

Ricardo's discursive demarcations: a Foucauldian study of the formation of the economy as an object of knowledge

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Abstract: Set against previous attempts to grasp the work of British political economist David Ricardo on a theoretical and methodological level, this article explores the emergence of the 'economy' in Ricardo's *Principles of political economy and taxation* (1817) from a Foucault-inspired perspective on the formation of objects of knowledge. Several distinctions (or 'discursive demarcations') are brought to the fore with which Ricardo sought to determine the boundaries of political economy, such as that between natural economic processes and artificial interventions; between long-term and short-term trends; or between different kinds of conflict. Taken together, the discursive demarcations examined in this article contribute to the formation of the 'economy' as an object of knowledge, make specific theories possible, and enable the use of a particular method.

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JEL Classification: A12, B12, B31, B41, Z13

The idea that all 'economic phenomena' are part of a distinct domain governed by its own laws and regularities only began to take shape in the second half of the 18th century. Before that time, there were numerous treatises devoted to phenomena we now consider to be economic—e.g., consumption and commerce, wages and wealth, and so on—yet, none of these were “grounded in the assumption of an autonomous social order” (Firth 2002, 40). In many economic discourses, the government's role is integral to maintaining order in economic life. For instance, the famous Italian penal reformer, Cesar Beccaria, proposed that a legislator ought to keep interest rates, as well

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as the price of labour and transportation costs, down. In a lecture on public economics delivered at the Palatine school in Milan in 1771, he predicted that chaos would ensue if such economic policies were not enforced by an enlightened despot (see Harcourt 2011, 65-68).

Although it is futile to look for the origin of economics in the text of a single author, we can trace the emergence of an overarching conception of the 'economy' in the work of 18th century French physiocrats, and subsequently, in that of Scottish moral philosophers. The physiocratic movement began as a writing workshop with François Quesnay and a small number of disciples at the Court of Louis XV in Versailles, and was later displaced to Paris where the new institution of the Salon provided the *économistes* with ample room for discussion (see Charles and Théré 2011). Both theoretical and applied works of the physiocratic movement were predicated on idea that a 'natural order' ruled the economic activity of a country. However, such a natural order still required government involvement in order to secure a nation's wealth and power—but not of the interventionist kind proposed by Beccaria. Quesnay claimed that an 'economic government' should provide the institutional structures to enable each individual to pursue his own interests, while at the same time protect agriculture as the eternal source of economic growth (see Steiner 2002, 100).¹ Amidst the intrigues of French court society, physiocratic doctrines began to spread to a wider audience. As a tutor to the Duke of Buccleuch, Adam Smith visited France in the mid-1760s where he became acquainted with members of the writing workshop. More than a decade later Smith published his misgivings with the teachings of the physiocrats in *The wealth of nations*; and subsequently this gave impetus to the British tradition of political economy (see Harcourt 2011, 79-85).

To provide a chronological account of the concept of the 'economy' as an autonomous entity would be beyond the scope of a single article. Therefore, this article ventures an alternative approach by commencing with the provisional end point of its development, which is to be found in David Ricardo's *Principles of political economy and taxation* (1817). In the history of economics, David Ricardo is regarded as one of the 'founding fathers' of the discipline. At a time when economics was still in its infancy as a science, Ricardo's *Principles* was instrumental

¹ The freedom to act upon your own interest on the market did require a very strict adherence to political authority. Quesnay's 'natural order' was bound up with a 'legal despotism' wherein a monarchy both hereditary and absolute was to punish all deviancy from the laws that made commercial society blossom, see Harcourt 2011, 94.

in giving political economy a distinctive profile, which led to fierce intellectual and political debates in the 1820s (see Blaug 1958, 44-45; Thompson 2002). By carefully examining Ricardo's 19th century classic in political economy, I will articulate a number of 'discursive demarcations' that are also found—to a greater or lesser extent—in 18th century physiocracy and political economy. I will show then how these elements together contributed to the formation of the 'economy' as an object of knowledge.

My epistemological focus on discursive demarcations is inspired by the French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault. The formation of objects of knowledge was central to Foucault's work in the history and philosophy of the human sciences. In *The archaeology of knowledge*, for instance, he said that "it is not enough for us to open our eyes, to pay attention, or to be aware, for new objects suddenly to light up and emerge out of the ground" (Foucault 1972, 44-45). In numerous studies he has shown how certain aspects of human action or 'being' were actively turned into an object up for grabs for further scientific inquiry, e.g., madness, illness, perverse behaviour, delinquency. Before elaborating upon the Foucauldian epistemological framework, however, I will take a closer look at two different ways in which Ricardo's work can be analysed. On the one hand, his writings can be examined on the contextual basis of particular economic theories; on the other hand, his work can be examined on the basis of contemporary interpretations of his scientific methods.

First, on the contextual basis of his theoretical work, David Ricardo has borrowed, developed, and refined a range of specific economic theories—these include: a theory of value; a theory of the relationship between the fast growth of the population and the slow increase of food; a theory about the equal rates of profits that spring from different capital investments; and a theory of the coming into being of rent (see Blaug 2003, 85-142). These theories, in turn, can be contrasted against those of his predecessors, contemporaries and successors. For instance, Ricardo's labour theory of value could be evaluated against the utility theory of value of Jean-Baptiste Say. It could then be shown that such theoretical differences are imbedded in their respective theories of the distribution of income (see Gehrke and Kurz 2010, 465-476). In similar vein, Keynes's criticism of Ricardo could be attributed to divergences in the classical theory of interest and a modern, Keynesian theory of interest (see Andrews 2000). When examined on this contextual basis,

Ricardo's *Principles* is essentially a collection of theories that can be compared and contrasted against enumerable others.

Alternatively, on the basis of Ricardo's methodological approach, historians and philosophers of economics have called attention to other features of his work. Ricardo's scientific method combines different theoretical propositions to form a deductive framework thus articulating particular economic processes and tendencies (see Redman 1997). By systematically thinking through these principles and their consequences, Ricardo was able to sketch a grand narrative of the allocation of global productions among the three classes of community. As recent interpreters of Ricardo's method make clear, the stress on his deductive methodology must not be pushed too far. As an experienced and highly successful broker on the London stock exchange, a landlord with agricultural duties, and a keen observer of contemporary politics, Ricardo was also a man informed by empirical inquiry (see Morgan 2005). Being a financier and a Member of Parliament, Ricardo had access to different sources of information such as newsletters from 'the city', business associates, taxation reports and parliamentary reports. Given his heavy involvement in business and government, Ricardo was well informed about current economic events and could equally be seen as an "empirical economist" (Davis 2002).

Similar to his economic theories, Ricardo's scientific methodology may be compared to the methods of other political economists. Because of their friendship and correspondence, contemporary scholars focus on the potential differences between Ricardo's methodology and that of Thomas Malthus (see Cremaschi and Dascal 1996). With regard to empirically minded economists, including Malthus and the Cambridge inductivists, Ricardo put far more emphasis "on logical deduction as a means of validating theories" (Redman 1997, 284 46n.). The contrast between different economic methodologies subsequently led to the question of the influence of earlier economic writers on Ricardo's way of practicing political economy. The writings of Scottish philosopher Dugald Stewart, for instance, might have influenced Ricardo via his pupils: Francis Horner—an influential writer for the *Edinburgh Review*—and James Mill—a close friend of Ricardo's (see Depoortère 2008). Furthermore, there are differences in opinion about the relationship between Ricardo's method and his alleged religious convictions (see Cremaschi and Dascal 2002; Depoortère 2002). Finally, current scholars

tend to focus on the critical reception of Ricardo's economic method—for instance by William Nassau Senior (see Depoortère 2013).

These theoretical and methodological approaches convey how Ricardo's *Principles* led to the development of an economic science; and this appears to fit nicely with contemporary categorizations of economics—after all, science can be taken as the combination of theory and method (see Zeuthen 1955; Ekelund and Hebert 2007; Hollander 2010; Schumpeter 2011). Nevertheless, an analysis based exclusively on theory and method would have serious drawbacks. While such analytic approaches may provide interesting insights into Ricardo's work, they would fail to address the formation of the concept of the 'economy' as an object of knowledge. This is problematic, for the development of theory and the application of method presupposes the existence of an 'object': the 'object' about which knowledge is learned.

The exclusive attention that has been paid to theory and method in the history and philosophy of science thus obscures the question as to the constitution of the economy as a distinct entity. In the words of Margaret Schabas, "hardly any scholars have asked how Ricardo conceived of an economy or even if he perceived such a construct" (2005, 104). According to Schabas, Ricardo did cultivate the concept of an 'economy' as an "integrated set of relations" (2005, 119-120). This would suggest that the economy is a domain where humans are inextricably bound together by market processes. Therefore, in such a "human economy" the ties linking economic phenomena with agriculture, which were prominent in the writings of Quesnay and the physiocrats, became less important (Schabas 2005, 120).

Although Schabas's analysis illuminates the broad transformation of economic science during the 18th and 19th centuries, her use of notions such as 'conceiving' and 'perceiving' seems to suggest that Ricardo somehow grasped the concept of the 'economy' prior to the actual formation of a discernable object of knowledge.² As a consequence,

² Another general feature of that transformation is Ricardo's downplaying of morality and religion by skirting the "broader question of human motivation and moral agency" (Schabas 2005, 103). Up until Ricardo's *Principles*, and even thereafter, political economy was part of a broader framework of moral philosophy and religious thought. In the scholarly debate on Adam Smith it is considered an affront to read *The wealth of nations* while totally ignoring his *Theory of moral sentiments* and *Lectures on jurisprudence*, see Winch 1996, 21-22, 95. For Smith, these projects were clearly related even in the absence of explicit cross-references. Other contributions to political economy had a profound religious take on economic issues, see Maas 2008. Malthus's doctrines of population and rent, for instance, were intertwined with the religious notion of divine providence; to draw a rigid distinction between his economic and his

it remains unclear exactly how the formation of that economy comes about in Ricardo's work. A Foucauldian analysis of the formation of objects of knowledge can be helpful in addressing this epistemological lacuna. In the following section, I will discuss Foucault's ideas on the formation of objects of knowledge in more depth and include a brief outline of his own attempts to come to terms with economics. In the main subsequent sections, I present a series of 'discursive demarcations' with which Ricardo tried to determine the boundaries of economic science. In the final section, I will show how these demarcations contributed to the formation of the economy as an object of knowledge, and then return to what the Foucauldian framework adds to the focus on Ricardo's theories and methods.

DISCURSIVE DEMARCATIONS

Foucault's reflections on economic science have recently received some attention from historians and philosophers of economics. Unfortunately, that attention has been restricted to clarifications of Foucault's own position vis-à-vis other authors from the philosophy of science—not in the continuation of his philosophical project. For instance, Kologlugil (2010) compares Foucault's archaeology of knowledge against the Western tradition of epistemology and modern strands of postmodern theorizing; and Vigo de Lima (2010) similarly analyses the archaeology of the human sciences in a book-length study of Foucault's analysis of economics. On the other hand Ryan Walter, in response to de Lima's analysis, concludes that Foucault's schemas and conceptual apparatus should not be taken as a set of rules or a definitive body of thought, but instead "need to be put to work, revised and developed" (2012, 110). In my view, this entails a Foucault-inspired approach by which specific concepts and themes are extracted from his work and applied to epistemological problems. It is this approach that I endorse in this paper. Therefore, I will first briefly recapitulate Foucault's twofold investigation of economic science and then give an outline of one such theme: the formation of objects of knowledge.

religious views would be inappropriate, see Winch 1996, 238, 349. For Richard Whately, political economist and Archbishop of Dublin, the ultimate explanation of economic misery was to be found in the vices inherent in human nature, not in the sound principles of political economy, see Vance 2000, 192. Set against this background, Ricardo's economic theories may strike the modern reader as particularly secular and free of moral connotations.

In Foucault's *The order of things*, economics is one of the three principal disciplines from the human sciences—together with linguistics and biology—that is analysed in an archaeological manner. The first feature of Foucault's archaeology of knowledge concerns humans' perspective to the outside world, that it is permeated by a "fundamental way in which it sees things connected to one another" (Gutting 1989, 139). This primordial experience of the order of things—or 'episteme', as Foucault called it—determined how the objects of these sciences could appear to those who performed scientific work. The second feature, which is directly related to the first, is that the experience of linguistic, biological, and economic phenomena, is subject to dramatic change from one historical era to the next.

Concerning the historical transformations in economic science, Foucault placed great emphasis on the differences between 18th century analysis of wealth and 19th century political economy. In this way, the work of Ricardo could only be understood against the background of the historical shift that took place around the year 1800 (Foucault 1994, 253-263). By being located at the beginning of the modern *episteme*, Ricardo could write about aspects of the economy that his predecessors were unable to. For example, he derived a characterization of labour as the ultimate determinant of the value of goods; he concluded that scarcity was a necessary feature of economic life; and he foresaw long-term developments in the production, consumption, and distribution of commodities. Thus, on this re-interpretation of Ricardo's theories of economic processes and events, Foucault determined that understanding the economy, as an object of knowledge, was dependent upon the particular *episteme* that ruled knowledge production in the modern era.

In 1978-1979, after a decade-long hiatus, Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France were fully devoted to economic science. In accordance with his increasingly political interests, economics re-emerged as crucial to a transformation of governmental reason or 'governmentality' (Foucault 2000b). In the lecture series preceding *The birth of biopolitics*, Foucault had started to sketch a history of the modes of governance, encompassing a variety of sources including political philosophies, religious treatises, and economic writings. From a governmental perspective, the intellectual tradition that ranged from physiocrats to David Ricardo implied a turning point in the history of political thought and action. The role of the 'economy' as an object of and as an

alternative to political intervention was crucial in this regard. Foucault argued in much detail that “the market” had transformed from a “site of jurisdiction” into a “site of veridiction” (Foucault 2008, 32). First, by “site of jurisdiction” Foucault meant that politics were required to provide a verdict on economic events, for instance on the supposed unjustness of the price of certain commodities exchanged on the market. However, by “site of veridiction”, he implied that the market was constituted as a natural realm with its own laws and regularities in terms of which one could evaluate the costs and effectiveness of political action. The transformation of Western political thought was thus entangled with a new conception of the economy.

In each case, Foucault’s focus on the formation of the objects of economic science was to convey how fundamental change depends either on the means of production of knowledge, or alternatively on the nature of political intervention and non-intervention. However, neither of his accounts are satisfactory. In Foucault’s archaeology of the human sciences all traces of human agency are eliminated from scientific inquiry. In this way, he depicts knowledge production as a process wherein scientists are mere mediators between stratified layers of *episteme* and the surface knowledge. This means, first of all, that there is no longer a place for the active role of scientists in shaping the object of inquiry. Moreover, it is difficult to conceive of a viable explanation of the whole process because the transformation is both sudden and beyond the grasp of any the participants. Finally, the rift between 18th and 19th century analyses of wealth seems to prohibit a more gradual emergence of the economy as an object of study.

In comparison with his archaeology of economics, Foucault puts more emphasis on the gradual emergence of the economy as an object of knowledge in the history of succeeding rationalizations of government (see 2008, 27-74; 2009, 333-362). This time, however, his interest in understanding the nature and transformation of modes of governance is stronger than his interest to explicate the formation of the object that provided leverage for that transformation. As a new conception of the economy played a pivotal role there, one might expect a detailed account of its formation. Unfortunately, it remains unclear how the ‘economy’ or the ‘market’ actually became a site of veridiction in the hands of 18th and 19th century economists. In fact, when it comes to this question Foucault merely points to “a number of economic problems being given a theoretical form” (2008, 33) as well as

to the “discovery of the existence of spontaneous mechanisms of the economy” (2008, 61).³

Even though Foucault’s own analysis of economic science is not entirely convincing, I do consider the formation of objects of knowledge an important epistemological theme. Moreover, I argue that Foucault’s own work holds the key to a more satisfactory approach to the emergence of new epistemic objects. The most explicit and constructive account of the formation of objects of knowledge is found in *The archaeology of knowledge* (see Foucault 1972, 40-49). Although his reflections on archaeology were meant to elucidate the method used in previous historical and philosophical studies, they actually contain a far more dynamic picture of knowledge production than the analysis of economics in *The order of things*.

According to Foucault, the formation of an object of knowledge is entangled with the task of a scientific discipline, to find “a way of limiting its domain, of defining what it is talking about, of giving it the status of an object—and therefore of making it manifest, nameable, and describable” (1972, 41). What this means is that, on the one hand, scientists have to define the object in question. Only after a positive investigation could it become manifest as an object available for further analysis. However, on the other hand, an attempt to give something the status of an object has a negative corollary in that these scientists simultaneously have to limit the domain of inquiry. In doing so, certain elements are selected for scientific study, and others are, by necessity, ignored. So what are the criteria according to which “one may exclude certain statements as being irrelevant to the discourse, or as inessential and marginal, or as non-scientific” (Foucault 1972, 61)?

This dynamic endeavour of defining one’s object and limiting one’s domain can be defined as the problem of demarcation. This problem does not exist between science and non-science, but exists between the attributes that belong to an object and that do not. I introduce the term ‘discursive demarcation’ to refer to such attempts to determine the boundaries of the object within a particular scientific

³ Again, this paper sides with Ryan Walter’s (2008, 95) remark that “the emergence of the economy has never been specified” in the literature on governmentality. My paper, though, takes a different view on the way it should be specified. Whereas Walter stresses the constitutive role of notions of class interests and wealth, I doubt whether the mere introduction of these two notions is sufficient to constitute ‘the economy’ as Ricardo demarcated it.

discourse.⁴ Each of these discursive demarcations is concerned with a particular aspect of what is either central or peripheral to the object of knowledge. In the economic discourse of David Ricardo we can discern five such demarcations: First, Ricardo sought to define the proper time span of economic analysis by distinguishing the *short term* chaos of fluctuating prices from the more stable developments in the *long run*. Second, he differentiated between elements that were *intrinsic* to economic processes and elements that were merely *contingent* upon them. Third, he distinguished between the *natural* course of events and *artificial* policy measures. The fourth demarcation is concerned with the separation of the *fluidity* of economic processes and the *force* of political interventions. And fifth, Ricardo contrasted an *economic* dimension of conflicts with a *socio-political* one. The elements that are of primary importance to Ricardo's political economy can be determined on the basis of these five discursive demarcations.⁵

ON SHORT TERM FLUCTUATIONS AND LONG TERM TENDENCIES

The first discursive demarcation that is found in Ricardo's *Principles* has to do with the time span that he considers appropriate for economic analysis. I will make this conception of time span explicit by focusing on his account of changes in prices, profits and rents.

Ricardo begins the discussion of economic change by distinguishing two different types of commodities. First, there are commodities "of which there exists a limited quantity, and which cannot be increased by competition". These commodities "are dependant for their value on the tastes, the caprice, and the power of purchasers" (Ricardo 1996 [1817], 135). For instance, the value of a bottle of wine "of a peculiar quality,

⁴ Looking at the history of economics through a Foucauldian lens is not equivalent to spotting discursive demarcations in the work of key historical figures. At least it should be acknowledged that one crucial issue is omitted here, namely the complex relationship between the development of knowledge and the wielding of power that came to dominate Foucault's writings in the 1970s, see Foucault 1980. But even though discursive practices made way for non-discursive ones at that time, the detailed account of the 'delinquent' or 'dangerous individual' as new objects of knowledge in criminology and psychiatry shows that the earlier theme is still very much present, see Foucault 1995; Foucault 2000a.

⁵ Of course, these five discursive demarcations do not exhaust the list of issues that a Foucault-inspired analysis of Ricardo could bring to the fore. They do, however, cover a number of important aspects of the latter's epistemological efforts. For each of these demarcations is linked to a fundamental feature of Ricardo's work: timeframe, causality, nature, forces, conflict. Taken together, moreover, they offer a fairly substantial account of his overall conception of an economy that additional demarcations could subsequently either extend upon or nuance.

which can be made only from grapes grown on a particular soil" depends solely on the wealth and willingness of those who desire to possess it (1996 [1817], 18). Opposite of rare and unique products are commodities that can be increased by production; however, manufactured commodities are also subject to influence by the tastes of consumers (p. 183). For instance, a change in fashion can cause an increase in the demand for a certain product—e.g., silks—and a decline in the demand for another—e.g., woollens (p. 63). On the common principle of supply and demand this can affect both commodities, precipitating a rise in the price of the former and a fall in the price of the latter. The difference between these two types of commodities is thus not a matter of capricious taste, but contingent upon the effect of demand on supply. Rare bottles of wine will continue to sell for the same high price as long as wealthy people are willing to pay for a particular *terroir*. The high price of silks, however, may return to the previous rate if capital drawn to this highly profitable sector precipitates a rise in its supply, thus equalizing its demand.

Whenever Ricardo discusses economic fluctuations of the latter kind, supply and demand effects, he states that their temporal scope is limited: price changes are due merely to "temporary effects" (1996 [1817], 20) or "temporary reverses" (pp. 82-83); they will remain with us for only "a limited period" (p. 118) or "a very limited time" (p. 183); they take place in "periods of comparatively short duration" (p. 202) or during "an interval of some little duration" (p. 268). In sum, when it comes to the demand for easily reproducible commodities, deviations from the average price are periodic but *short-lived*.

Over and against this mode of short term fluctuations, one finds a mode of economic change that takes place at longer intervals. Here, Ricardo speaks of the "natural progress of wealth and population" (1996 [1817], 53), of the "progress of society and wealth" (p. 83) and of the "progress of nations" (p. 185). This long-term narrative can be explained on the basis of more general laws and tendencies. For example, an increasing population cannot be sustained by only the most fertile lands; in due time it will become necessary to cultivate lands of inferior quality. As soon as the most fertile lands become scarce, landlords will be able to demand a higher price for it. Consequently, less fertile land will have a lower return on invested capital, meaning that additional labour and machinery will be necessary to cultivate the same amount of raw produce. Further, when additional labour is required to produce

basic necessities their value will rise proportionally. As the value of basic necessities increases, the labourer's wage must also increase in order to afford these necessities for survival. In turn, the long-term increase of both rent and wage has consequences for the capitalists in the form of a decreased profit-margin. That is, if the dual tendency is not checked by improvements in machinery and discoveries in agricultural science, profits will gravitate towards the point where the investment of capital yields nothing in return (1996 [1817], 83).⁶ By piecing together these processes Ricardo conceives of a *long-term* tendency, which predicts how society progresses over time—he concludes that,

we have shown that in early stages of society, both the landlord's and the labourer's share of the value of the produce of the earth, would be but small; and that it would increase in proportion to the progress of wealth, and the difficulty of procuring food (Ricardo 1996 [1817], 77).⁷

By distinguishing economic phenomena according to these temporal indices, Ricardo declares that each can be studied without taking account of the other:

Having fully acknowledged the temporary effects [...] we will leave them entirely out of our considerations whilst we are treating of the laws which regulate natural prices, natural wages, and natural profits, effects totally independent of these accidental causes (Ricardo 1996 [1817], 64).

Ricardo thus singles out the laws regulating long term economic tendencies while leaving short term economic fluctuations out. Not only does this highlight the importance of law-like tendencies, the quote above signals two other discursive demarcations that are crucial to Ricardo's project of delimiting objects of economic inquiry. First, these temporary effects are linked to 'accidental causes' that political economy equally leaves out; this is the subject of the next section.

⁶ For an account of the knowledge Ricardo might have had of these checks, see Morgan 2005.

⁷ This is also the temporal level where Ricardo can distinguish the different stages society can be subdivided in. References to the "early stages of society" like this one, serve a strategic purpose: they make it possible to open up a time frame spanning ages, if not millennia, turning the fluctuation in prices due to the caprice of taste into tiny deviations from a more constant price that can be brought under general laws, see Ricardo 1996 [1817], 18, 27, 38.

Second, it shows that the adjective 'natural' is important when it comes to the fluctuations in prices, wages and profits that are central to political economy; this will be the subject of the third section.

ON NECESSITY AND CONTINGENCY

With regard to causality, the main issue at stake is the distinction between causes that are deemed to be 'necessary' to economic processes and those that are considered merely 'contingent' or 'accidental'. In order to show the difference between them, I will first discuss several examples of both types of causes before turning to the general significance of this discursive demarcation.

The first cause that falls under the heading of 'contingency' is contained in the aforementioned taste and caprice of consumers. The sudden emergence of a preference for a certain product may have a significant effect on its price. The price of a manufactured commodity will rise when producers are unable to cope with the rising demand immediately (Ricardo 1996 [1817], 183). Furthermore, Ricardo also states that taxation may have effects of a contingent kind, destroying "the comparative advantage which a country before possessed in the manufacture of a particular commodity" (p. 183). A new duty will oblige producers to raise the price of a commodity beyond the ordinary, shifting the balance of trade between nations. Thirdly, war between nation states can be categorized as set of contingent influences with regard to economic fluctuations. The insecurity of war brings many difficulties along with it; manufacturers may be forced to refrain from exporting their products, or alternatively, may be forced to produce those products which are incapable of being imported. Finally, Ricardo states that he leaves "the accidental variations arising from bad and good seasons" out of consideration when discussing the price of corn (p. 79).

When Ricardo discusses his core economic principles and their consequences, the emphasis shifts from what is accidental and mere contingency to what is necessary, determined and inevitable. A few examples will give the reader an idea of what this category consists of. The first of these examples concerns the labour theory of value, i.e., the doctrine that "it is the comparative quantity of commodities which labour will produce, that determines their present or past relative value" (1996 [1817], 21). This principle has two implications: it means that for the cost of maintaining the means of production, along with the

subsequent increase in value of basic necessities, the price of labour “necessarily rises” (1996 [1817], 37 1n.); but it also means that if the introduction of machinery enables the cultivator to obtain his product at a lesser production cost, this “will necessarily lower its exchangeable value” (p. 109). Similarly, if machinery used for processing raw cotton is rendered more efficient “the stockings would inevitably fall in value” (p. 27). Thus, the amount of labour required to produce some commodity determines its exchangeable value in a necessary and inevitable way.

Second, Ricardo's so-called “principle of rent” illustrates how economic production may be causally deterministic. He states:

Is it not, then, as certain that it is the relative fertility of the land, which determines the portion of the produce, which shall be paid for the rent of land as it is that the relative fertility of mines determines the portion of their produce which shall be paid for the rent of mines? (Ricardo 1996 [1817], 229).

When it comes to mining, the poorest mine yields the usual profits of stock and all that the other mines produce more than this, “will necessarily be paid to the owners for rent” (Ricardo 1996 [1817], 58). Whereas in the case of agriculture, there is a determinate relationship between the unequal fertility of plots of land and the unequal amount of rent that must be paid to the landlord. The rent received by the landlord will decrease if the quality of different plots of land becomes homogeneous. However, a subsequent differentiation in the quality of these plots “necessarily produces an opposite effect” and tends to increase rent values (p. 56). Finally, Ricardo identifies deterministic relationships between income levels and social classes, as well as between capital and productivity. With regard to the former, he states that that “whatever increases wages, necessarily reduces profits” (p. 82); with regard to the latter, he claims that “in proportion as the capital of a country is diminished, its productions will be necessarily diminished” (p. 106).

On the basis of the examples given above it is shown that there is a tension between events and phenomena that are ‘accidental’ or ‘contingent’, and tendencies and laws that are ‘necessary’, ‘determined’ and ‘inevitable’. The first three phenomena that Ricardo described as contingent or accidental—i.e., taste, taxation, and war—are entangled with human judgement and decision-making; for this reason they are difficult to categorize in terms of universal (deterministic) laws. Taste is

dependent upon fashion, taxation is dependent upon the influence of political deliberation, and war is dependent upon international relationships and conflicts. With regard to the fourth phenomenon of accidental seasonal change, whether or not the seasons provide the farmer with an abundant crop depends upon the forces of nature—not upon economic forces. Again, this tension between contingency and necessity is hierarchically structured in that the contingencies are not properties of the object of economic science, whereas necessary relationships are part of the nature of economic processes.

By combining the first two discursive demarcations, the effects of long term economic processes can be seen as determined and inevitable, and can therefore be analysed independently of short term fluctuations, which are caused by a diverse range of accidental features.

ON NATURALNESS AND ARTIFICIALITY

In an earlier passage (located in the conclusion of the section on time-spans), Ricardo declared that laws that regulate the natural prices, natural wages and natural profits are the proper objects of economic inquiry. The adjective 'natural' indicates the third discursive demarcation: it distinguishes proper objects of economic inquiry from other objects that may be deemed 'artificial'. Below, I will describe how Ricardo conceives of the notion of artificiality before returning to the central theme of the formation of the economy as an object of knowledge.

The distinction between the natural and the artificial is first presented by Ricardo as a characterization of certain restrictions that operate in economic life. When he discusses international trade, for instance, he states that "the very best distribution of the capital of the whole world [...] is never so well regulated, as when every commodity is freely allowed to settle at its natural price, unfettered by artificial restraints" (Ricardo 1996 [1817], 120). A closer look at these artificial restrictions reveals that taxation is to blame. A tax imposed on raw produce raises the price of commodities, thus preventing them to reach their 'natural' level; hence the imposed tax creates an 'artificial' price. However, the converse is also true. For instance, when the price of corn is diminished, it may have to do with an alteration in the 'natural' value of corn. In such a case, the change can be viewed as a consequence of some mitigating factor, e.g., that less labour is necessary for its production. Yet when price decreases are precipitated by a subsidy,

Ricardo attributes this not to natural but to artificial conditions. That is, a fall in the price of corn due to the fact that its producer receives a bonus is conditioned by “artificial means” (1996 [1817], 224).

On an aggregated level, the adjective ‘artificial’ is subsequently used to characterize the overall effects of these policy measures. On that level, a whole country is said to be in an “artificial situation” as a result of a “mischievous policy of accumulating a large national debt” (Ricardo 1996 [1817], 168). Heavy taxation on luxuries, income and property is then necessary to pay off such debts. These taxes, in turn, may motivate the taxpayer to “withdraw his shoulder from the burthen” (p. 172). Finally, members of the capitalist class may even be tempted to move their capital to other countries as an ultimate consequence of this “artificial system” (p. 172).

Similar to the previous discursive demarcations, there is a clear tension between what Ricardo considered to be natural and artificial concerning economic processes. In one way or another, the examples above show that *artificiality* is always dependent upon political action. *Naturalness*, on the contrary, depends upon actions of market participants and therefore upon the effects of market processes. The state thereby becomes an actor that artificially intervenes in a domain with its own natural laws and tendencies. Thereby, the state is no longer an integral part of the economy but something that stands outside it. The third discursive demarcation thus distinguishes what is natural from what is artificial and excludes the latter from further economic inquiry.

ON FLUIDITY AND FORCE

The fourth discursive demarcation concerns the use of metaphor in economics in the 18th and 19th centuries. Initially biological, or more precisely, anatomical metaphors were used to explain economic systems. The French physiocrats spoke of the cycle of production, distribution and consumption in terms of the circulation of blood in the human body (Schabas, 2005, 46-48). With some reservations, Jean-Jacques Rousseau compared the internal coordination of a man’s body to society and economy at large: what if we consider public finance the blood of the body politic, commerce, industry, and agriculture its mouth and stomach, and sovereign power its head (Rousseau 1987 [1755], 114)? Even Adam Smith incidentally made use of bodily metaphors to elucidate the potentially catastrophic effects of the monopoly of

colonial trade in terms of overgrown vital parts and artificially swelled blood-vessels (Smith 2000 [1776], 653-654). Similarly, in Ricardo's work we come across the use of language akin to these anatomical metaphors; yet his are sufficiently distinct to deserve their own discussion.

In classical political economy, there is a strong tendency to treat the economy as a domain where goods and services move in a fluid manner.⁸ In the *Principles*, metaphors of fluidity have become part and parcel of the depiction of economic mechanisms and processes. This can be understood in two distinct ways: first, the fluid movement of economic phenomena is depicted with such terms as “flow” and “flux”. Ricardo speaks of the “natural flow of capital” (Ricardo 1996 [1817], 37); the “flow of gold” (p. 83); the risk of a “sudden influx of corn” for which farmers expect to be compensated (p. 89); the “influx of precious metals” (p. 107); and the lack of effect on the rate of profit from an “influx or efflux of money” (p. 88). Second, metaphorical fluidity also describes the courses phenomena take: the “channels” where the funds for the maintenance of labour have been diverted from (p. 177); the “stream of trade” which gives a certain impetus to money; the “current of money” (p. 91); the “tide of capital” that comes to a pause when rates of return on different employments of capital converge (p. 205). These metaphors are used to suggest that the market domain is free from any inherent friction. The elements of economic life (capital, money, commodities, and people) are able to circulate freely.⁹ What is here at one instance can be there at another—hence the emphasis on the immediacy of effects following from fluid changes in production, consumption and distribution.

In accordance with the previous discursive demarcations, we must identify an antithesis to the fluid metaphor in order to determine its role in the process of demarcation. Now, it is only in terms of the essential fluidity of economic life that Ricardo speaks of the obstacles that hinder the flows of labour, capital and money. In this way, taxes are an “obstacle” to the increase of general income when they prevent a

⁸ Smith explicitly uses the metaphor of fluidity when he discusses mercantilism in terms of an unsuccessful attempt to dam up a stream of water. Based on the description of the problems of water management, he uses the mercantilist quest for a high gold stock in order to describe the latter in terms of the former: the power of gold is just as irrepressible as the power of water and the policy of restricting its exportation is in the end doomed to fail, see Smith 2000 [1776], 547-548.

⁹ There are some instances where the general emphasis on fluidity is temporarily subordinated to very concrete economic problems, as is the case when he speaks of the difficulty of subtracting capital from the soil once invested, see Ricardo 1996 [1817], 133, 187. But these instances never get to play a major role.

beneficial exchange of property (1996 [1817], 108); war is an “obstacle” to importation of corn (p. 186); and the mercantilist attempt to secure a high gold stock an “opposing obstacle” to the exportation of precious metals (p. 220).¹⁰ Furthermore, he sets ‘force’ over and against the lack of resistance that characterizes the economic realm, as is the case when he mentions the mercantile system “forcing capital into channels where it would not otherwise flow” (p. 102); or the limitless variation in exchange between countries “whenever the current of money is forcibly stopped” by law (p. 218). Lastly, one can only speak of ‘disturbance’ if the economic domain is one of inherent harmony and equilibrium, as is the case when a tax “occasions a disturbance of the equilibrium of money” (p. 101).

Thus, the fourth discursive demarcation concerns the ‘viscosity’ of the economic domain. It distinguishes the solid obstacles, forces and disturbances found in politics from the natural flow of economic phenomena. In terms of the formation of objects of knowledge, the demarcations of fluidity and force broaden the divide between the economy (as a market) and the state (as an independent political entity). Not only are economic processes of a natural kind, they are also characterized by a lack of friction; and not only is the state an artificial agent, it is also an agent that imposes obstacles upon these natural economic processes, forcing trade in unnatural directions and causing disturbances that would otherwise not have happened.

ON SOCIO-POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONFLICT

The fifth and final discursive demarcation regards the nature of conflict in the economy and society. Concerning the “harmony of interests”, Ricardo is sometimes either praised or blamed for the emphasis he places upon conflict as an essential part of society, one which explicitly separates the different classes and their interests from one another (see Winch 1996, 353). For instance, in the chapter on machinery—which was not included until the third edition of his *Principles*—he illustrates that opposing interests of the labour class and capitalist class can be demonstrated by capitalists’ use of machines to replace human labour. Labourers were in fact right to observe that the introduction of machinery might diminish the demand for labour:

¹⁰ In fact, two of these passages are quotes from Jean-Baptiste Say; the characterization of government as an external ‘force’ might thus be a more common one in the literature of political economy.

[...] the opinion entertained by the labouring classes, that the employment of machinery is frequently detrimental to their interests, is not founded on prejudice and error, but is conformable to the correct principles of political economy (Ricardo 1996 [1817], 273).

Furthermore, in stark contrast to Adam Smith and Thomas Malthus, Ricardo states that “the interest of the landlord is always opposed to that of the consumer and manufacturer” (1996 [1817], 232). In the long run the landlord will benefit from the rising price of goods due to the increasing difficulty of production, while capitalists and consumers suffer the consequences.

Without diminishing the importance of this distinction between Ricardo and his predecessors, the role of conflict in Ricardo's treatise must be specified. As it turns out, not all kinds of conflict are essential to understanding economic processes. Ricardo's description of the emergence of rent is crucial in this regard. In the most well-known description, the scarcity of fertile land is the decisive factor for the emergence of rent. However, a closer look into the text reveals a far more ambiguous depiction of its genesis. Rent is “that portion of the produce of the earth, which is paid to the landlord for the use of the original and indestructible powers of the soil” (1996 [1817], 49). There were times, however, when land was free of charge and no one thus had to pay for its use. To account for the initial availability of free land, Ricardo roughly distinguishes between two different stages in the development of society. On the initial settling of a country, when there is an abundance of fertile land, only a small proportion of the land will have to be cultivated in order to supply the population with the necessities required for its subsistence. On the common principle of supply and demand, the boundless supply of land ensures that it bears no price; it is at every man's disposal and there is no private ownership of the land. In the second stage, however, fertile land becomes scarce due to the expansion of population, and this demands price and rent come into being (1996 [1817], 34).

Albeit, the transition from the one to the other is not unproblematic. In between these two stages of development there emerges the class of landlords who collect the rent. It is only in a footnote that Ricardo suggests—parroting the words of Jean-Baptiste Say—that a unique distribution and ownership of the land underwrites the formal

possibility of rent. This uniqueness is due to the fact that the earth is the only agent of nature that “one set of men take to themselves to the exclusion of other; and of which, consequently, they can appropriate the benefits” (Ricardo 1996 [1817], 47 1n.). In other words, at the threshold of the second stage the most fertile land must fall into the possession of a small minority of landowners powerful enough to enforce others to pay for the services rendered. Looking into further detail regarding the creation of rent, we see that it requires more than just the condition of scarcity; it also presupposes a specific allocation of land and a specific allocation of the power to enforce the emerging division of property.¹¹ The well-known economic explanation of rent thus hides another, socio-political explanation from view.

The fifth discursive demarcation is intended to define which forms of conflict are necessary for proper economic inquiry and also which forms of conflict are not essential to it. Concerning the role of conflict in Ricardo's *Principles*, it is now evident that there is a function for the regular clash of interests between economic classes, but not a function for conflicts that have led to the formation of these classes themselves. With regard to the formation of the economy as an object of knowledge, this demarcation ensures that long term and natural economic processes can be studied without the problematic issue of the legitimacy of the current divisions of property. The picture of a stable class structure thus keeps difficult normative and socio-historical questions at bay—questions that would have transformed Ricardo's reputation as a controversial yet respected writer into a far greater intellectual threat to the existing social and political order.

THE FORMATION OF THE 'ECONOMY' AS AN OBJECT OF KNOWLEDGE

Now that these five discursive demarcations in Ricardo's *Principles* have been brought to the fore, we can address the central theme of this article: the formation of the 'economy' as an object of knowledge. In *The archaeology of knowledge*, Foucault depicted the formation of objects of knowledge as a dual endeavour, which consists of defining

¹¹ As Keith Tribe (1978, 129) remarks: “The analysis of distribution does not concern itself with the origin of the possessions of these agents: it is as irrelevant to consider the source of the capital held by the capitalist as it is to question the title of the landowner to his land”. However, contrary to Tribe, it is far from self-evident that this consideration ‘falls outside the bounds of an economy’. It is precisely Ricardo's boundary work that makes it do so. In fact, the exclusion of class formation from economic analysis is one of Marx's central reproaches levelled at classical political economy, see Marx 1993 [1939], 81-111.

the object of inquiry and of excluding what is considered irrelevant, inessential or marginal to the inquiry. Ricardo's discursive demarcations are clearly part of such an epistemological endeavour. In each of these demarcations some things are selected as central to political economy while others are excluded as being unworthy of further economic inquiry.

In this section, I will zoom out from the details of the previous analysis of Ricardo's discursive demarcations. First, I will show how these demarcations together contribute to the formation of the 'economy' as an object of knowledge. Second, I will return to theory and method as distinct fundamental concepts that are used to understand what (economic) science is about, and show how the focus on the formation of objects of knowledge contrasts with the conception of Ricardo as a theorist and methodologist. Third, I will elaborate upon the relationship between Foucault's accounts of economics and my own; that is, I will state how a more fine-grained analysis of the formation of the economy as an object of knowledge adds to the frameworks of archaeology and governmentality. Finally, I will briefly reflect on the formation of objects of knowledge beyond the present applied framework, by asking: how can the study of discursive demarcations be extended in new directions?

Discursive demarcations in Ricardo's *Principles*

(positive)	(negative)
1. Long term 2. Necessity 3. Naturalness 4. Fluidity 5. Economic conflict	Short term Contingency Artificiality Force Socio-political conflict

First and foremost, the focus on discursive demarcations makes it possible to trace the composition and constitution of a new object of knowledge. This is shown by the first two demarcations, which shield the economy from exorbitant chaos and fluctuation. Ricardo's concept of the 'economy' develops in the long run according to its own necessary laws, unimpeded by events and processes that might interrupt its steady course. Diverse phenomena including tastes

(preferences), war, taxation, and weather are considered to be merely temporary, accidental, and contingent and are therefore regarded as causally indeterminate. What remains is the slow but inevitable course of events that influences the distribution of the earth's produce amongst different classes of society.

The next two demarcations contribute to the separation of the economic domain from the political domain (i.e., state and government). First, the demarcation between naturalness and artificiality isolates politics from the market. According to Ricardo, the state is not an integral part of the economy; it is an external entity that artificially intervenes in a natural domain that has its own internal rules and regularities. Second, the distinction between fluidity and force further illustrates the differences between the economy and the state by presenting each domain its own level of viscosity. Given Ricardo's fluid metaphor, politics thus creates obstacles, applies forces and causes disturbances in a domain that otherwise contains no such hindrances or frictions. The economy is thereby understood to be something dynamic and flexible in the sense that commodities, capital, and labourers move freely from one sector to another.

The last distinction identifies the forms of conflict that are misunderstood in Ricardo's text. As it turns out, the conflict between the different social classes is taken to be an essential part of economic processes. Nevertheless, the formation of such social classes and the socio-political conflict this entails is external to economic analysis. In a positive sense, these discursive demarcations contribute to the formation of the economy as a natural and fluid domain wherein the different social classes and their conflicts are subject to certain necessary factors (laws, tendencies, regularities) that operate over longer time spans. In a negative sense, these discursive demarcations exclude as unimportant or unnecessary contingent and artificial factors that are appropriated by other social sciences; the emergence and reproduction of class divisions, processes of state formation and violent conflicts between nation states, the formation of taste and fashion and so forth are phenomena not of interest to economic science.

As I made clear in the introduction, Ricardo is currently conceived of as both an economic theorist who embraced, developed and refined a number of specific theories about production, consumption and distribution; as a methodologist he is regarded for certain approaches to doing political economy. The focus on the formation of the economy as

a new object of knowledge makes it possible to cast these theoretical and methodological perspectives on Ricardo's *Principles* in a new light. First of all, some of the discursive demarcations discussed above pertain to the core of Ricardo's theoretical principles. Without the metaphor of fluidity, for instance, one of his central principles of political economy would be incoherent: the principle of equal profit rates presupposes that capital and labour move freely from the sectors of lesser profit to the sectors of greater profit. This is because profit rates will only normalize in a quick and frictionless way if economic processes are presumed to be fluid in nature. Moreover, Ricardo's theory of rent would be far more ambiguous were it not for the distinction between two types of conflict. The laws that regulate the progression of rent would then have to include the far less regular power-politics that has led to the current class divisions. If Ricardo gave his side-remarks on the appropriation of the earth more weight, the human laws that made land into private property would be equally part of economic inquiry. At least in these cases, what was presented as two basic principles of Ricardian political economy now emerges as an end point of epistemological work.

In addition to their relevance to theoretical principles, the discursive demarcations above also pertain to methodological inquiries. Notwithstanding that Ricardo was a keen observer of contemporary political events, the deductive method of reasoning is the dominant approach in his *Principles*. Such a method of reasoning, however, is instrumental only if the (economic) premises are clear and unambiguous. That is, deduction ceases to be explanatory (and therefore useful) if the premises are only loosely defined or if additional factors are not accounted for. Given the foregoing analysis, it is evident that the discursive demarcations are part of an attempt to keep ambiguity and interference out. One can deduce long term economic processes based on a small number of basic theoretical premises provided that contingent factors, such as war and weather, and artificial factors, such as government intervention, do not influence these premises (this also would include intrusion by temporal market fluctuations due to taste and human caprice).¹² What goes for theory thus goes for method. Instead of considering the method of deduction a basic feature of Ricardian economic analysis, he has to make room for

¹² There might be another interesting connection between Ricardo's method and the temporal demarcation, namely that of his preference for comparative statics in allowing the "permanent effects of changes" to reveal itself, see Milgate and Stimson 1991, 59.

a deductive style of reasoning by way of the discursive demarcations analyzed in the previous sections.

Having elaborated upon Ricardo's discursive demarcations and their relationship with his theories and method, we can now assess the above account of the formation the economy as an object of knowledge in a manner familiar to *The order of things* and *The birth of biopolitics*. At the beginning of this article, I stated that Foucault's own analysis of economic science and its history was lacking. Ricardo played an ineffectual role in Foucault's archaeology of economic knowledge in the sense that his work was presented only as a symptom of a fundamental shift in the way knowledge was produced. In the present study, I focused on Ricardo's active role in demarcating the object of economic inquiry—even if these discursive demarcations are not explicitly presented as such by the author himself. Thus, I maintain that we should consider the formation of objects of knowledge as an important epistemological theme, but without the concept of a deep layer of discursive rules that determine the production of knowledge.

Foucault's analysis of economic science was subsequently mainly directed towards its political significance in the history of governmentality. The new conception of the market brought to the fore by (political) economists was therefore the focal point of the emergence of a distinct liberal rationalization of government. The critical problem was that Foucault did not elucidate how the market actually became a site of veridiction, that is, a pulpit from which to judge the effects and effectiveness of government policies. However, by making the discursive demarcations explicit in Ricardo, we can show how the market was conceived as something natural and autonomous. Moreover, the extrication of the state from economic processes—by highlighting its alleged obstructive and artificial effects—further illuminates the governmental transformation that was analysed by Foucault. Consequently, the economy is no longer regarded as a domain in need of interventionist economic policies; having demarcated the non-natural political influences, it has become a domain with its own laws and regulations that leaves little room for beneficial state interference.

Of course, Ricardo's attempt to demarcate the economy as an object of knowledge did not set a precedent for the succeeding two centuries of economic science. Foucault's own *Birth of biopolitics* reveals a divergence from classical political economy in German ordoliberalism and American neoliberalism in the post-war period. Thus, in light of

the subsequent developments in economics, how can we extend this reconfiguration of Foucault's formation of objects of knowledge in terms of discursive demarcations in new directions? I propose that there are, at least, two separate but related ways to do so.

One new line of inquiry would involve selecting further cases from the history of economic science to show how the academic economists responded to Ricardo's overall demarcation of the economy as an object of knowledge. After the general establishment of new objects of knowledge—e.g., economy, culture, and society—in the 19th century, economics became recognized as a separate academic discipline. For that reason, discursive demarcations have held a distinct disciplinary ring, and thus stand in need of an historical investigation of the origin and rivalry between disciplinary interpretations of the object of social scientific knowledge (see Heilbron 2004). Indeed, there are already some fine case studies of such instances of disciplinary demarcation. Lionel Robbins's intricate attempt to shield economics from history and psychology comes to mind here (see Maas 2009); the same can be said of Talcott Parsons, who attempted to enact a disciplinary division of labour between economics—the study of the *economic value* of things—and sociology—the study of the *social values* held by individuals and groups (see Velthuis 1999; Stark 2009, 7-8)

A second line of inquiry would draw connections between case studies such as these in a full-scale historical study of discursive demarcations. This is what I have attempted to do for the notion of 'incentive' in *Governing by carrot and stick: a genealogy of the incentive* (Dix 2014). Herein, I traced the shifts in the formation of the incentive as an object of knowledge from the end of the 19th century until the beginning of the 21st century. From the 1880s onward, American engineers were the first professional authority to demarcate the incentive as something that could be studied in a circumscribed manner. For them, studying the 'incentivization' of employees was synonymous with the analysis of and experimentation with different variants of piece wages. From the 1920s onward, the authority of the engineers was challenged by management scientists with a background in psychology, sociology, and anthropology. They developed different explanations for human behaviour and developed a set of alternative techniques to steer that behaviour in desirable directions. It took until the 1970s for a third authority on the use of incentives to emerge. In this third approach, mathematically trained economists abstracted from the interwar

problem of human motivation and behaviour, and forged a formal link between incentives and information. Such a genealogy of discursive demarcations—with regard to incentives, in this specific case—not only told us something about some particularities in the history of economic science, but revealed how economic science came to demarcate the object(s) of inquiry as they are studied today.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article I have presented an account of the formation of the 'economy' as an object of knowledge in the work of David Ricardo. In particular, I have argued that there are five distinct discursive demarcations at work in the *Principles of political economy and taxation* (1996 [1817]). I have shown that, taken together, these demarcations enable Ricardo to determine the boundaries of his object of inquiry. In a positive sense, he selects the natural and law-like processes that determine the long term distribution of agricultural and industrial products among the classes of the community and the way conflicts between these classes are played out in a realm where goods, people, and capital move in a fluid manner. In a negative sense, Ricardo excludes short term and contingent fluctuations, artificial and disturbing government action, and socio-political conflicts from economic inquiry. By highlighting this dual process of inclusion and exclusion in Ricardo's *Principles*, I have made use of a theme drawn from Michel Foucault's archaeology of knowledge. With some reservations, his focus on the formation of objects of knowledge in the human sciences proved an interesting addition to the scholarly interest in Ricardo's theories and methods. Finally, I have put forward that a Foucault-inspired analysis of economics is not necessarily restricted to one particular account of political economy, but can be used more generally to trace the development of (disciplinary) demarcations over time.

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