

# Buy Good, Do Good, Be Good? Ethical Consumption as Neoliberal Governmentality

Written by Ruby Agatha Utting

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

## Buy Good, Do Good, Be Good? Ethical Consumption as Neoliberal Governmentality

<https://www.e-ir.info/2019/11/24/buy-good-do-good-be-good-ethical-consumption-as-neoliberal-governmentality/>

RUBY AGATHA UTTING, NOV 24 2019

In recent years, capitalism has increasingly been framed as a site of ethical rather than explicitly profit-driven conduct. Since the late 1970's, the retreat of the state from the area of social provision (Harvey, 2005) has centralized corporations in the meeting of both national welfare needs and global goals aimed at poverty alleviation, environmental sustainability and health-care. Here, business has seemingly become moral within a market increasingly defined by its ability to meet ethical as well as profit-driven standards. Within this rise of a 'caring' capitalism, ethical consumption (EC) has emerged as one of the most prominent examples of a movement towards a supposedly moral economics. Understood to facilitate effective social change through capital exchange, EC is demonstrative of a dual movement whereby not only do companies commit to charitable endeavours but simultaneously, individuals are understood to be enacting ethics through consumption. The rising popularity of EC, therefore, has created a changing framework through which corporate behaviour and individual consumption are understood as sites of responsibility in the global fight against social and environmental challenges.

Within this context it is necessary to assess the relationship EC has to the wider governing paradigm in which it acts. Whilst often naturalised as a progression of capitalism beyond its exploitative foundations into the sphere of social needs, EC must be understood as a '*singularity*' (Foucault, 1991b, p.76) that is inherently linked to the wider socio-economic framework of neoliberal capitalism. Neoliberalism, defined as a model based on facilitating free-market economics and the '*extending and disseminating [of] market values to all institutions and social actions*' (Brown, 2003), is reproduced by EC as a global-corporate and individualised conflation of the economic and social spheres. Here, EC is constitutive of neoliberalism's 'new tactics and techniques' (Foucault, 1991a, p.100) that have promoted the economisation of the social via the pairing of the practice of consumption with the idea of morality. Furthermore, not only can corporations, through their ethical practices, be seen to reframe how capitalism is understood but this can be seen to fruition via an individualised 'self-regulation' (Rose, 1989, p.226) whereby consumer practice is altered in accordance with the need to follow an ethical lifestyle. It is necessary, therefore, to examine the power inherent within EC, how this is situated within the changing discourse surrounding understandings of capitalism, the subjects this produces and fundamentally, how EC acts to reproduce the governing framework of neoliberal capitalism.

In order to examine EC in this way, this paper will move beyond current analyses to examine the multifaceted way EC reproduces neoliberal capitalism. Whilst EC has overwhelmingly been examined through a debate concerning the extent to which it offers an alternative to exploitative capitalist consumption, here it will be examined using Michel Foucault's notion of *governmentality* (Foucault, 1991, p.103). Governmentality is understood as the historically specific, institutional, normative and personal mode of rule through which the 'conduct of conduct' (Lemke, 2002, p.51) is enacted. The creation of institutional and normative practices is underscored by a specific rationality (Rose, 1989, p. 230), that govern individuals via the production and legitimation of certain subjectivities and understandings as true. Governmentality, thereby, concerns not only the 'governing [of] others' (Ibid, p.51) but it simultaneously, and mutually reinforcingly, involves the 'governing [of] the self' (Ibid, p.51). Using governmentality in this sense allows for EC to be understood as neoliberal governmentality, as both a set of governing practices that alter conceptions of capitalism and as an individualised method of acting upon the self. Using governmentality, thereby, offers an important critical tool through which analyses of EC can move beyond current literature to examine the discursive

# Buy Good, Do Good, Be Good? Ethical Consumption as Neoliberal Governmentality

Written by Ruby Agatha Utting

power of the pairing of ethics and capitalism, both on a governing and individual level and to assess the multiple ways it acts to reproduce neoliberal capitalism.

To explore EC as neoliberal governmentality, it is useful to illustrate the point using a specific case study. *Innocent Drinks* (ID), is a company that offers an indicative example of EC as governmentality because it is illustrative of both a technique of rule of others and of the self. ID, as a company that prides itself on its ethical stance and as a range of products that allows consumers to engage in ethics through consumption, allows for an exploration of the two-fold mechanisms of governmentality via its role in challenging conceptions of corporate behaviour and as an expression of a specific lifestyle that instructs conduct. ID, therefore, allows for an empirical exploration of the theoretical themes and further understanding of how neoliberalism is reproduced by EC.

To undertake this exploration of EC this essay will firstly seek to define what EC is, briefly outline its rise and contextualise this against an explanation of neoliberalism. This will lead on to an assessment of the current literature on EC, specifically the debate surrounding its effectiveness as an alternative to traditional capitalist exchange. A theoretical framework will then be outlined which will utilize Foucault's notion of governmentality and use it to initiate an examination of how EC acts within to reproduce neoliberal capitalism. The case study of ID will then be used to illustrate how EC acts within and is reproductive of the governing power of the neoliberal paradigm. This will firstly be done by analysing, at a governing level, how the charitable work undertaken by ID is used to legitimise consumption and acts to reconceptualise capitalism. Secondly, it will examine how ID, at an individual level, promotes self-regulation in accordance with their ethical, healthy products. This will allow a thorough investigation to be conducted to demonstrate the role EC has in the reproduction of neoliberal capitalism through situating it within neoliberal governmentality.

## Context

The spiralling popularity of ethical products has been hard to miss. From buying a coffee in a high-street chain to choosing which bananas to purchase in the supermarket, the attachment of ethics to everyday products has been blatant. Symbolised in images of indigenous coffee-growers and labelling systems offering assurance of fairness and equality, EC is argued to define a new way of consumption that allows companies to contribute to combatting global problems and for buyers to conduct a moral action when purchasing products. Its popularity, illustrated in the 2017 growth of the ethical market by 3.2% in the UK alone (Mackenzie, 2017, p.5), demonstrates the rise of EC as an emerging framework that has seen the normative and practical merging of morality and economics via both corporate practice and individual behaviour. Here, buying has become ethical, a fact that not only marks a change to traditional understandings of capital exchange but a development that is in need of examination concerning its relationship to the wider paradigm within which it acts.

In order to initiate a discussion into EC it is necessary to firstly outline what it is and to situate its rise within the contemporary socio-economic context. As a field of corporate practice and consumer behaviour, EC is inherently broad and encompasses a myriad of issues. As Tania Lewis and Emily Potter note, the 'ethical turn within consumer culture... is not necessarily marked by a coherent set of shared political values' (Lewis and Potter, 2011, p.4) but is used to refer to the multiple movements that businesses and consumers can align with when producing and choosing products. Popularly symbolised by organisations such as *The Fair-Trade Foundation* or *The Rainforest Alliance*, EC is associated with issues as broad as HIV/AIDS in Africa via *Product (Red)* to the protection of UK farming by *The Soil Association*. As pointed to by the Ethical Consumer Research Association's *Market's Report 2017*, EC refers not only to these high-profile initiatives but similarly to an individual's 'own set of values' (Mackenzie, 2017, p.4) such as the need to eat a vegan diet, buy locally or boycott brands. EC can, therefore, similarly be understood as a form of 'consumer politics' (Lewis and Potter, 2011, p.4) that empowers individuals to choose to distance themselves from what is perceived as an unequal exchange system by embracing alternative consumption patterns.

For the purposes of this paper EC will have a narrower definition. EC, within this context, will refer only to the creation and exchange of products whose consumption is understood to contribute to a specific cause. Therefore, despite the relation of ethical living practices or company avoidance to the EC movement, here, EC will only refer to the production and consumption of products which are endowed with an ethical alignment.

# Buy Good, Do Good, Be Good? Ethical Consumption as Neoliberal Governmentality

Written by Ruby Agatha Utting

This understanding of EC rests on a conception that ethics can be undertaken in two ways. Firstly, on a global governing level, ethics are enacted via the framework of 'ethical corporate capitalism' (Dolan and Rajak, 2011, p.4) that has seen business increasingly viewed as undertaking ethical projects to help others. EC must, therefore, be viewed as a rearticulated corporate practice that undertakes ethical deeds for and upon others. Secondly, on an individual level, EC must be defined as an act of exchange that allows for consumers to self-define as committing a moral deed via consumption. At the subject level, EC therefore refers both to the enactment of ethics to help others but also to help the self. Here, ethics is undertaken through 'care of the self' (Foucault, 2000c, p.285) whereby conduct is legitimised in accordance with a certain ethical lifestyle. Ethics, in this sense is used in a way to 'attain a certain mode of being' (Ibid, 281) by both achieving care of others and an understanding of the self as acting ethically. This understanding of EC, as the enactment of ethics through both corporate and individualised practice, has gained momentum since the 1970's (WFTO, 2017), a rise inherently linked to the wider political and economic context.

This rising popularity of EC should be contextualised against the corresponding ascendance of neoliberalism. Economically understood as a model 'characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade' (Harvey, 2005, p.2), neoliberalism arose as the dominant paradigm of economic development in the late 1970's. Widely defined through its prioritization of deregulated corporate interests and the limitation of the state to the facilitation of the market, these economic policies have been fundamental to the fruition of a political and social project that has extended a 'market rationality' to 'all dimensions of human life' (Brown, 2003). Moreover, the neoliberal framework has been underscored by the promotion of an individualism aimed at creating subjects who are simultaneously 'responsible and moral' and 'economic-rational' (Lemke, 2002, p.59). It's pervasive nature, captured by Ellen Wood, means neoliberalism has entailed 'the universalization of market-based social relations [and a] penetration in almost every single aspect of our lives of the discourse and/or the practice of commodification, capital accumulation, and profit making' (Wood, 1997, in Shamir, 2008). Given this centralisation of the economic in ordering the socio-political sphere, the rise of EC, as an individualised practice of meeting social-ethical needs via economic activity, is both indicative of and fundamentally linked to the practical and 'epistemological shift' (Lemke, 2001, p.198) of neoliberalism. Not only is EC emblematic of the neoliberal merging of the economic and social but the emergence of EC within this specific context allows for EC to be denaturalised as a normalised development of capitalism and examined as a practice that can be situated within the wider governing framework of neoliberalism.

Key to understanding this conjunction between EC and the neoliberal emergence is the changing role of the state. What was during the Keynesian post-war era a state that played a pivotal role in providing welfare gave way to policies designed to curtail its capacity in the fulfilment of public provision. Neoliberal notions of individualism and prioritisation of private capital facilitated a roll back in state services through a purposeful 'link [between] a reduction in (welfare) state service and... the increasing call for 'personal responsibility' and 'self-care'' (Lemke, 2001, p.203). Not only was the state increasingly stunted in its role as social provider but the onus was passed onto individuals to step into the role of carer, with private capital encroaching on the provision of previously public services. Whilst the idea of a limited state is fundamental to the neoliberal ideal of an unbounded, deregulated market, the social consequences of such a model have been pervasive. Within Western nations and globally, the rise of poverty, inequality and environmental harm under neoliberalism has become increasingly publicly recognised, with corporations understood as sites of elite greed. Moreover, a rising public disillusionment with neoliberalism has prompted calls for new methods to challenge what is viewed as the uncontrollable accumulation for private profit and a growth of alternative techniques to counter an economic and political system viewed to be thriving upon environmental destruction and unequal social relations.

EC must be situated within this supposed challenge to neoliberalism. With increasing cries against the perceived immorality of neoliberalism, it appears that a new 'humane capitalism' (Dolan and Rajak, 2011, p.1) has been borne. Within this, corporations are understood as increasingly driven by an ethical impetus, with 'instruments of capital becom[ing] agents of social improvement' (Rajak, 2011, p.2). Furthermore, a supposed new turn has been taken that has facilitated corporations becoming key to social, political or environmental improvement via a 'marriage of moral imperative and market discipline' (Rajak, 2011, p.2). This change in corporate behaviour has similarly been facilitated by the growing demand for responsibly sourced products due to the 'growing realization that significant environmental and social challenges... are directly related to human consumption activities' (Carrington et al, 2016,

# Buy Good, Do Good, Be Good? Ethical Consumption as Neoliberal Governmentality

Written by Ruby Agatha Utting

p.23). EC, thereby, has seen the rise of an individualised approach to social change, with the growing public consciousness concerning global problems matched by an increasing desire to lead an ethical lifestyle. EC should, therefore, be understood as indicative of a merging of ethics with market imperatives, not only through the supposedly altered aims of corporations but similarly with how individuals conduct themselves in reiteration of this.

Whilst promoted as a challenge to neoliberal capitalism it is necessary to further an investigation into how EC relates to this wider governing paradigm. Although positioned as a challenge to the inequality of neoliberalism, it is necessary to understand EC and the wider altruistic capitalism movement, as producing and reproducing the paradigm of neoliberal capitalism. Here, the power inherent within the fusion of the economic and the social via EC has been productive of a discursive framework that has rearticulated how capitalism is understood and how individuals conduct themselves. It is necessary, therefore to interrogate how EC is reproductive of neoliberal capitalism.

## Literature Review

In order to undertake an exploration into how EC reproduces neoliberalism it is necessary to firstly situate this analysis within existing literature. The majority of current writing that addresses the emergence and significance of EC, both as a corporate turn and consumer practice, situates it within a debate concerning the extent to which it offers an alternative to traditional capitalistic exchange.

For its advocates, EC represents a way for consumers to engage in alternative consumption practices that challenge the dominance of exchange based on inequitable wage-labour. For Kim Humphery, EC can be understood as forming part of 'a Western anti-consumerist politics' (Humphery, 2011, p.41) that empowers individuals to make a 'political statement' (Ibid, p.45) against, what she views as, a 'preoccupation with the endless acquisition of consumer goods' (Ibid, p.42). This argument is furthered by Jeremy Youde who, in his analysis of the product (RED) initiative, argues that whilst consuming 'ethical' products is not revolutionary in scope, it allows individuals to 'generate something positive out of the currently existing system' (Youde, 2009, p.202) by facilitating a redistribution of funds to in-need areas. Correspondingly, and indicative of this argument, are Fairtrade advocates who view exchange as a platform through which inequitable trade patterns can be challenged and alienated relationships between producers and consumers altered. Like Humphery and Youde, Rose Ericson, argues that using ethical standards to regulate production and consumption, via Fairtrade, allows for 'supply-chain accountability' (Ericson, 2006, pp.4) to be built in order 'to make a difference to the lives of people who grow the things we love' (Fairtrade Foundation, 2018b).

For these writers, therefore, EC represents a break from conventional capitalist exchange. This argument posits EC both as a method through which corporations are able to make substantive changes to their own practice, by complying to ethical standards, and a new mode of exchange that empowers and politicizes individuals to contribute to tackling global issues. In doing so these writers not only fail to recognize a multitude of practical issues with the many varieties of EC but they falter by situating EC in opposition to capitalism. Moreover, by understanding EC as an alternative to traditional capitalist exchange these writers fail to recognise the continuities of exploitation due to the premise of exchange EC is based upon.

This promotion of EC as an alternative to exploitative capitalist consumption has been subject to sustained critiques. For these writers, EC is argued to represent an ideological continuation with neoliberal capital through an attachment of ethics that veils and legitimises further capital expansion. For Michal Carrington *et al*, EC facilitates a 'fetishistic disavowal' (Carrington *et al*, 2016, p.33) that ignores 'the blatant irrationalism of global capitalism predicated on excess, exploitation, and destruction' (Ibid, p.33). For them, EC is based on a 'fantasy' that inaccurately assumes there is a 'difference between a capitalism that is flawed and one that is just' (Ibid, p.33), thereby countering Youde's assumption that neoliberalism can be reformed from within. Similarly, James Carrier, questions the relationship between ethical products and capitalism by positing EC as a reiterated 'commodity fetishism' (Carrier, 2010) that, in contrast to Ericson's proposed accountability, adds to the 'mystification of objects of consumption' (Ibid, 686). For Carrier, by focusing on specific 'contextual events' (Ibid, p.686) EC acts to legitimise continued capital consumption by appealing to 'consumers' moral values' (Ibid, p.686) whilst hiding the real producer/buyer relationship.

# Buy Good, Do Good, Be Good? Ethical Consumption as Neoliberal Governmentality

Written by Ruby Agatha Utting

Correspondingly, Ndongo Sylla, in an unforgiving critique of the Fairtrade initiative, furthers this argument that EC is ideologically coherent with neoliberalism by describing it as a 'new iteration of the free market rationale' (Sylla, 2013, p.1). Sylla focuses on what he views as Fairtrade's flawed foundation which assumes that the logic of capital, based on the profit motive, can be used to challenge the inequality and poverty caused by capitalism. Sylla, like Carrington *et al*, thereby, situates EC as ideologically complicit with neoliberalism due to the inherent exploitation any exchange under capitalism is founded upon.

These arguments rightfully understand EC to be consistent with neoliberal capitalism. Here, EC is understood to allow for consumption based on the exploitation of the producer via a reiterated capitalistic logic to continue unhindered. By framing EC as ideologically complicit with capitalism they act as a useful opposition to the unchallenged uptake of EC as a solution to neoliberal inequality. Critiques in this area do, however, falter in their analysis of how EC relates to the neoliberalism. Furthermore, through focusing on what they view as a capitalist ideological drive behind EC, they fail to fully consider how EC relates to the wider governing framework within which it acts. Here, EC is positioned as an unquestionable tool of elite power that dupes consumers into continued exploitative social relations rather than considering it as a technique through which neoliberalism is legitimized and thereby reproduced. Moreover, by positioning EC as an overt tool of capital exchange these critiques ignore the multiple levels at which EC acts, the power inherent within EC as both a corporate and consumer practice and the way in which EC relates to the neoliberalism in a discursive sense. It is necessary, therefore, for analyses to conceptualise EC, not as a class-driven tool of domination but rather as representative of a changing discourse surrounding capital and consumer relations and therefore, reproductive of the governing power of neoliberalism.

In response to the limitations of these criticisms, a small body of literature has begun an examination of the multiple ways EC acts to reproduce neoliberalism. Here, two levels of analysis have taken place, the first concerns the discursive consequence of corporations aligning themselves with a moral purpose and the second concerns the self-regulation that takes place when individuals perform EC. Dinah Rajak, in her analysis of the wider context of businesses undertaking social endeavours through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), focuses on the way in which the rise of CSR has facilitated a changing normative framework around how capitalism is understood. For Rajak, the 'confluence of economic values and ethical values' (Rajak, 2011, p.2) that CSR seeks to represent has a 'profound discursive capacity... to transform social relations... according to a particular set of corporate values' (Rajak, 2011, p.12). What is of interest here, for Rajak, is the way in which imbuing corporations with a moral purpose inherently alters the discourse concerning how capital is understood and subsequently allocates them a new form of power that legitimises continued capital consumption. This idea is furthered by Ronen Shamir who argues that the rise of market 'moralization... [is a] product of... the neoliberal epistemology' (Shamir, 2008, p.3) that has allowed for a conceptual 'economization of morality' (Shamir, 2008, p.3) with the theoretical and practical extension of the market into social life. Unlike Sylla, therefore, Rajak and Shamir do not understand the rise of EC as an explicit tool to further corporate profits but rather view the rise of ethics within corporations as indicative of a changing knowledge framework concerning how capitalism is conceived.

This concern with the discourse surrounding capitalism is furthered by writers who examine individual conduct. For Tania Lewis, EC, popularised within lifestyle television, is representative of a growing movement under neoliberalism for the individualisation of responsibility and the rise of self-regulation in accordance with a 'choice-based ethics' (Lewis, 2008, p.238). Through this, she argues, the need to address global problems is 'framed strongly in terms of personal self-control, self-management and informed choice' (Lewis, 2008, p.235). What has emerged in this context, for Lewis, is a 'consumer-citizen' (Lewis, 2008, p.238), for whom consumption is a channel through which to perform 'responsible citizenship' (Lewis, 2008, p.234). Correspondingly, Kertsy Hobson and Ann Hill, in their analysis of organized gardening projects, argue that such endeavours aim to 'create self-reliant and productive subjects' (Hobson and Hill, 2011, p.225). Whilst their focus of analysis does not concern EC as specified in this paper, they lend support to the idea that the attachment of ethics to individualised practice works to create an 'ethical self-formation' (Hobson and Hill, 2011, p.225) whereby market ethics become intrinsic to self-definition. Lewis, Hobson and Hill therefore all highlight the role of ethics, via morally imbued action, in the regulation and 'responsibilization' (Shamir, 2008, p.4) of the self.

These writers therefore offer an initiation into examining EC as a practice of neoliberal governmentality. By examining

# Buy Good, Do Good, Be Good? Ethical Consumption as Neoliberal Governmentality

Written by Ruby Agatha Utting

the discursive power inherent within the pairing of ethics and corporate practice, Rajak and Shamir rightfully situate EC as forming part of the governing framework of neoliberalism. This is particularly useful in terms of creating an understanding of the changing knowledge formation that has allowed for a renewed legitimisation of capitalist exchange as well as a conceptualisation of the power inherent within corporations undertaking morally driven objectives. Similarly, the examination of subjects in relation to responsibility, self-regulation and self-care under neoliberalism by Lewis and Hobson and Hill, is instructive in terms of understanding the processes of a changing subjectification via EC and how such 'subjugated subject[s] of neoliberal power' (Bidet, 2016, p.1) are created. Here, the situating of consumption as a tool through which individuals participate and recreate neoliberalism is particularly important. In order to build on this literature, therefore, this paper will seek to take these two aspects; of neoliberal corporate practice and individualised regulation as manifestations of EC and seek to examine how they work in tandem to reproduce neoliberalism.

## Theoretical Framework

In order to undertake this study into how EC reproduces neoliberal capitalism it is necessary to outline the theoretical framework that will be utilized. Foucault's notion of governmentality will be mobilized as an intellectual tool that allows for a thorough exploration of the multifaceted way in which EC produces and reproduces the neoliberal paradigm.

Governmentality is understood most productively in a two-tiered sense; as a system of practices that act upon and through individual conduct. For Foucault, governmentality is used to describe the multiple modalities through which a population is shaped and controlled, not through the overt rule of a political elite but through the dominant discourse that is underscored by a power that is both hidden and accepted. In its most popularised sense, governmentality was defined by Foucault as 'the ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of ...[a] very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security' (Foucault, 1991, p.102). Moreover, what is key to all governmental aspects is the dominance of a specific rationality which acts to define the 'norms of truth' (Rose, 1999, p.9) and 'particular ways of *thinking*' (Miller and Rose, 1990, p.2). Moreover, governmentality, should be understood to concern two aspects; 'techniques of domination' (Foucault, 1993, p.203) through institutions and authoritative practices and 'techniques of the self' (Ibid) within the individualised conduct of subjects. As Thomas Lemke indicates, governmentality, as a mode of rule through both governing structures and individual practice, is a mutually reinforcing process whereby the two aspects 'codetermine each-others emergence' (Lemke, 2002, p.51). Governmentality, thereby, should be understood as consisting of both rule of other and rule of the self, a two-way power dynamic whereby global governing structures and subject-conduct work in tandem to reproduce what is legitimately thought of as the dominant paradigm.

Governmentality has been used to describe the neoliberal model. Within Foucauldian theory, neoliberal governmentality, represents an 'epistemological transformation' (Foucault, 2008b, p.222) that has centralised economics within institutional practice and the construction of the subject. Here, an expansion and reiteration of 'political power... modelled on the principles of the free market' (Foucault, 2008a, p.131) has allowed for a neoliberal economism to rearticulate governing structures and understandings of legitimate conduct. Neoliberal governmentality, thereby represents an attempt 'to introduce market regulation as [the] regulatory principle of society' (Ibid, p.146) underlined by an 'economic rationalization' (Ibid, p.148) that orders both institutional and individual conduct around the extension of a market 'dynamic of competition' (Ibid, p.147).

Key to neoliberal governmentality is the construction of individuals as responsible. The neoliberal facilitation of 'an enterprise society' (Foucault, 2008a, p.147) that rests upon a new 'political rationality' (Lemke, 2001, p.203) is defined by 'increasing call[s] for... 'self-care' (Ibid, p.203) and a pairing of 'moral responsibility... [and] rational action' (Brown, 2003). The individual under neoliberal governmentality is framed as both responsible for themselves and responsible for others in line with the need for self-sufficiency in place of state services. Responsible conduct is key to the production of individuals who are reliant on market relations and work within these relations in order to reproduce themselves. Neoliberal governmentality, thereby, represents a reciprocal relationship in which the way 'individuals are driven by others is tied to the way they conduct themselves' (Foucault, 1993, p.203), which, in its neoliberal manifestation, is underscored by the extension of the market into legitimate modes of governance, thought,

# Buy Good, Do Good, Be Good? Ethical Consumption as Neoliberal Governmentality

Written by Ruby Agatha Utting

knowledge and conduct.

This conception of neoliberal governmentality is not without critique. For Daniel Zamora, Foucault, whilst overwhelmingly understood as critical of neoliberalism's economic pervasiveness, maintains arguments which are complicit with the neoliberal project. Zamora highlights, what he perceives as a conception, by Foucault, of social provision as a form of 'control' (Zamora, 2016) or 'biopower' (Ibid) that creates a 'dependency' (Zamora, 2014b) based on a falsifiable 'notion of "rights"' (Ibid) that acts at a level of control rather than empowerment. Jan Rehmann, similarly situates Foucault's understanding of neoliberal governmentality as 'merg[ing] with the ideological conjuncture of neoliberalism' (Rehmann, 2016, p.136) by focusing on power 'in an individualistic manner' (Ibid) and thereby ignoring 'collective agency and self-determination' (Ibid). Rehmann suggests, what he perceives as an avoidance of the 'ideological practices' (Ibid, p.144) which, to him, are inherent to the success of neoliberal governance and thereby believes governmentality fails to fully 'grasp the ideological domination of liberalism' (Ibid, p.143). These writers, thereby, question the utility of governmentality to an assessment of neoliberalism and instead highlight the need to focus on the ideological, class-driven motivations behind neoliberalism's rise.

It is possible to overcome these critiques. By situating Foucault within neoliberal propositions these writers fail to understand the potential of governmentality and, instead, concern themselves with the personal political preferences of Foucault. Through arguing for what they view as primarily an ideological, profit-based drive behind neoliberal governance, these writers falsely brand governmentality as an 'abstract concept' (Ibid, p.141) that lacks 'explanatory power' (Ibid, p.139). This focus on the need for ideological causation, fails to grasp governmentality as a tool through which 'specific social forms' (Barry, 2004, p.199) have been rendered legitimate and visible. Moreover, as Andrew Barry rightfully articulates governmentality can be used as both a theoretical notion and a tool through which to examine 'the very practical ways in which particular domains of life can come to be governed' (Ibid, p.207). Jacques Bidet, similarly usefully highlights how such critiques can be overcome through a unification between Marxist, ideological-driven arguments and Foucauldian governmentality. Bidet acknowledges that Marxist arguments based on a conception of 'property power' (Bidet, 2016, p.16) and Foucauldian arguments underlined by a focus on 'knowledge-power' (Ibid), while centralising focus on differing areas do not have to be exclusive modes of analysis. Moreover, by positioning these forms of power as interactive rather than oppositional and as mutually relevant to current analysis of neoliberalism, Bidet acts to neutralise the understanding that Foucault falters in his focus on discourse over ideology. Far from being an 'artificial neologism' (Rehmann, 2016, p.144), therefore, governmentality is a crucial tool through which the relationship between EC and neoliberalism can be investigated in both theoretical and practical terms.

## Theory

Situating EC within this governmentality framework allows it to be understood as a product of and reproductive of neoliberal capitalism. To undertake this task, it is necessary to display how EC relates to the main theoretical tenets of governmentality. In its global manifestation, as a mode of business practice, the rise of corporations undertaking ethical practices has altered the discursive framework of how capitalism is understood. Here, traditionally economic vehicles become viewed as ethical. Through this, EC reproduces a rationality that conflates economics and morality, with the market defining how ethics is enacted both institutionally and individually. This rationality manifests in the subjectivities of EC. Here, individuals have been regulated as both responsible for social change and in need of undertaking self-formation in accordance with a responsible ethical lifestyle. EC as governmentality, therefore, is enacted both on a corporate level and on an individual level, which simultaneously act to produce practices and subjects that conform to neoliberalism.

EC constitutes a site of 'power 'beyond the state' (Larner and Walters, 2004, p.10) that is responsible for defining what ethics is and how it is undertaken. Here power is understood not in a coercive sense but rather 'as a pure limit set on freedom' (Foucault, 1990, p.86) that is mobilized through the creation of 'specific political knowledge[s]' (Lemke *et al*, 2011, p.5) and which facilitates the "'govern[ing]" [of] individuals and collectives' (Ibid). Ethical businesses are imbued with a specific power that allows them to define and order the social sphere. Within the EC movement, corporations have been allocated a legitimacy via an attachment of ethics to their practice within a wider 'global governmentality' (Larner and Walters, 2004, p.2) framework that has altered how the wider market is

# Buy Good, Do Good, Be Good? Ethical Consumption as Neoliberal Governmentality

Written by Ruby Agatha Utting

understood. This moral power means corporations undertaking ethical practices are equipped with the power to change how traditionally economic practice is understood, allowing business practice and the wider governing framework they are part of to be conceived as virtuous and legitimate.

This power allocates globalised business a governing role in defining the discourse surrounding what is understood to be ethical and how ethical practice is undertaken. This 'ethical authority' (Barry, 2004, p.202) rests upon the 'production of particular truths' (Larner and Walters, p.2) whereby what is understood to be ethical is increasingly conflated with a market rationality based on corporate interests. EC is premised on the idea that businesses are able to produce and exchange products upon a capitalist market whilst simultaneously producing ethical outcomes. Here, ethical practice is fused with profit making and corporations framed as channels through which such ethics can be met. This fusion of moral and economic function thereby 'serve[s] to authenticate and extend the authority of corporations, not only over the economic but over the social and political order' (Rajak, 2011, p.231) and similarly rearticulates the framework away from traditional understandings of production and exchange towards altruism. EC, therefore, acts as a direct method through which previously detrimental capitalistic endeavours are viewed as socially beneficial and therefore, as a technique of governmentality, are legitimated in their role in the reproduction of neoliberal capital.

This power imbued within ethical corporations is coherent with the neoliberal rationality. Rationality, as the specific ideas and reasoning that underscore the dominant governing model, defining the limits of practice and classifies 'what can be thought and what cannot be thought' (Rose, 1999, p.8) through a legitimisation of what is epistemologically viewed as true. This is not a 'neutral' (Lemke, 2002, p.191) manifestation but the historically contingent emergence of a 'certain regime' (Foucault, 1991c, p.79) that defines what is valid through its 'inscri[ption]... in practices or systems of practices' (Ibid). EC rests upon a rationality that conflates the ideas of being economic and being moral that is emblematic of neoliberalism. Here, the '*homo oeconomicus*' (Brown, 2003) mentality based on the utilisation of rational economic calculus is paired with the simultaneous enactment in ethics, defined by a responsibility imperative both to others and oneself. Through this, both an institutional and individualised manifestation of the neoliberal rationality is presented with the wider ethical-capital framework, that validates corporations as channels of morality that are productive of an individualised logical economic behaviour that's is simultaneously responsible. *Fairtrade*, for example, allows consumers to embark on an economic transaction whilst making a 'difference to thousands of farmers [and] workers' (Fairtrade Foundation, 2018a), thereby, displaying a rationalization that is simultaneously economic and moral. This rationality of EC 'that tries to render the social domain economic' (Lemke, 2001, p.203) is, thereby, not only foundational to neoliberalism, but by acting through it, situates EC within neoliberal governmentality that both within governance and conduct acts to reproduce the neoliberal capital framework.

This mobilization of the neoliberal rationality within EC is evident in the production of knowledge that has altered understandings of business practice. The knowledge surrounding EC is 'grounded in an epistemology which dissolves the distinction between economy and society' (Shamir, 2008, p.3) and is endowed with a power to define frameworks of understanding. Here, reports and statistics are developed that show the global benefit that corporations bring to the international realm, alongside the use of expert opinion to validate specific corporate decisions. A quick scroll on the *Starbucks* website, whose global mobilization of ethical affiliation is indicative of the rise of EC, and their *EMEA News* provides dozens of articles providing information about the work they do on issues as diverse as London Pride to a partnership with Public Health England on a calorie-reduction project (Starbucks, 2018). Here, Starbucks, the corporation, acts to define what is understood as in need of help and the specific method through which this help should be enacted, as through them.

What is important here is how the provision of this knowledge has implications for creating 'a particular way of *thinking* about the kinds of problems that can and should be addressed by various authorities' (Miller and Rose, 1990, p.2). Moreover, corporations who align their business practice with ethical standardization are able to define what is in need of ethical problematization and the creation of information concerning how such moral issues should be dealt with. The knowledge produced by companies engaged in the EC framework is therefore tailored in a way that means ethical concerns and strategies are not only defined via the market imperatives of business but this similarly places limitations about what can be thought of as ethical. EC knowledge, thereby, as a mechanism of



# Buy Good, Do Good, Be Good? Ethical Consumption as Neoliberal Governmentality

Written by Ruby Agatha Utting

governmentality acts to regulate ethics in a way that corresponds to capital and acts as a tool of legitimation to both produce and reproduce neoliberal capitalism.

This rationality similarly underscores the creation of subjectivities via EC that act within governmentality to reproduce neoliberalism. Is it understood that 'governing operates through subject[s]' (Miller and Rose, 1990, p.18), in the sense that 'techniques of the self', 'the procedures... suggested or prescribed to individuals in order to determine their identity, maintain it, or transform it' (Foucault, 2000a, p.87) are inherently linked to the 'institutional frameworks, social groups, and historical periods in which they develop' (Ibid, p.88). EC can be situated as a site in the formation of subjectivities that are linked to the aspirations of the moral, autonomous-rational actor and the imperative to fulfil a market-defined ethical lifestyle. What is key here is the centralisation of 'neoliberal responsabilization' (Shamir, 2008, p.7) that places the individual as not only accountable for others but as responsible for themselves in conjunction with moral-rational norms. Through this it seems the 'project of responsible citizenship has been fused with individuals' projects for themselves' (Rose, 1999, p.88) whereby EC as corporate governing practice has become a framework of 'self-regulation' that subjects reproduce through ordering themselves. Here, the practices of market-defined ethics have come to play a governing role in individual conduct with subjects shaping themselves in line with the market-drive to 'make a... difference' (Fairtrade Foundation, 2018a) both to others and themselves.

Consumption is a central site in the formation of these neoliberal subjectivities. For Nikolas Rose, consumption has become a key strategy in 'the management of subjectivity' (Rose, 1989, p.217). For Rose, consumers are offered a 'range of possible standards of conduct, forms of life, types of "lifestyle"' (Ibid, p.230) which 'incorporate a set of values from among the various alternative moral codes' (Ibid, p.231) that both inform and order the choices subjects make. Here, 'personal practices of consumption' (Rose, 1999, p.85) are linked to 'the government of conduct' (Ibid) through the production of goods that allow citizens to build identities based on 'choices made' (Ibid, p.87). EC, by tying ethics to products allows for a specific lifestyle to be presented as correct and only achievable through participation in capitalist exchange. This synthesis of 'the mechanisms of the market and the imperatives of self-realization' (Ibid) allows for ethics to be used as a form of self-identification and as a self-disciplining, responsabilizing mechanism that both shapes and measures consumers choice. As highlighted by Clive Barnett *et al*, this should not reduce a conceptualisation of consumption choices to solely 'strategically governed movements of different actors' (Barnett *et al*, 2008, p.640) but rather should be understood as a framework through which consumption choice is increasingly defined by its ethical affiliation and how consumers 'act... upon themselves' (Miller and Rose, 2008, p.1) in accordance with this.

EC can therefore be situated as a site of neoliberal governmentality that acts to reproduce neoliberal capitalism. This disruption of naturalised conceptions of EC allows it to be understood as imbued with a power to define how ethics are understood and practiced. Here, governmentality, both as a governance technique and a mode of conduct, allows for the legitimisation of neoliberal capital through the association of ethics with capital exchange; a fact that rearticulates and revalidates capitalism. In order to further this exploration, it is necessary to assess the practical application of governmentality to studies of EC.

## Case Study

To further this investigation into how EC reproduces neoliberalism, it is useful to examine its fruition through the case study of a single company. *Innocent Drinks* (ID) will be examined as a site of business and consumption that demonstrates the multifaceted relation EC has to neoliberal capitalism as well as illustrating the practical relevance of governmentality to examinations of ethical capitalism. This will be done by applying the framework of governmentality to the qualitative literature surrounding ID as a company in order to provide a 'detailed and intensive analysis' (Bryman, 2016, p.60) of how EC acts as neoliberal governmentality. Moreover, it will seek to overcome critiques such as those raised by Jan Rehmann that by focusing on 'management literature, government proclamations, and the mainstream press' (Rehmann, 2016, p.144) governmentality studies fails to grasp 'the real... relevance and function' (Ibid) of such 'texts within the actual culture of enterprises' (Ibid). This paper will attempt to move beyond this issue through consultation of a range of both advertising and business sources in order to conduct a discourse analysis of the 'organisational identities... displayed' (Bryman, 2016, p.556). Here, not only will the primary documentation of the company be examined but similarly the products produced, promotional material and videoed interviews.

# Buy Good, Do Good, Be Good? Ethical Consumption as Neoliberal Governmentality

Written by Ruby Agatha Utting

ID is characteristic of the ethical capitalism movement. Created with the purpose of selling healthy drinks through a business founded on a sustainable and charitable ethos, ID has become a centrepiece brand on the drinks shelves of UK and European supermarkets. Described by one of its co-founders, Richard Reed, as 'a way to do ourselves some daily good' (Innocent Drinks, 2006), ID positions its products as simultaneously good for the individual consumer and beneficial to others primarily through its commitment to funding its corresponding charity *The Innocent Foundation* (IF). With products ranging from Smoothies to Coconut Milk that are all argued to be nutritionally rich and responsibly sourced, ID promotes a lifestyle that former Head of Brand Dan Germain describes as 'helping people live well and die old' (Oxford Academic, 2014). Started by a group of three at a music festival in 1999, ID grew to become Europe's best-selling smoothie in 2011 (Innocent Drinks, 2018c) with an annual profit of £8.5 million in 2016 (Walsh, 2017). This expansion was further facilitated by the full sell-off of the brand to *The Coca Cola Company* in 2013 (Innocent Drinks, 2018b). Such a move has seen ID added to the portfolio of 'the world's largest beverage company' (The Coca Cola Company, 2015), thereby positioning it firmly within a governing corporation of the global food and beverage industry.

It is necessary to firstly outline the work of ID as a company that defines itself as ethical. Since its inception, ID has proclaimed to conduct itself in a way that is socially and environmentally beneficial, with the goal of being 'good' (Innocent Drinks, 2018c) at the heart of its brand. From using packaging that is '100% recyclable' (Innocent Drinks, 2018d) to making their central London office '*Fruit Towers* as sustainable as possible' (Innocent Drinks, 2018c), ID prides itself on its environmental credentials. Similarly, claims to be 'good to the core' (Innocent 2018a) in respect to social issues are illustrated in its efforts to create sustainable business practices and supply chain accountability. Here, 'human rights' (Ibid) and farm and factory standards are used to demonstrate a central commitment to be a 'business that wants to do good' (Ibid), an effort highlighted in the '£8.9 million' (Innocent Foundation 2018a) of funding IF has received from ID. This effort to be 'good' was rewarded in June 2018 when ID was granted status as a Certified B Corporation, thereby validating its role as a business that 'meets[s] the highest standards of verified social and environmental performance, public transparency, and legal accountability to balance profit and purpose' (B-Lab, 2018). ID is, therefore, firmly positioned within the ethical capitalism framework as a business that seeks to conflate ethics with capitalism through the corporate fulfilment of social and environmental needs.

This ethical ethos extends through to ID's production of products it claims to accord with a specific ethical lifestyle. ID is situated within the wider healthy living movement as a company that produces products that 'help people live well and die old' (Innocent Drinks, 2018e). Informed by the knowledge of their resident expert nutritionist Helen Whitby, ID's website offers extensive advice concerning the necessity to eat fruit and vegetables, the nutrients this provides and how this corresponds to the content of their smoothies and juices. This is reinforced through provision of a list of references that allow for further research into governmental bodies that offer proof of the health benefits of having a sufficient daily intake of fruit and vegetables. ID similarly offers a guide to 'living well' (Innocent Drinks, 2018e) that highlights aspects such as the need to 'exercise' and avoid 'stress' and 'fad diets' (Ibid) in order to fulfil a specific way of life. This emphasis on living in a certain way is tied to the idea that by doing yourself good you will be doing others good through the consumption of products that will not only keep you alive for longer but will simultaneously contribute in a way to helping others. In the words of ID, they create products that 'taste good [and] does good' (Innocent Drinks, 2013) thereby combining the idea of an individualised ethical lifestyle to the overarching goal of ethical capitalism.

ID, as a company that conducts itself ethically and as a product that is consumed in accordance with a lifestyle defined as ethical, is a useful example of how EC acts as a technique of neoliberal governmentality. What is of particular utility here is the emphasis placed within ID on the aim 'to make it easy for people to do themselves and others some good' (Innocent Foundation, 2018a). This corresponds to governmentality both through the creation of practices that situate the company as doing 'others some good' and the facilitation of conduct that allows consumers to 'do themselves... good'. This, thereby, concerns not only the moral-economic power that ID is imbued with due to its position within a capitalist conglomerate that undertakes ethical practice but similarly how the practices promoted by ID act to shape the conduct of those who buy their products. To demonstrate how EC acts within governmentality to reproduce neoliberal capitalism, it is necessary to examine ID as a company imbued with power, how this power sets a framework through which ethics are understood and practiced, the rationalities this conception is based upon and the way this extends to the shaping of subjectivities that accord to neoliberalism.

# Buy Good, Do Good, Be Good? Ethical Consumption as Neoliberal Governmentality

Written by Ruby Agatha Utting

On a global level, the adoption of ethics as a central pillar of its business imbues ID with a specific moral power. ID has positioned itself within the ‘remoralised’ incarnation of market discourse’ (Rajak, 2011, p.232) that has validated the corporation as a site of social improvement. ID claims to ‘take full responsibility for the impact of our business on society and the environment’ (Innocent Drinks, 2018) is, through this ethical association, empowered to alter ‘the act of discourse’ (Foucault, 1990, p.83) upon which conceptions of capitalist corporations are created. Here, a direct link is formed between a company that is part of a multi-billion-dollar empire and the ability to be ‘so good it hurts’ (Innocent Drinks, 2006). Furthermore, this positioning of ID as ethical affords it a ‘moral legitimacy’ (Rajak, 2011, p.232) that allows for the re-articulation of ‘self-evidences’ (Foucault, 1991b, p.76) upon which understandings concerning the sphere in which it acts and the wider neoliberal paradigm in which it is positioned are altered. Here, the corporation, ID, is viewed as the vehicle that is validated within the sphere of the social through its enactment of ethics, demonstrated in its multiple social campaigns such as ‘The Big Knit’ or ‘Bee Friendly’ and practices of charitable giving and sustainability promotion. Moreover, what is of importance here is how this association frames ID as a legitimate capital and ethical player, thereby articulating it as both economic and moral. Therefore, ID can be situated within neoliberal governmentality through its role in legitimising neoliberal capitalism via this legitimisation of corporate practice as moral.

This power ID is attributed with similarly allows it to set the framework through which ethics are conceived. Ethics, or being ethical, within the literature surrounding ID is overwhelmingly framed in an economic sense. Here, consumption is centralised within how ethics are mobilised and similarly regulates how they are conceived. This understanding of ethics can be viewed on the multiple platforms upon which ID engages with its consumers. For example, on their website ID’s pledge to donate 10% of their profits to IF equates the act of buying an ID product to the realisation of social projects such as fighting poverty in Ecuador or building safe water facilities in India (Innocent Foundation, 2018a). Similarly, on the Innocent Instagram feed, it is stated that the sale of each bottle associated with the Big Knit campaign ‘raises money for @age\_uk so they can be there for older people’ (Innocent, 2017). This point is re-emphasised on ID’s packaging which is ‘100% recyclable’ (Innocent Drinks, 2018d), again equating the purchasing of an ID drink with an ethical act, here of helping to protect the environment.

Through this synthesis of consumption with conducting ethics, ID acts to define the ‘practices of freedom’ (Foucault, 2000c, p.283) through which the two terms are understood and enacted. Here, being ethical is framed as an act that is inherently linked to the economic processes of production and consumption whilst correspondingly capitalist exchange is understood as a moral act. Whilst it is not the point to say whether the projects that ID funds are good or bad, it is necessary to understand the changing discourse this creates surrounding how consumption is understood and the narrow way in which ethics are defined in relation to this. Moreover, ethics in this context, are mobilized in a way that alters the paradigm of understanding surrounding capitalist consumption so as to re-legitimate it away from ideas of exploitation and inequality. It appears, therefore, that ID acts through an ethical framework to create a continued re-validation of capitalism in its neoliberal form. Furthermore, here the changing practice of business, as signified by ID, and the reconceptualization this entails has not only re-validated neoliberal capitalism but has similarly altered how individuals are conceived and conduct created.

The ethical-capitalist framework that ID acts within, relies on a conception of the individual as simultaneously ethical and economic. Here, neoliberal rationalities are reproduced via a centralisation of responsibility within ID’s construction of the individual. ID promote and frame their drinks as sites of individual responsibility which can, once bought, be used to enact ethics both to themselves and to others through what is framed as the ‘good’ choice. From being contained in recyclable bottles to the high nutritional content, ID promote a conception of their products as small packages of accountability that allow individuals to undertake an act of rational responsibility. Here, ‘personal self-control, self-management and informed choice’ (Lewis, 2008, p.235) are centralised within ID’s materials, with the onus on individualised behaviour and making a responsible choice framed as the key to creating change. This responsibility is inherently tied to economic compliance with the fruition of morals only materialising once the ID product has been bought and consumed. Moreover, for ID, individuals become ‘hero[s]’ (Innocent Drinks, 2018d), once they have undertaken an economic transaction, which subsequently allows them to enact a morality conceived within the narrow framework of market-based conceptions of what and who a responsible citizen is.

This onus on the individual as responsible-economic is usefully displayed in ID’s 2014 ‘Taste’s Good Does Good’

# Buy Good, Do Good, Be Good? Ethical Consumption as Neoliberal Governmentality

Written by Ruby Agatha Utting

campaign. Within this series of TV commercials, ID advertise the power of their products to create beneficial outcomes for consumers and simultaneously for others. In one such advert (Innocent Drinks, 2013) a hungover character named Mark is shown to choose an ID product because it is a healthy option that will be 'good' (Ibid) for him. Buying this product is framed as the responsible choice which not only allows for Mark to be ethical towards himself, through choosing a nutritious option, but this simultaneously brings about a moral outcome for others. Furthermore, by choosing to consume an ID drink Mark starts 'a global chain of good' (Ibid) which directly benefits a Peruvian family, headed by Ravalina, via the funds provided through a partnership between IF and the charity *Practical Action*. Here, Ravalina is framed as an economically sound individual who utilizes funds provided by ID in order to expand her wool business and enter into further market relations. The message is thereby founded on the idea that an ID product both 'tastes good [and] does good' (Ibid) allowing for ethics to be conducted in a dual process both to the self and to others. Here, through consumption, not only is ethics enacted in this double sense but the consequence of this is that the individual who chooses to buy ID is 'good' (Ibid) due to his consumption choice. Moreover, by framing 'doing good' (Ibid) in this purely economic-rational sense, in the ability of it to provide self-care and to help others make economically rational decisions, ID acts to reproduce the understanding of individuals as utility maximising subjects who, under neoliberalism are responsible for themselves and others.

This rationality is, thereby, similarly linked to how neoliberal subjectivities are conceived and reproduced by ID. Here, not only do ID offer a specific conception of what an ethical lifestyle constitutes but they present 'rules of acceptable conduct' (Foucault, 2000c, p.285) that conform to and reproduces this ideal. ID promotes a morality based upon 'a virtuous liaison of happiness and profit' (Rose, 1999, p.86) whereby ethics is understood to be both beneficial to the responsible individual and the moral company. Moreover, ID works to produce a discourse that understands ethics to others to be inherently linked to a self-ethical lifestyle whereby eating a nutritionally balanced diet, exercising sufficiently and reducing stress allows 'people to do themselves some good' (2013e). Here, the notion of individual 'care of the self' (Foucault, 2000c, p.281) that has centralised self-responsibility within the creation of subjectivities under neoliberalism is key to how ID understand their audience. Here, being responsible means to be healthy and live a long and productive life, values that allow for extended engagement with market-based social relations. Furthermore, ID products are allocated as a channel through which such a lifestyle can be achieved because they allow the consumer to 'get more fruit and veg into their diet' (Innocent Drink, 2018e), thereby conforming to what is understood as a self-responsible lifestyle. ID is, therefore, framed as a direct channel through which to achieve a lifestyle that conforms to the ideals of neoliberalism, allocating it a space as a technique of governmentality in the legitimisation and reproduction of this paradigm.

Through this lifestyle framework, ID's products are positioned as sites of self-regulation through which responsibility can be performed. Here, the moral-economic discourse of ID acts to shape how individuals act upon themselves in order to conform to the wider ethical paradigm. The information provided by ID concerning nutrition is a useful example of how its reliance on promoting a specific lifestyle translates into conduct as 'care of self' (Foucault, 2000c, p.285) that conforms to market principles. Here, not only are consumers offered overt instruction to 'get more fruit and veg into their diet' (Innocent, 2018e) but this is positioned within a wider discourse concerning the need for 'people to live well and die old' (Innocent, 2018e). Here, health is used as an ordering factor through which individuals measure and construct themselves. Moreover, expertise is deployed to 'shape conduct... through the power of truth' (Miller and Rose, 1990, p.19) by not only presenting a specific lifestyle as an ideal but by placing ID within this picture as a necessary and legitimate channel through which it can be achieved. This not only concerns numerous facts about the content of fruit and vegetables but all of the nutritional information is validated through the association of their in-house nutritionist, Helen. What is of importance here, again, is not to debate the nutrition of fruit and vegetables or the necessity of recycling, but to demonstrate the framing of a particular lifestyle that presents a conception of personal wellbeing that works in conjunction with market principles.

ID is, thereby, representative of EC as neoliberal governmentality. As a company ID conforms to the ethical capitalism model that acts to re-articulate the framework within which practices and understandings of neoliberal capitalism are legitimised. Though this, ID is imbued with a moral power that re-shapes the discourse concerning both corporate practice and individual consumption in ways that are viewed as morally good. ID's discourse, reliant on an economic-moral rationality, acts to define individuals as responsible, both to others and to themselves, through the promotion of a lifestyle that accords to neoliberal ideals. Through this, individuals act within a specific lifestyle

# Buy Good, Do Good, Be Good? Ethical Consumption as Neoliberal Governmentality

Written by Ruby Agatha Utting

framework that is both responsible and economic. ID, therefore, acts within governmentality to further the conflation of the economic and social spheres and to reproduce neoliberal capitalism as the legitimate governing framework.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has not been to criticise the practicalities of EC. Nor does it deny that there are many who will have benefitted from the awareness raised and profits donated through this move towards a capitalism that enacts ethics. It has, however, attempted to disrupt narratives that overwhelmingly view EC as either symbolic of a spontaneous rise in corporate altruism or as the further progression of a malign profit-seeking model. In doing so, it has attempted to understand EC not as a perceived practical solution to global problems but rather as a discursive technique that should be situated as both product of and reproductive of neoliberalism both as a corporate practice and as a mode of individual conduct.

As has been shown, EC as neoliberal governmentality acts to further facilitate the cohesion of the social and economic domains. In its corporate manifestation, EC has allocated business with a moral power that allows them to not only act within the social sphere as sites of ethics but, through this power, allowed them to define both what ethics is and how it should be enacted. Here, normative conceptions of corporate behaviour and the discursive framework within which neoliberal capitalism is conceived have been altered to legitimise the extension of a market rationality into the realm of morality. Furthermore, corporations engaged in ethical action for others act in accordance with market-defined needs, which has changed perceptions of what business does. This extension of traditionally economic forms into the moral sphere adds legitimacy to the neoliberal model. This creation of corporate practices that are viewed as ethical has not only altered how neoliberal capitalism is conceived but has acted within it to shape individual conduct that is reproductive of the paradigm.

As an individualised practice, EC not only allows subjects to take part in this enactment of ethics for others but facilitates them acting in accordance with market defined ethics towards themselves. Here, the attachment of morals to capital exchange allows for individuals to enact responsibility to others, through buying ethical products, whilst undertaking a lifestyle of responsible self-care. Moreover, EC should be understood as a key site in the individualisation of responsibility under neoliberalism whereby subjects are increasingly measured concerning their accordance with a lifestyle based on self-accountability. Through EC, consumption becomes a performance of responsibility with economic transactions tied to the idea of being moral to others and to oneself. Here, subjectivities are underscored by a rationality that conflates being ethical-responsible with economically sound. This creation of conduct to help others and to help the self thereby acts to conform to and reproduce neoliberal ideals of individualised responsibility as economic rationality.

This tandem of corporate practice and individual conduct positions EC as neoliberal governmentality. Here the wider normative framework of ethical-capital practices has, through EC, acted to create subjects that accord to the responsible-economic logic of neoliberalism. Furthermore, not only do subjects buy products that are framed as ethically good, allowing them to do good to others but in turn they become good themselves. Conceptualising EC in this way provides an important starting point to not only assess the role of ethics in the validation of neoliberalism but, importantly, it can be used to initiate a discussion on the how the discursive power of neoliberal capitalism can be challenged. Moreover, whilst ethical capitalism acts to revalidate neoliberal economism it can also be used to begin a conversation concerning how a neoliberal power can be challenged on a discursive as well as practical level.

## Bibliography

Barnett, C. *et al* (2008) 'The Elusive Subjects of Neo-liberalism' *Cultural Studies* 22:5 p.624-653

Barry, A. (2004) 'Ethical Capitalism' in Larner, W. and Walters, W. (eds) *Global Governmentality: Governing International Spaces* (Routledge: Oxon)

Bidet, J. (2016) *Foucault With Marx* (Zed Books: London)

# Buy Good, Do Good, Be Good? Ethical Consumption as Neoliberal Governmentality

Written by Ruby Agatha Utting

- B-Lab (2018) 'About B-Corps' Accessed online: 02/08/18 Available at: <<https://bcorporation.uk/about-b-corps>>
- Brown, W. (2003) 'Neo-Liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy' in *Theory & Event* 7:1
- Bryman, A. (2016) *Social Research Methods* (Oxford University Press: Oxford)
- Carrier, J. (2010) 'Protecting the Environment the Natural Way: Ethical Consumption and Commodity Fetishism' *Antipode* 42:3 p.672-689
- Carrington, M. *et al* (2016) 'The Ideology of the Ethical Consumption Gap' *Marketing Theory* 16:1 pp.21-38
- Dolan, C and Rajak, D. (2011) 'Introduction: Ethnographies of Corporate Ethicizing' *Focaal: Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* 60 p.3-8 t
- Ericson, R. (2006) *The Conscious Consumer: Promoting Economic Justice Through Fair Trade* (Washington DC: Fair Trade Resource Network)
- Fairtrade Foundation. (2018a) 'Buying Fairtrade: Bananas' *The Fairtrade Foundation* Accessed online: 22/08/18 Available at: <<https://www.fairtrade.org.uk/Buying-Fairtrade/Bananas>>
- Fairtrade Foundation. (2018b) 'What Fairtrade Does' *The Fairtrade Foundation* Accessed online: 10/08/18 Available at: <<https://www.fairtrade.org.uk/What-is-Fairtrade/What-Fairtrade-does>>
- Foucault, M. (1990) *The History of Sexuality Volume 1* Translated by Hurley, R. (Pantheon Books: New York)
- Foucault, M. (1991a) 'Governmentality' in. Burchell, G et al. (eds) *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1991)
- Foucault, M. (1991b) 'Politics and the Study of Discourse' in. Burchell, G et al. (eds) *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1991)
- Foucault, M. (1991c) 'Questions of Method' in. Burchell, G et al. (eds) *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1991)
- Foucault, M. (1993) 'About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Two Lectures at Dartmouth' *Political Theory* 21:2 p.198-227
- Foucault, M. (2000a) 'Subjectivity and Truth' in Rabinow, P. (ed) *Ethics: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984* (Penguin Books: London)
- Foucault, M. (2000b) 'Technologies of the Self' in Rabinow, P. (ed) *Ethics: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984* (Penguin Books: London)
- Foucault, M. (2000c) 'The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom' in Rabinow, P. (ed) *Ethics: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984* (Penguin Books: London)
- Foucault, M. (2008a) '14 February 1979' Translated by Burchell, G. in Senellart, M. (ed) *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France 1978-79* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan)
- Foucault, M. (2008b) '14 March 1979' Translated by Burchell, G. in Senellart, M. (ed) *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France 1978-79* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan)
- Harvey, D. (2005) *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

# Buy Good, Do Good, Be Good? Ethical Consumption as Neoliberal Governmentality

Written by Ruby Agatha Utting

Hobson, K and Hill, A (2011) 'Cultivating Citizen-Subjects through Collective Praxis: Organised Gardening Projects in Australia and the Philippines' in Lewis, T and Pottery, E. (eds) *Ethical Consumption: A Critical Introduction* (Routledge: Oxon)

Humphery, K. (2011) 'The Simple and the Good: Ethical Consumption as Anti-Consumerism' in Lewis, T and Pottery, E. (eds) *Ethical Consumption: A Critical Introduction* (Routledge: Oxon)

Innocent (2017) 'Hats like this unicorn are sitting on out smoothies right now. Each one raises money for @age\_uk so they can be there for older people' *Instagram* Published: 19/10/17 Accessed online: 06/08/18 Available at: <<https://www.instagram.com/innocent/?hl=en>>

Innocent Drinks (2006) *TV Choice: Essentials of Marketing Collection* [Video file] Accessed online: 31/07/2018 Available from Kanopy: <<https://sussex.kanopy.com/video/innocent-drinks>>

Innocent Drinks (2013). *innocent drinks chain of good advert – tastes good does good*. [Online Video]. 19 December 2013. Accessed online: 02/08/18 Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LeXgxN24loc>>

Innocent Drinks (2018) *Being Sustainable* Accessed online: 02/06/18 Available at: <<https://www.innocentdrinks.co.uk/us/sustainability>>

Innocent Drinks (2018a) *Good to the Core* Accessed online: 02/06/18 Available at: <<http://www.innocentdrinks.co.uk/>>

Innocent Drinks (2018b) *Our Owner* Accessed online: 31/07/18 Available at: <<http://www.innocentdrinks.co.uk/us/our-owner>>

Innocent Drinks (2018c) *Our Story* Accessed online: 31/07/18 Available at: <<http://www.innocentdrinks.co.uk/us/our-story>>

Innocent Drinks (2018d) *Recycling Revolution* Accessed online: 02/08/19 Available at: <<https://www.innocentdrinks.co.uk/us/recycling-revolution>>

Innocent Drinks (2018e) *We Make Natural, Delicious Drinks That Help People Live Well and Die Old* Accessed online: 02/08/18 Available at: <<https://www.innocentdrinks.co.uk/us/nutrition>>

Innocent Foundation (2018) *The Innocent Foundation* Accessed online: 02/06/18 Available at: <<https://www.innocentfoundation.org/>>

Innocent Foundation (2018a) 'About the Foundation' Accessed online 01/09/18 Available at: <https://www.innocentfoundation.org/about-us>

Innocent Foundation (2018b) 'What we Fund' Accessed online 02/08/18 Available at: <<https://www.innocentfoundation.org/what-we-fund>>

Larner, W. (2000) 'Neo-liberalism: Policy, Ideology, Governmentality' *Studies in Political Economy* 63 pp. 5-26.

Larner, W. and Walters, W. (2004) 'Introduction: Global Governmentality' in Larner, W. and Walters, W. (eds) *Global Governmentality: Governing International Spaces* (Routledge: Oxon)

Lemke, T. (2001) 'The birth of bio-politics': Michel Foucault's Lecture at the Collège de France on Neo-Liberal Governmentality' *Economy and Society* 30:2 p. 190-207

Lemke, T. (2002) 'Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique' *Rethinking Marxism* 14:3 p.49-64

# Buy Good, Do Good, Be Good? Ethical Consumption as Neoliberal Governmentality

Written by Ruby Agatha Utting

- Lemke, T. et al. (2011) *Biopolitics: An Advanced Introduction* (New York: New York University Press)
- Lewis, T. (2008) 'Transforming citizens? Green Politics and Ethical Consumption on Lifestyle Television' *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 22:2 p.227-240
- Lewis, T and Potter, E. (2011) 'Introducing Ethical Consumption' in Lewis, T. and Potter, E. eds (2011) *Ethical Consumption: A Critical Introduction* (Routledge: Oxon)
- Mackenzie, D (2017) *2017 Ethical Consumer Markets Report 2017* Accessed online: 25/07/18 Available online: <<http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/portals/0/downloads/ec%20markets%20report%202017.pdf>>
- Miller, P and Rose, N. (1990) 'Governing Economic Life' in *Economy and Society* 19:1 pp. 1-31
- Miller, P and Rose, N. (2008) *Administering Economic, Social and Personal Life* (Cambridge: Polity Press)
- Oxford Academic (2014) 'Marketing Case Insight 18.1: innocent' *YouTube* Accessed online: 31/07/18 Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9FA3t6d eJg>>
- Rajak, D. (2011) *In Good Company: An Anatomy of Corporate Social Responsibility* (Stanford: Stanford University Press)
- Rehmann, J. (2016) 'The Unfulfilled Promises of the Late Foucault and Foucauldian 'Governmentality Studies' in Behrent, M. and Zamora, D. (eds) *Foucault and Neoliberalism* (Polity Press: Cambridge)
- Rose, N. (1989) *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (Free Association Books: London)
- Rose, N. (1999) *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- Shamir, R. (2008) 'The Age of Responsibilization: On Market-Embedded Morality' *Economy and Society* 37:1 p.1-19
- Starbucks (2018) *Starbucks EMEA News* Accessed online: 24/08/18 Available at: <<https://news.starbucks.com/emea>>
- Sylla, N. (2013) *The Fair Trade Scandal: Marketing Poverty to Benefit the Rich* (Pluto Press: London)
- The Coca Cola Company (2015) *2015 Annual Report on Form 10-K* Accessed online: 31/07/18. Available at: <<https://www.coca-cola.co.uk/faq/company/what-is-your-annual-turnover>>
- Walsh, D (2017) 'Innocent Back in Profit after Sales Surge in Europe' *The Times* Accessed online: 31/07/18 Available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/innocent-drinks-puts-on-sales-in-europe-6t2psfgr>
- WFTO (2018) *History of Fair Trade* Accessed online: 07/08/18 Available at: <<https://wfto.com/about-us/history-wfto/history-fair-trade>>
- Youde, J. (2009) 'Ethical Consumerism or Reified Neoliberalism? Product (RED) and Private Funding for Public Goods' *New Political Science* 31:2 p. 201-220
- Zamora, D. (2014a) 'Can We Criticize Foucault?' Interviewed in *Ballast* (12.10.2014) Accessed online: 20/06/18 Available at: <<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/12/foucault-interview>>
- Zamora, D. (2014b) 'Foucault's Responsibility' in *Jacobin* (12.15.14) Accessed online: 20.06.18 Available at: <<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/12/michel-foucault-responsibility-socialist/>>



# **Buy Good, Do Good, Be Good? Ethical Consumption as Neoliberal Governmentality**

Written by Ruby Agatha Utting

Zamora, D. (2016) 'Introduction' in Behrent, M. and Zamora, D. (eds) *Foucault and Neoliberalism* (Polity Press: Cambridge)

*Written by: Ruby Agatha Utting*  
*Written at: The University of Sussex*  
*Written for: Louiza Odysseos*  
*Date written: August 2018*