16, 24).

³ Foucault’s first approach regarding the study of power relations involved disciplinary power, a form of power disseminated by non-State social institutions, such as school, hospital, prison and factory. According to Foucault, these institutions had a major role in constituting the modern subject through coercion, controls and surveillance. His shift to biopolitics occurred when Foucault noticed a different non-disciplinary type of power that also influenced and modeled the constitution of subjects in modernity.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/994994>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/994994>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)