

Critiquing the Educational Present: The (limited) usefulness to educational research of the Foucauldian approach to governmentality

ROY GODDARD

University of Sheffield

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Abstract

The claim may be made that the Foucauldian analytics of power, in its detailed attention to the question of how modern societies are rendered governable, has superseded classical and radical analyses. This paper points to problems occasioned by Foucauldian governmentality's reliance on Foucault's flawed conception of the subject. These problems undermine the ambition of this style of research to outline possibilities for political intervention. It is suggested that educational critique can draw usefully on the scrupulous specificity of Foucauldian governmental analysis but that only a critique firmly based in a normative framework aligned to an idea of democratic sociality can aspire to political effectiveness.

Keywords: governmentality, subjectivity, critique, desubjectification, democracy

How can we still today in our historical present find ways of significantly clarifying and warranting the ethical-political perspectives that inform a critique of the present? This is *the* question that Foucault's genre of critique requires us to raise, a question he never quite answered.

(Richard Bernstein, 1994, pp. 234–235)

... each person's life should be its own telos. [Politics] would thus have its own minimal normativity: we should oppose all that which stands in the way of life being its own telos.

(Nikolas Rose, 1999a, p. 283)

Introduction

This paper begins with a brief account of the Foucauldian genealogical approach to the study of government, and then goes on to review some differences in the

ways in which Foucault's ideas about governmentality have been taken up by influential mainstream social theorists and researchers within education. I go on to argue that governmental studies are founded in Foucault's speculative and deficient theorisation of subject and discourse formation, a dependence which severely impairs their capacity for conceptualising the individual and its relation to the social whole. I then suggest that the Foucauldian idea of the subject shares similarities with the neoliberal subject required under the conditions of global capitalism and that this means that certain applications of governmental analysis may render them complicit with a market-driven project that threatens social cohesion and democratic aspiration. I conclude by arguing that educational research must develop a style of critique that attends to the valuable contributions of Foucauldian genealogy and its scepticism about emancipatory theoretical projects, but which must also serve education's primary responsibility of shaping a citizenry capable of sustaining and enhancing democratic sociality. Foucauldian governmental studies can tell us how rule is conducted in modern democratic societies operating under the rubric of neoliberal capitalism, but they cannot, as Bernstein's observation suggests, work themselves into a position where they would be able to consider whether societies *should* be operating in specific ways nor offer indications of how government *might* be conducted differently. Educational research must look beyond Foucauldian analysis, towards a practice of normative critique that might offer politically enabling accounts of the social problems of the present phase of modernity, a critique whose capacity to question existing dispositions of power and to imagine alternative ways of being in the world is not disablingly restricted by a defensive over-reaction to the dogmatic excesses of philosophical anthropology.

Governmentality

The concept of *governmentality* referred to in this paper was introduced by Michel Foucault's 1978 lecture at the Collège de France (Foucault, 1991) and has been developed since by a wide range of social theorists.¹ The term indicates a field of study which seeks knowledge about 'the particular mentalities, arts and regimes of government and administration that have emerged since "early modern" Europe' (Dean, 1999, p. 2). It refers to the ways in which government may be construed when the Foucauldian genealogical approach is applied to the matter of how society has been, is and might be ruled. *Government* is understood as 'any relatively calculated practice to direct categories of social agent to specified ends' (Dean, 1991, p. 12) or the 'conduct of conduct' (Foucault, quoted in Gordon, 1991, p. 2), as something broader and more varied than the powers thought to be held by the state. It involves 'a plurality of agencies and authorities, of aspects of behaviour to be governed, of norms invoked, of purposes sought, and of effects, outcomes and consequences' (Dean, 1999, p. 10). A fundamental of the Foucauldian governmental approach is its rejection of the disproportionate importance attached by classical and radical thought to 'the problem of right and violence, law and illegality, freedom and will, and especially the state and sovereignty' (Foucault, 1979, p. 89). As a means of theorising or analysing power, the sovereignty model, derived from the

relation of ‘transcendent singularity’ (ibid., p. 91) between the prince and his state, simply doesn’t suffice. It cannot *represent* the multiple, varied operations of power across its many sites in a way that can be useful to understanding. *Genealogy* has been defined as a way of writing history without a subject—without stabilising reference to an ideal figure which is at once the subject and theme of history, for example, the autonomous individual of liberal thought or the historic class of Marxism. It eschews the emancipatory projections of Enlightenment thought and its installation of a particular form of rationality as an historical goal and inevitability and rejects what it sees as critique’s commitment to a notion of the universal foundations of truth and morality. It prioritises practice over theory. Rather than being concerned with the system’s infection by alien pathogens (like capitalism or instrumental rationality) it addresses ‘the endogenous hazards and necessities of a system’ (Gordon, quoted in Dean, 1999, p. 41). It aims to describe things as they are, rather than as they ought to be. Genealogy also dissociates itself from what it terms postmodernism’s nihilist and theatrical celebration of the death of universal values, aspiring to a strenuously shallow investigation of government, how it is and may be conducted within the necessary and contingent constraints of the rationalities and social technologies available for thinking and acting politically. It offers ‘a cautious initiation into the conditions of a renewed task of political invention’ (Dean, 1999, p. 44). Genealogy aspires to a ‘cautious militancy and intellectual moderation’ which sets it against ‘dire prognostications on the fragmentation of identity and the ills of “mass society”’ (ibid.).

In the hands of its major practitioners this style of analysis sees no single ‘ordering principle of contemporary societies’ (Rabinow & Rose, 2003, p. 11) and therefore no possibility of a totalising analysis of what is a moral economy far more complex and extensive than radical, emancipatory critique envisages (ibid., p. 12). Although they might recognise that an ‘ethic of autonomy [lies] at the heart of advanced liberal modes of subjectification’ (ibid., p. 22), such researchers cautiously reserve judgement as to its effects, refusing a pessimistic determinism and ready to recognise benefits as well as costs ensuing from what are still for them, emerging configurations of power. This is an analytics of government that does not look for ‘signs of an impending doom from a position of exile’ but is committed to the ‘patient labour of detailed historical and empirical work’ necessary to the possibility of diagnosing ‘the limits and possibilities of the present’ (Dean, 1999, pp. 45–46). This genealogy is appropriate to and ‘practised in a time of limited political adversity’ (ibid., p. 45). The practice of this style of genealogy determines governmental studies as a way of understanding how government works in the present, ‘advanced liberal’ order (see Dean, 1999, pp. 149–175; Rose, 1999a, pp. 137–166), with a view to distinguishing good and bad effects of government and, possibly, discerning possibilities for political interventions.

Governmental Theory and Educational Research

There now exists a substantial and growing body of research in education that has been shaped or influenced by Foucault’s ideas and which is reflective of a wide

range of research orientations and purposes.² One of the earliest pieces of educational research influenced by Foucault's development of the concept of governmentality was Ian Hunter's *Culture and Government* (1988), a genealogy of literary culture which, along with his account of the emergence of popular education, *Rethinking the School* (1994), and writing for journal publication, constituted a vigorous assault on the pieties of liberal and radical educational theory. Subsequently, there have been a number of important applications of governmental thought to educational issues, from researchers such as James Marshall, Michael Peters and Mark Olssen. The publication of a special issue of *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 'The Learning Society from the Perspective of Governmentality' (edited by Jan Masschelein *et al.*, 2006) gave evidence of the vitality of educational research shaped by the Foucauldian approach to governmentality, whilst serving the valuable function of drawing attention to a range of ways in which Foucault's development of the concept of 'governmentality' have been taken up by European researchers working from a variety of disciplinary perspectives.³

Whilst acknowledging that Peters (2004, p. 51) is right to urge caution concerning the identification and proclamation of clear-cut tendencies or differences in research orientation in this still emergent field, it is nevertheless apparent that many applying Foucault's ideas about governmentality to educational matters share a particular interest in identifying the particular kind of subject which modern government (and education) seeks to produce. These writers describe this subject as, *inter alia*, the entrepreneurial self (Peters, 2005; Simons, 2006), the lifelong learner (Olssen, 2006; Popkewitz, Olsson & Petersson, 2006) the participatory subject (Quaghebeur, 2006), the unfinished cosmopolitan (Popkewitz, Olsson & Petersson, 2006), the self-managed learner (Pongratz, 2006), the autonomous chooser (Marshall, 1995b), the responsabilised self (Peters, 2005) and the citizen-consumer (*ibid*). Most of these writers are disturbed by the project of developing this kind of subject, some of them viewing it as working in harness with neoliberalism to submit human life to a 'busnocratic rationality' (Marshall, 1995b), to 'bio-economisation' (Simons, 2006), 'a regime of economic terror' in which learning may be ordered according to a 'permanent economic tribunal' (*ibid*), a 'sovereign force' (Simons, 2006) which threatens 'take care of investment in yourself, or disappear' (Simons, in paraphrase of Lyotard, *ibid.*, p. 536; see also Pongratz, 2006). Peters seeks 'in an age of consumerism' a politics 'that does not entail a capitulation to a regime of self-consumption' (2005, p. 136). The perceived consequences for education of this project are typified by Mark Olssen's judgement that the policy goal of lifelong learning, central to the European Commission's pan-European strategy for developing citizenship, social cohesion, employment and individual fulfilment, is 'a market discourse that orientates education to the enterprise society where the learner becomes an entrepreneur of him/herself' (Olssen, 2006, p. 223) and responsibility for emancipation and the acquisition of capacities becomes an individual rather than social responsibility. Such a development lends itself to an impoverished, skills view of learning, a passive adaptability to the changing requirements of capital and a socially dangerous individualism; it is deeply threatening to what Olssen sees as education's objective of developing and

encouraging the participatory, collaborative virtues and the civic norms required for a democracy to function (*ibid.*, p. 228).

Many of these educational theorists appear to share Olssen's ambition to explore the possibility of harnessing the discourse of governmentality to 'a progressive emancipatory project based upon egalitarian politics and social justice' (*ibid.*, 2006, p. 214). Those whose emphasis does not necessarily fall so heavily on the tyranny of neoliberalism nevertheless conjecture the possibility of a transformative liberation from governmental regimes: Quaghebeur, examining participatory management training for development workers, concludes that learning to participate is also about 'learning the norm and how to submit to that norm as a practice of freedom' and wonders if 'practices of freedom have to involve subjection to a norm or tribunal' (Quaghebeur, 2006, p. 508); Masschelein ponders 'critique as a project of desubjectivation' and the possibility of a pedagogy that might 'transgress the limits of a governmental regime' (Masschelein, 2006, p. 561). Overall, educationalists who have been attracted to Foucauldian analysis see late modern modulations of subjectivity as threatening to, variously, civil society, social solidarity, a liberated subjectivity, the possibility of critique, to democracy and to emancipatory politics. They thus adopt Foucault's ideas not simply as a way of understanding how government works in the advanced capitalist period but as a lens for bringing into focus opportunities for resistance to, non-compliance with, what is seen as a powerful, dominant economic-social model. They want education to serve such ends as liberty, social justice and a democratic sociality. Their analyses come close to seeking a total and singular explanation of how power operates in modern societies, in that although they recognise the plurality of ways in which power operates and its dispersion to a multiplicity of agencies, they are interested in the possibility of using Foucauldian governmental analysis to identify a governing principle (mis)directing historical development in the present. It is a style of analysis that, however cautiously framed, has a palpably denunciatory, at times apocalyptic, ring to it, and which commits itself to or hankers after the subversion of an existing systematisation of power. As we have seen, it thus differs significantly from the way in which Foucauldian ideas about government have been applied by important scholars outside of education whose research steadfastly refuses to entertain grand explanatory narratives.

Some warrant for these apparently contradictory adoptions of Foucauldian genealogy can be found in Foucault's writing. The approaches of theorists like Rose, Dean, Hindess and Hunter are firmly based in the ideas of a Foucault who was relentlessly clear-eyed about the inescapability of governmental regimes and traced their operations with forensic detail. Foucauldian thought embodies, in its core ideas and in its genealogical method, a severely circumscribed notion of the social possibility of freedom. On the other hand, the frankly emancipatory conjectures of Masschelein and Quaghebeur are based, as Masschelein makes clear, in Foucault's interest in pursuing limit-experiences, in the art of not being governed in a particular way. He did yearn for an escape from subjectification. As Butin (2006) argues, Foucault may be called upon to support both 'entrapment' analyses of modern regimes of power and as indicating possibilities for emancipation from unequal

power relations. I have no interest in setting up opposing camps and adjudicating who is right and who wrong. I value the scrupulous attention applied by researchers like Dean and Rose to the micro-operations and effects of power. I welcome Hunter's bracing assertion of the centrality of technical and administrative inventiveness to the achievement of popular education systems and his associated assault on critical intellectuals' understanding of their own importance in such systems. I recognize and am indebted to the work of those educational researchers who have drawn upon governmental thinking to anatomise education's penetration by market rationalities and those who glimpse in Foucault possibilities for the reversal of power relations. My position is that governmental studies indeed offer illuminating and compelling analyses of modern government, but that no political solutions to existing problems can be generated from within the practices of Foucauldian genealogy, because that approach is immersed in an incompletely formulated conception of subjectivity which makes it complicit with destructive neoliberal conceptions of the individual and society. This style of governmental analysis is all too prone to a discursive slide from analysis and description to resignation to the arrangements and dispositions of the power relations it examines, accommodating itself comfortably within a regime of power whose assumptions and requisite truths it is content to accept, a regime which is inimical to aspirations to developing a democratic sociality. I am suggesting that Foucault nowhere produces an account of the subject, its formation and its capacities for agency, which might explain how societies achieve levels of cohesion that allow their continuance and avoid entropy. Governmental studies need to be alive to this inadequacy.

The Foucauldian Subject

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault attempts the task of analysing knowledge, its production, maintenance and transformation without recourse to humanist categories, 'to define a method of analysis purged of all anthropologism' (Foucault, 1972, p. 16). He suspends reference to logical, grammatical, psychological or semiotic analyses of language and seeks instead to show 'the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice' (ibid, p. 49). He has no interest in words and things because discourses are more than a 'surface of contact ... between a reality and a language' (ibid.). There is more to be understood about discourses than the meanings they allow to be formed, more to be described than the linguistic analysis of how meanings are produced. He attempts to identify the rules that enable discourses to give signs a specific form of existence and which govern what can and must be said within a discursive formation. Within this analysis, the subject is simply a position that can be assigned, a functional space, a necessary point of occupation if a group of signs is to exist as a statement. Foucault describes the subject as 'an empty function that can be filled by virtually any individual'. This is obviously a severely anti-humanist assault on the notion of the transcendental subject who unifies discourse into coherent expression through the synthetic activity of a self-possessed consciousness. Discourse, Foucault argues, is located in a space exterior to human consciousness in which man's utterances and understandings,

the possibility of him saying anything, are contained and enabled by a regularity which authorises and limits what may be said, provides positions from which subjects might enunciate and which organises an enunciative field so that meaningful utterance might be made possible and statements circulated, transformed and adapted within strategies of challenge and struggle. Here is a radically decentred subject whose conditions of existence are relational, dispersed, never finally given and only allowed the possibility of expression by and within the contingent unity of the field of regularity that is a discourse. The self is dispersed and discontinuous with itself within any given discourse.

Foucault's dauntingly abstract analysis of discursive formation is a rhetorical *tour de force* which strains the limits of language to see whether it is possible to formulate a new way, as he puts it, of attacking verbal performances. *The Archaeology of Knowledge* was published in the same year as Foucault's rhapsodic review of Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*, and its summary downgrading of the subject to a functional space which may be filled under certain conditions by different individuals according to the rules of a system that owes nothing to human consciousness, clearly has affinities with Deleuze's project. Both are opposed to the notion that language is foundationally determinative of self, the unconscious or sense, and Deleuze's description of his endeavour in *The Logic of Sense* could describe what Foucault attempts in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*:

We seek to determine an impersonal and pre-individual transcendental field, which does not resemble the corresponding empirical fields, and which nevertheless is not to be confused with an undifferentiated depth. This field cannot be determined as that of consciousness. (Deleuze, 2004, p. 118)

However, where Deleuze identified the variousness and proliferation of regimes of signs and challenged the notion that the capacity to make meaning can only be granted to the human subject by virtue of its submission to the symbolic order—the signifying system of spoken and written language, which he viewed as an entirely arbitrary, historical (and fascistic) limitation on human possibility (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004)—Foucault, in specifying discourses as systems of rules that enable signs to take on a material existence and 'as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972, p. 49), makes no attempt at a reworking of Saussurean theories of the sign. What discourses 'do is more than use ... signs to designate things' (ibid), but '[o]f course, discourses are composed of signs'. He is thus vulnerable to the kind of linguistic critique that Deleuze's painstaking accounts of the sign are careful to head off (Deleuze, 2004; Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, pp. 123–164). Brown and Cousins (1986) point out that Foucault, by concentrating on the categories of sentence and proposition and bracketing off the realm of signs, protects himself from 'dealing with the problem of the production of sense by semiological systems' (ibid., p. 60). Signs simply exist as an inexhaustible, unproblematic resource, 'the general semiotic field'. Thus Foucault avoids 'the uncongenial task of dealing with, rather than dismissing, the arguments of Derrida'

(*ibid.*), which is to say that where the subject, in Derrida's account, is traversed and riven by the miscegenatory flux and the incorrigible provisionality of language, which at no point allows installed and sure meanings, Foucault appears to want a version of the subject that is beyond these mutatory effects, a tidier version that will not distort or sully the chaste architecture of his analyses. Foucault's primary reason for wanting to keep linguistic categories at a distance is that their admission into analysis requires engagement with the subject of consciousness, a category highly contested at the theoretical level, and whose mere consideration may permit its recolonisation of the discursive field, returning the mistaken and toxic notion of the subject as the author of meaning. In fact he is unable to dispense with the subject if the systems of formation he describes are to be put into operation, if the enunciative function he maps is to occur. His attempt to do so leads him to a conceptualisation of the subject of enunciation—that empty function, that anonymous positionality that can be assigned—as the cement that binds the different levels of discourse together as a unified formation. He thus entangles himself in the realm of linguistics:

For what could the subject of enunciation be, indeed, what could enunciation itself be, if not still conjugated and declined through a linguistic medium? (Brown & Cousins, 1986, p. 55)

The Archaeology of Knowledge is marked by a profound antipathy to those conceptions of knowledge and history which promise to restore wholeness to the subject and the text by returning to consciousness their repressed and hidden conditions. Despite his claims not to be interested in replacing conventional ways of 'attacking verbal performances' (1972, p. 108), Foucault's hostility towards humanist analyses leads him into attempting something like a totalising account of discourse that replaces the exhausted categories of conventional humanist thought and which escapes the problems of language, meaning and subject formation generated by post-Saussurean theory. In order to do this, in order to establish discursive formations as systematic, unified regularities, Foucault's category of the subject position, hitherto defined as a controlled function, an empty space which may be filled under certain conditions by different individuals according to the rules of a system that owes nothing to human consciousness, becomes the highly problematic subject of consciousness which arrives on Foucault's enunciative scene, as Brown and Cousins note, bearing intentions, understandings, a history, a social being and, in another view, a heavy load of determinations which render it susceptible to delusions and misunderstandings about its social relations.

The Archaeology of Knowledge is sometimes dismissed as an opaque footnote to the dazzling reconfiguration of the history of thought that is *The Order of Things*, a laboured attempt to offer a theoretical underpinning for the latter book's description of the emergence of the human sciences. In fact it is the one place in which Foucault attempted, with sustained rigour, to offer an account of how knowledge, considered as forms of discursive practice, comes to be constituted, maintained, transformed and decomposed, and this account has at its centre an idea of the subject, its formation and its capacity for agency, which informed all his later,

genealogical, work on power/knowledge, governmentality and care of the self.⁴ This is subjectivity as an atomised, endlessly flexible capacity, a functional positionality, a potentiality for the habitation of subject positions. Foucauldians often proceed as if this speculative, experimental theorisation of the subject is an achieved intellectual triumph that may license their descriptions and analyses and their excursions into a 'minimal normativity'.⁵ The consequence of this misplaced confidence is that post-Foucauldian inquiry believes that it has an account of the relation between the individual and society that sets out the boundaries of possibility for social change and political intervention, whereas what it has actually been bequeathed is an insufficient conceptualisation of the self and the social that all too readily contours itself to neoliberal notions of the kind of subject required by a market-orientated society.

The Foucauldian Subject and Neoliberalism

Capitalism in its latest transformation requires selves which are endlessly adaptable to the levels of change and insecurity, to the personal and social instability generated by a globalised economy. This is an economy which pursues its relentless growth with little or no regard for the preservation of the institutions, the familial, workplace and communal regularities which were formerly considered necessary to the sense of personal fulfilment that would provide the underpinning of a cohesive society. If the social goals of prosperity and freedom are to be achieved individuals must constantly reinvent themselves, must seek to enhance and promote their talents in response to the challenges of the market and must be happy to abandon previous versions of self, to live without the consolation of a long-term life narrative and to accommodate themselves to the disrupted social relations that must proceed from resignation to a reality of flux and dislocation. Richard Sennett has described this figure as 'to put a kindly face on the matter—an unusual sort of human being' (Sennett, 2006, p. 5). A less kind-hearted consideration of this ideal type might conclude that it displays many of the characteristics of anti-social personality disorder. This is not a facetious point. The subject sought by neoliberalism cannot sustain a theorisation of the social. A society peopled by such subjects could not achieve the levels of reciprocal interdependence, the self-regulating civility required for the practice of a democratic sociality. Such a society would be ungovernable as a democracy. Brown and Cousins point out that the Foucauldian conception of the subject is not really concerned to support a general concept of the social, is uninterested in explaining how 'the totality of practice can exist as a society rather than a poached baby elephant' (1985, p. 51). This reticence, or refusal, to submit to the Enlightenment demand for a totalising account of the subject-society relation and the inevitable normativities that must come in train, produces an idea of the subject and its relation to society which perfectly accords with neoliberal notions of the subject required for the present stage of capitalism. Furthermore, Foucauldian squeamishness concerning normative regimes may produce a style of research which is unduly compliant with dominant dispositions of power.

It should be clear that I am not mounting a blanket condemnation of the Foucauldian genealogical approach to governmental studies. I am all for painstaking attention to actualities rather than faithfulness to ideal and future states. I recognise that the social and personal effects of historically recent transformations in modes of subjectification and in the management of human life may confer benefits as well as costs. I agree that 'the essence of critical thought must be its capacity to make distinctions that can facilitate judgment and action' (Rabinow & Rose, 2003, p. 9). I accept that power relations cannot be simplified to 'a single modality of sovereign power' (*ibid.*, p. 10) which can only be, must be, opposed by a radically other, and intrinsically just, single form of the exercise of power, in which sovereignty is claimed by subjects themselves. I welcome genealogy's critique of the reliance of classical and radical theories of power on the issue of sovereignty, on the legitimacy of rule (see Hindess, 1996). What I cannot accept is that sovereignty is quite the marginal concern that some Foucauldian governmental research implies. Although Foucault criticised social theory's heavy focus on matters of right and legitimacy in government, he was emphatic that the problem of sovereignty was 'more acute than ever' (Burchell *et al.*, 1991, p. 101) in a period when political power is diffused across a vast range of agencies, employing a variety of tactics and techniques. This is a problem that Foucauldian governmental studies have largely declined to explore, preferring instead to develop and submit themselves to a particular understanding of what Foucault (and Deleuze) meant by insisting on 'investigating the surfaces of emergence of political discourse and action' (Dean, 1999, p. 198). This is an interpretation that has led to a stance of scrupulous abstention from judgement, a refusal of what are seen as the grandiose seductions of normative critique. This, I suggest, is a species of methodological purity which might be viewed as an irresponsible refusal to address the ways in which claims for legitimacy continue to shape the operations of power in contemporary society.

Foucault identified three levels to his analysis of power: strategic relationships (struggles over government); the techniques of government; the levels of domination. He spent more time on the second and third of these than on the first. His emphasis has perhaps bequeathed to some of his followers an extremist commitment to a diagnostic methodology uncontaminated by principled understandings or theoretical framings and an excessive caution about envisaging possibilities for political change, a stance which maroons them in the present, constrained by the prevailing forms of political reasoning and the governmental mechanisms available to those rationalities, so that the contingent acquires the appearance of the universal. What was announced as an attempt to distinguish between the two in order to expose possibilities for political change (Dean, 1999, p. 44) becomes something very much like a purely descriptive functionalist or systems-theoretical account of government (Honneth, 1994). Foucauldian governmental studies can offer no reasons why policy-makers should act in one way rather than another, since they refrain from normative judgements and thus have no way of justifying one course of action over another. Rose's oddly Leavisian suggestion (Rose, 1999a, p. 283), reminiscent of a Deleuze stripped of his radicalism and his politics, that life-as-its-

own-telos is the slight and only normativity required for political decision-making, is surely subject to the criticism he and his collaborator level at neo-Marxist conceptions of bio-power (Rabinow & Rose, 2003), that it is too expanded and all-encompassing a notion to generate the kinds of discriminating analyses required if we are to understand how modern power works.

Critique in the Advanced Liberal Present

It has become a commonplace that modern society is riven by cultural plurality and ethical division. Certain kinds of theory suggest a world in which there is a tumultuous moral and perspectival dissonance, a melange of unbridgeable differences which threaten social disintegration (or, alternatively, the release of myriad creative energies). I want to avoid the lurid prophetic extremes of such thinking, and would merely suggest that the neoliberal project of the responsabilised, entrepreneurial self must exacerbate the problems generated by the collapse in the period of 'advanced liberalism' of fidelity to central authorities and to the societally generalised values once thought necessary to the maintenance of social cohesion. The entrepreneurial subject of choice, ever adaptable to neoliberalism's ceaseless demand for change, unencumbered by ties to long-term relationships, to place, to collective solidarities or to a sustained sense of self, is the ideal subject for (the reproduction of) a social landscape in which enislanded communities are ordered according to incommensurable rationalities and ethical perspectives. In such circumstances of cultural and moral heterogeneity, I am suggesting that the question of sovereignty, of the legitimation of rule, and the necessity of its critical problematisation, is indeed, 'more acute than ever'. Questions of right and violence, law and illegality, cannot be dismissed from the scene, exiled along with the king, simply because the dominance of the sovereignty model of power has been challenged. It is the task of educational research to develop an unequivocally normative critique which puts those questions, to assist government in its 'enterprise', as Richard Rorty puts it, 'of developing institutions that protect the weak against the strong' (cited in Okshevsky, 1997, p. 1). But what form should critique take? How can normativity be grounded without it becoming an oppressive orthodoxy?

Simons and Masschelein (2006, pp. 426–427) write of the need for educators to abandon the comfort of a 'position' from which to speak 'in the name of a court' and which permits oneself to see people as in need of government. I am arguing the necessity of a form of critique which speaks in the name of a court. That court is not the court of some transcendental truth which awaits inscription into the present, but one of the inescapable and necessary courts which are installed at every inescapable and necessary moment or occasion of historical intellectual-ethical closure. Two of the courts to which appeal may be made in our present, and which bear particularly upon educational policy-making, are the economy and democracy. Education is assigned the responsibility of forming individuals who will have the attributes, capacities and attitudes necessary for our society's economic prospering and it is enjoined to produce subjects who will be active in the conduct and construction of government through the exercise of freedom. Educators, whilst

recognising the interrelation, the interweaving, of economy and democracy and the claim made upon their attention and their practice by the necessity to effective government of the generation of wealth, must submit themselves eventually to the tribunal of democracy, because education's predetermining calling, the aboriginal task with which it has been charged by modern society, is to the formation of a free and responsible citizenry. Claims made upon educational policy and practice, in the name of the effective operation of the economy, must, for the educational researcher and the pedagogue, be submitted to the tribunal of democracy and interrogated in terms of their impact upon the maintenance and enhancement of liberty and civility in our society. Democracy, as neoliberals themselves tirelessly point out, is a precondition of, the necessary environment for, the flourishing of free market economies. As educators, let us take this prior importance of democratic practice seriously.

What, then, does this mean for the kind of critique that is appropriate to the circumstances of 'advanced liberal government', within which '[a]ll aspects of *social* behaviour are now reconceptualized along economic lines—as calculative actions undertaken through the universal human faculty of choice' (Rose, 1999a, p. 141)?

Firstly, as I have just argued, educational critique should decline to accept that it would be useful or appropriate to subject the analysis of education to the dominance of economic logic. The ethos and rationale of education are incommensurate with those of the domain of economic calculation, although, of course, there is necessary exchange and negotiation between the two realms. Education should be more aware and assertive concerning its foundational commitments. This may seem a banal point. Surely, all academics are conscious of the necessity to their practice of free inquiry, unfettered by political, institutional or economic interests? Writing of what she sees as the transformation of German Higher Education into 'a service[-]providing business', Andrea Liesner states that the response of university teachers and researchers to the university's reconfiguration as a service-provider has been lethargic: 'The overwhelming reaction within the institution appears to be one of indolence' (Liesner, 2006, p. 493). Could it be, she asks, that 'the new modes of governing have already entered the university and shaped a new kind of academic subjectivity?' I would suggest that, for all that there are isolated voices raised in protest or refusal, one might observe in this country a similar resignation and adaptation to the economic government of education.

Secondly, we can learn from Derrida that this must be a critique that accepts that it is not possible to move to a space beyond 'a position' or a 'court', that the very possibility of society involves closure and settlement around norms, subjectification to some tribunal or other. However, although closure or settlement is always necessary if communities and societies are to exist and function, such a fixing of the ceaseless play of thought and language, its organisation into determinate structures (Hobson, 1998, p. 35), is always an arbitrary, an essentially conventional arrangement. It is always an expedient restriction of the field of social and conceptual possibility, an organisation of that field into a 'hierarchically ordered space' (Derrida, 1981, p. 11) and its insertion into normativity. If the necessary settlement is not to

harden into a repressive orthodoxy or an inflexibly principled absolutism it must always be open to doubt and questioning. A disposition or readiness to accept the contingent and impermanent nature of the ethical settlements that stabilise social orders is a vital democratic virtue and a condition of the style of critique required in the present period. It reminds that a society's governing concepts, its institutional structures and its moral orderings are provisional and local-particular and never eternal, essential or universal. Sensitivity to the undecidability of ethical issues on rational grounds works against power's insistent tendency towards domination; it enjoins a constant appreciation of the constructed and arbitrary nature of the moral, conceptual and social order; it is the disposition to put into question all that presents itself as self-sufficient and self-evident.

Thirdly, critique must do what Foucauldian theory cannot, which is to conceptualise a subject capable of sustaining a cohesive, sufficiently stable and democratic society. Foucauldians and neoliberals assume a self that in some respects resembles an outlandish variant of the liberal humanist sovereign subject, granted total freedom to reinvent itself without any hindrance from a social identity forged in and constrained by an ordering of life to particular social ends or by the bounded sense of purpose and meaning that such an identity might provide the individual. I am arguing that if government is to meet the challenge presented by the multi-perspectival nature of modern societies, the shaping of the morally reflective subject, the figure which possesses a capacity for the critical problematisation of social experience, is the key task for government if it is to form the kinds of individuals required by a democracy. What makes ethical traffic possible between the different communities of society is the existence of the subject of consciousness, the individual recognised by Foucault, who has 'really carried out certain operations, who lives in an unbroken, never forgotten time' (Foucault, 1972, p. 94). This figure, necessarily, tries to make sense of her life and the world she travels through and in so doing brings into being the possibility of dialogue, of intercourse between these separate domains and their distinctive ethical perspectives. This is about more than the individual project of one person constructing a more or less useful model of a world, which enables her to assemble a life narrative that is more or less convincing to herself and others. The figure of the moral subject is necessary to the notion of social cohesion, for without the general moral capacity which is embodied in the moral agent, without that individual moral performance, society would indeed consist of enislanded domains ordered according to irreconcilable rationalities. The subject required for democracy, a subject founded in liberty, would willingly submit to governing its own behaviour according to democratic norms; it would be adept in the games of liberty, the rules and techniques of self-management that enable it to negotiate the attempts of others to control its conduct and to keep its own impulses to control others within the limits appropriate to civil behaviour and the moral coherence of society. Such a subject would also possess a capacity for reflecting on how it has been formed as a moral being, for inspecting and critiquing the governmental rationality of its formation and for deciding the form of its subjection. This is the sense that I make of the notion of desubjectification: not an escape from subjecthood, but the choosing of the form of one's subjection.

Conclusion

These seem to me the valuable lessons of Foucauldian genealogy. It insists that education is a form of government. It teaches us that there is no social state of emancipation from the operations and effects of power; unequal power relations may not be replaced by social relations free of the effects of power. It rebukes emancipatory critique's tendency to denounce the practical improvisations of government in the name of implacable idealities; calculative rationality cannot be excised from the social realm but is the necessary servant of the social administration required for modern states to be governed and to endure. Foucauldian governmentality's detailed empirical investigation of the social field offers an immeasurably more nuanced and informative account of how power operates in modern societies than critical models focusing on making normative distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate uses of power. It teaches that power is various and deployed or harnessed by a vast range of agencies within a complex interplay of forces, producing multiple and diverse cultural and social effects; it cannot be reduced to simple binarisms of oppressors and oppressed, of just and unjust government.

Educational research can only benefit from the achievements of genealogy, and not simply by employing or developing genealogical insights to denounce existing regimes of power. Foucauldian governmental analysis offers critique a practical purchase on the educational-social field, a precision of focus for its normative problematisations, which it has not always found easy to manage from within the grand, universalising sweep of its emancipatory ambition. Its analyses carefully located in present actualities, critique's arguments for political intervention may acquire the conviction and persuasiveness that they have increasingly lacked in the imperium of calculative rationality. This, then, would be a critique unequivocally grounded in normativity, a normativity stripped of its universalist claims and which legitimated itself by reference to an idea of democracy, not as an ideal or perfected form, but as a pragmatic aspiration to develop political and social practices that would serve the aims of making people free and yet governable.

Notes

1. This study is particularly indebted to readings of Dean (1991 and 1999), Hindess (1996), Miller and Rose (1993), Rose (1990, 1996 and 1999a, 1999b) and Donald (1992), as well as to Hunter (1988, 1993 and 1994).
2. Peters (2004) offers a summary of the diverse adoptions and applications of Foucauldian thought amongst Anglo-American educational researchers.
3. Within the field of educational research this paper has been particularly invigorated by ideas encountered in Hunter, Marshall (1995a, 1995b), Peters (2004, 2005), Olssen (2006) and the contributors to the special issue of *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 'The Learning Society from the Perspective of Governmentality' (Masschelein *et al.* (eds), 2006).
4. It is apparent that from the mid-1970s on Foucault had moved some distance from Deleuze's notion of an unfettered being, a becoming through the dance of difference and polymorphous desire. Where he once acclaimed Deleuze's thought as heralding 'the epidermic play of perversity' (Foucault, 1977, p. 171) and looked forward to the 'disintegration of the subject' (*ibid.*, p. 183), Foucault's later work explores the possibility of the subject as a work of

self-government. This is, notably, a self-conscious subject in that it establishes a relation to itself, a stance of critical surveillance and reflection. It is, however, a constructed self which still aims to elude all externally imposed courts of symbolic authority, the 'archaic morality, the ancient Decalogue that the identical imposed upon difference' (ibid., p. 186). I argue here that the project of constructing a self untouched by, that evades, the symbolic order is unable, so far at least, to offer a convincing account of how, in the words of Slavoj Žižek, 'the minimal conditions for the tolerable coexistence of subjects' (1999, p. 289) might be achieved.

5. The speculative nature of Foucault's endeavour is emphasized by Rabinow: 'he was experimenting to see how much autonomy could legitimately be claimed for discursive formations' (Rabinow, 1984, p. 10). Foucault sets himself the task of seeing what discourse and subjecthood might look like if all reference to meaning, to representation and to consciousness were bracketed off. He writes: '... the analysis of statements does not claim to be a total, exhaustive description of "language" (*langage*), or of "what was said" ... In particular, it does not replace a logical analysis of propositions, a grammatical analysis of sentences, a psychological or contextual analysis of formulations: it is another way of attacking verbal performances ...' (ibid., p. 108).

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