

Foucault's central intuition is not structure or break but rarity, in the sense of exceptionality (rather than infrequency): human phenomena are exceptional.

Fact: Gladiator fighting came to an end in Rome during the 4th c. AD under the reign of the Christian Emperors.

Question: Why did it come to a stop? Why did it stop then?

Possible answers:

1. Because of Christianity.

Objection: but Christianity condemned all public spectacles, and especially theatre---claiming that theatre incited spectators to lascivious conduct in their everyday lives---but while gladiator fighting was outlawed, theatre thrived.

2. Because of humanitarian or pagan wisdom.

Objection: (a) Not only are very few people humanitarian, but humanitarian arguments against gladiator fighting concern the turning of human beings into things, objects of violent action. Whereas, the condemnation (Christian and pagan) that fights sully the onlookers' souls doesn't really care about the objectification of human beings at all. It is prudence rather than humanitarianism.

(b) What is objected to is thus not the horror itself and nor even that such horror is legitimate, legal, orchestrated by the state, but that it is not veiled by any pretense whatsoever (and in this it differs from auto da fés, for instance, which are equally horrific, equally legitimate, but veiled by a pretence, that of protecting the faith, and so on).

3. Because political power was humanised or Christianised.

Objection: Not only were the Christian emperors not professional humanists, but pagans were not inhuman either. Further, as above, if they were "Christianised," then they would have outlawed theatre as well, which is what Christians truly clamoured for.

So, the real answer lies elsewhere: in political power but not in standard "politics" but in "the submerged base of the iceberg": political practices. These are submerged in the sense of being below the line of visibility, not because they are hidden or occluded---on the contrary they are always on display---but because they do not fall within the purview of certain kind of gaze. Like the letters on Poe's map, they are fully visible and yet do not fall under the domain of "normal"

visibility. And this is because we focus on and only see objects, the results of practices, rather than those practices themselves.

So let us try and look at the different kind of practices. Rather than fixating on the statement “The emperors were Christian,” let us ask ourselves “what is it that they do?” “what sort of doing is Christian doing for them?” And rather than assuming that there exists a “governed” for them to do things to, let us ask “what they actually happened to those called the governed?” “What sorts of actions make them the ‘governed’?”

If we ask these questions we see that there are a number of ways in which the relationship between governor and governed can be practiced: they can be treated as juridical subjects, as fauna, as a population, as a tribe, and so on. So, the new question in the specific case of gladiator fighting is: “In what political practice are people objectified in such a way that, if they want gladiators, they get them, and in what political practice are people objectified in such a way that they don’t get them?”

Broadly speaking, two sorts of regularities in practice that emerge (regularities, not laws). First, the pastoral model: the Roman people are “flock people” and my job as king is guide this flock. The destination is not relevant, but the survival of the flock as a sustainable group is. I do the job because I know better than the individual members of the flock what the needs of the flock are, and so I discipline and administer this flock as and when needed, in accordance to those needs. We don’t care therefore about the morality or immorality of gladiator fighting; rather we care about the energy and strength of the flock, and watching gladiators is good because it makes the flock stronger. So let them have their circuses. Second, the paternal model: the individual flock members are like children, the governed are “child-people” and my job is to sensitive to their needs as parents are to children, and so we would have to be aware of their terror at seeing unwarranted murder become an established institution within the state, we would have to sympathise with them as individuals and so on. So, the shift from gladiators to no gladiators is a shift from treating people as flock people to treating them as child people (though not as soul people, for then I would be a priest king rather than simply a father king).

But why does it stop when it did? When the Roman emperors became Christians they also ceased to govern via the senatorial class, that is, they acted in such ways as to centralise control and power, and in so doing he took on one of the roles available to monarchs (father, priest, and so on). So there was a change in political practice whereby the king became the father, and so he became a Christian (and not vice versa), and because he was a good father he stopped gladiator fighting.

What does such an interpretation do? For one, it does away with goals, objects and material causes (such as governed masses, relations of production, the State). For another, it focuses on describing what people do. In other words, it looks for regularities on the level of practices rather than laws on the level of pre-existing objects (the State, relations of production, ideological beliefs, and so on). Objects seem to determine our behaviour, but our practice determines its own objects in the first place. The relation in which I do something to something else determines the object and myself, not the other way around. The object is the correlate to the practice. The father king is an effect of the ways in which the king treats those he relates to as father, he is a father king because he looks at them in that way, not the other way around. And historical changes come from practices that are simply there, that simply happen, and that change in accordance to shifting circumstance and that cannot be explained by recourse to abstractions, to already existing objects.

With discourses, the same thing is true. Don't try and figure out what people think they mean when they say something. Just describe what they say, and in describing that you will discover regularities that are effects of that saying, that reveal an underlying logic which is not to be ascribed to a conceptual object with its laws but is simply marks a regularity (and therefore leaves open the possibility of irregularity as well). Thus "discourse and its hidden grammar do not belong to the realm of the implicit; they are not logically contained in what is said or done, they are not axiomatic to or presupposed in what is said or done, for the good reason that what is said of done obeys a grammar of choice rather than a logical, coherent, perfected grammar" (157).