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# Governmentality, criticism, politics

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## Abstract

The growth of the governmentality literature represents a significant development in current social theory. However, certain prominent and interlinked tendencies, which are associated with the place of politics as a subject and object of theoretical work, are queried. Most especially the concerns are with: the rejection of critique as part of the work of social theory; the rendering of government programmes as univocal and as overly coherent and systematic; and the focus on politics as 'mentalities of rule' to the virtual exclusion of understanding politics as social relations. The paper explores some of these difficulties which are here seen as presenting problems for the future development of governmentality research and theory. Without aiming to systematize the literature, nevertheless the paper suggests that the time is overdue for central issues in the literature of governmentality to become the subject of more open and vigorous debate.

Keywords: critique; criticism; Foucault; genealogy; governmentality; politics.

The governmentality literature, a creative and innovative line of writing responding positively to the publication of Michel Foucault's essay 'On governmentality' (1979), forms a varied but nevertheless fairly consistent and increasingly influential body of thinking about government as a decentred process.[1] One of the most formative general principles underlying governmentality writings has been the rejection of the identification of government with the state, understood as a centralized locus of rule, and the identification of programmes and practices of rule in micro-settings, including those 'within' the subject. Equally characteristic, and arguably more important, has been the adoption of a theoretical strategy in which power is decomposed into political rationalities, governmental programmes, technologies and techniques of government (Miller and Rose 1990; O'Malley 1992). This line of development has been extended primarily in relation to two integrated areas of investigation.

The first line of questioning concerns the ways in which programmes of government are formulated and articulated within broad discourses of rule or 'political rationalities'. As Miller and Rose (1990) point out, the approach is

concerned with how government is thought into being in programmatic form, how the practitioners of rule ask themselves the question of how best to govern, what concepts they invent or deploy to render their subjects governable in certain ways, and how government constantly reforms itself in light of failures and evaluations. This is sharply distinguished from the more familiar historical and sociological approach of examining rule through the observation and documentation of 'what *actually* happened' (the historical detail of implementation) or of 'what government is *really* about' (the concealed interests or underlying mainsprings explaining governance). Accordingly, politics is understood primarily as a 'mentality of rule' and the sociological concern with politics as social relations is sidelined in favour of examination of texts of rule that provide the empirical record of governmental plans, programmes, self-interrogations and responses to the intractability of what it seeks to govern. One of the primary aims is to formulate a genealogy of the rationalities of rule (for example, classical liberalism, Keynesianism, neo-liberalism, etc.) and the programmatic schemata through which they are to be translated into practical government. Developments in this governmentality literature have been rapid and often have radically rejigged conventional thinking about rule. Thus, while 'unemployment' is almost taken for granted as an ahistorical descriptor in much sociological writing, Walters' (1994) research shows it to have emerged as a *category of governance* linked directly to the envisioning of worklessness as a characteristic of populations or, more precisely, of 'economies', rather than of individuals. In a similar vein, Dean's (1991, 1992) genealogy of the emergence of 'poverty' as distinct from that of previous governmental conceptions of 'pauperism', Gordon (1991) and Burchell's (1991) rethinking of *laissez faire* liberalism in terms of its specific conceptualization of the limits to state rule, and Rose's (1993) reading of the 'welfare state' in terms of the programmatic mobilization of networks of agencies, provide a small sample of such writing, demonstrating its capacity radically to rethink many taken for granted sociological unities and verities.

The second and closely related line of investigation is focused on the technologies and assemblages of practices, materials, agents and techniques that are deployed to put these rationalities, categorizations and abstract programmes into effect. These processes, or, more precisely, their textually recorded programmes and representations, have been considerably explored and elaborated. Papers concerned with the development of 'technologies of the self' (e.g. Cruikshank 1994 on 'empowerment'; Greco 1993 on the 'duty to be well'; Ewick 1993 on lifestyle commodities) have been particularly active locations for rethinking rule. Such work not only has served to further break down the notion that government is a monopoly practice of the state, but also has played an important role in directing attention to the nexus between broad political rationalities and such micro-technologies of everyday life as developing 'self-esteem' and personal regimes of 'wellness'. Likewise, there has been a considerable enhancement of our understanding of the complex ways in which abstract technologies (such as 'actuarialism' or 'insurance') are translated into specific forms of governance. Thus Ewald (1991) and others (e.g. Defert 1991; O'Malley 1992, 1995; Castel 1991) have

begun to explore the complex assemblages of agents and agencies, routines and activities that make up the 'insurantial forms' that are created from the abstractions of insurance technologies in order to govern such specific fields of life as old age, burial, property, health and employment.

The contribution of these lines of development in the governmentality literature extends well beyond the innovative examination of forms and practices of rule which have been ignored or glossed by most conventional sociological work. In particular, as suggested above, its principal strengths and contributions stem from a characteristic concern with the nexus between political rationalities and technologies of rule. One such benefit is that, through the emphasis on historical and empirical questions of how government envisions implementation through techniques and lines of action at a distance, the literature has avoided sociology's entanglement in the largely fruitless metatheoretical debates over such binary oppositions as state and civil society, and has rejected hermeneutic explanations that search for the concealed mainsprings underlying and shaping forms of rule (such as class interests). Another benefit, of equal importance, is that it provides the conceptual and analytical equipment for a close critical engagement between theory and political practice. This is perhaps best illustrated by contrast with the characteristic weakness of Marxist theorizing where the emphasis has been on theoretical elaboration at high levels of abstraction – notably theorizing around the nature of the 'capitalist state', of modes of production and the nature and extent of the 'relative autonomy' of the state. As critics of the Marxist framework complained (notably E.P. Thompson [1980] against structural Marxism), such highly abstracted concerns contributed little to understanding mundane processes of rule, provided no guidance on appropriate interventions, and thus isolated theoretical work from political practice. In contrast, through its direct concern with mundane practices of rule the governmentality literature avoids this trap. Not only does it provide a theoretical elaboration which potentially opens everyday and institutional programmes and practices for critical and tactical thinking, it also provides a considerable array of empirical work in terms of which interventions can be examined and thought out. For example, the examination of strategies of responsibilization in neo-liberal governance can be used to create space for contesting the governmental provision of conditions for the exercise of responsibility among subjects excluded from market participation (Brogden and Shearing 1993; O'Malley 1994). Further, because the governmentality literature attends to the nexus between everyday practices and techniques, and more abstract technologies and broader political rationalities, the political insulation characteristic of many micro-focused frameworks (for example, ethnomethodology) is readily avoided.

## Governmentality and political critique

Despite the clear potential for linking the governmentality approach to a critical politics, by and large it has not been realized. This avoidance of critique and

political engagement has persisted despite statements to the effect that the broad aim of the approach is to generate a 'post-social politics' that provides a successor to socialism, but which nonetheless is more than a 'simple condemnation' of neo-liberal and neo-conservative thinking (Gordon 1993; Burchell 1993; Barry *et al.* 1993; Rose 1996). Such concerns about the relatively underdeveloped politics in the governmentality literature should not be read as a call on our part for the development of a new *political programme* out of this work. Given the Foucauldian lineage of the governmentality writers, and our own sympathies, this would not be appropriate to a tradition that is explicitly concerned with maximizing the opportunities for difference and contestation. The imposition of yet another programme of rule might only add to the array of possible oppressions. But even a politics that seeks to maximize the possibilities for contestation should, in co-operation with extra-academic organizations, think out the kinds of political and social conditions that would facilitate contestation and make room for diversity, help locate and define targets for intervention, and assist in the development and refinement of strategies for confronting or interrogating problematic regimes and technologies.

The eschewal of such forms of political thinking and engagement, we argue, represents a serious limitation for a literature that professes a broadly diagnostic/critical agenda. We view this limitation as the symptom of a series of tendencies that are by no means defining elements of the governmentality work. Whatever reservations we have about the realization of its political potential, we hold that the governmentality literature does possess that potential, and that this can be realized without losing its positive characteristics. This paper identifies a number of features that have confined the role of the governmentality literature largely to gestures of formal support for political contestation. We will argue that its political potential is being undercut by the appearance in the governmentality literature of a rhetorical strategy that poses genealogical work over and against criticism, a shift from the prior period when genealogy conceived itself as a non-Marxian form of criticism. Accompanying this shift has been an absence of commentary on the location of the genealogist as a public intellectual, an absence flagged by a lack of interest in transferring knowledge beyond the limits of academic audiences. Lastly, we deal with closely connected tendencies towards schematism and over-abstraction in the governmentality literature. Because of its emphasis on the programmatic nature of rule, and a concomitant methodological focus on texts of government rather than what they refer to as the 'messy actualities' of governance (Barry *et al.* 1993) or on the constitutive role of contestation and social variation, the literature tends to generate ideal typifications which often are in danger of being little more than the systematized self-representation of rule (Weir 1996).

The concept of governmentality was designed to form a mid-range explanatory level between the history of political philosophy and an empirical study of social relations. The consequence of this kind of explanatory strategy has been the reduction of politics to a 'mentality of rule'. The lack of attention to social relations occurs by epistemological design, not by accident. It is a problem at the

level of its theoretical object, 'mentality of rule', that has led governmentality studies to be insensitive to social variation and social heterogeneity. In this we refer not only to recognition of the multiplicity of voices and discourses subject to government but not aligned with it, but equally to the multiplicity of voices within rule itself.

Against these general – but, we would stress, avoidable – characteristics, we will argue for a revised agenda for governmentality work that emphasizes: an understanding of genealogy as criticism/critique; a renewal of interest in the role of historians of the present as public intellectuals; and a conceptualization of politics as relations of contest or struggle which are constitutive of government rather than simply a source of programmatic failure and (later) redesign. In our conclusions, we will explore the theoretical and political implications of these criticisms for rethinking programmes of rule not as formed by programmers alone, nor even as formed in relations of contest with the subjects of rule, but also as themselves multivocal and decentred.

In carrying out this exercise we are mindful of the fact the work is in some respects still inchoate. This is one reason why we deploy the term governmentality 'literature' rather than 'approach'. While this inevitably will open our comments to criticism on the basis of exceptions to what we argue, we believe the exercise of exegesis and criticism undertaken in the paper is based on clear trends and general characteristics of the literature. More to the point, as we suggest later, there has been a lack of (published) debate within the literature about major issues central to governmentality work. This paper is intended to trigger such debate by outlining what we regard as current strengths and contributions as well as some *tendencies* which we identify as troubling and inessential.

## Genealogy and criticism: governmentality and the present moment

During roughly the last ten years Anglo-Foucauldian work has increasingly distanced itself from what it calls 'criticism'.[2] Gane and Johnston in their 'Introduction' to *Foucault's New Domains*, note that the genealogical 'project seems after Foucault's death to have become detached from its original and practical matrix and to have become, perhaps inevitably, abstract and academic' (1993: 7). Gordon goes further to suggest that 'the specific genre of genealogy, of a question of the present linked to a history of the present, seldom coexists with revolutionary thought. Its representatives tend, where politically classifiable at all, to belong to within a broadly liberal tradition or, if of the Left, to represent a heterodox minority standpoint' (1993: 25).

There has, of course, been a long history of tension, not to say antagonism, between genealogical work and Marxism, with Foucauldian work affirming contingency and rupture in the face of Marxist writings on the train of history and the succession of modes of production. But it was with the political and intellectual marginalization of Marxism that it became the standard first move

for genealogical arguments to counterpose themselves to 'critique' or to 'criticism' (e.g. Hunter 1994), concepts which are treated as equivalent in the literature. This tendency is evident in governmentality work, as in the 'Introduction' to the special issue of *Economy and Society* on liberalism and neoliberalism:

> These studies do not seek to provide a 'critique' of various liberal and neoliberal problematizations of government. The papers do not seek to draw up a balance sheet of their shortcomings or to propose alternatives; they are concerned to diagnose the varied forms of rationality that govern our present rather than simply to denounce or condemn them.
>
> (Barry *et al.* 1993: 260)

Indeed, some of the most recent governmentality literature has, in the course of discrediting criticism, ended up implicitly lauding the vocation of bureaucracy (Hunter 1994) and siding with liberal bureaucratic procedures against the straw figure of radical feminism in sexual harassment disputes (Minson 1993).

The mark of the genealogist has been a refusal of an ideological critique oriented to the discovery of hidden logics, interests or meanings, for example, human rights as the smokescreen of the bourgeoisie. Ideological critique gives itself the task of 'unmasking' 'disguised' ideological interests. Genealogical work, which has had governmentality studies as its leading edge over the last decade, has consistently characterized criticism as assuming a negative theory of power: power as prohibitory rather than inciting. The texts of criticism, it is argued, neglect the possibility of government operating through the formation of subjects, a positive form of power. However, many of the most interesting forms of contemporary criticism such as queer theory or feminist deconstruction have been as much implicated in the history of poststructuralism as has the governmentality literature and are not susceptible to these objections. Since the existence of these forms of criticism is simply not acknowledged, the net effect of the genealogy-criticism binary is to make governmentality work appear insular (Valverde 1995).

When genealogy comes to be defined over and against criticism/critique, the result is a history of the present that downplays interpretations of history as systemically antagonistic and violent. It has not been sufficiently recognized that severing genealogical work from critique/criticism would mark a fundamental political reorientation of Foucauldian work. Foucault's 1971 commentary on genealogical method, 'Nietzsche, genealogy, method', made the writing of history as the struggle for interpretive dominance a defining feature of the genealogical method. What he later came to call the history of the present was to be done as a history of rupture and emergence after the clash of forces; the history of the present was to be written as the site of symbolic violence: 'humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination' (Foucault 1977: 151). Foucault's comments were later reaffirmed in 'What is enlightenment?' (Foucault 1984), where he distinguished two lines of critical philosophy descended from Kant: (1) an inquiry into the conditions of possibility of true knowledge and (2) a practical, historical critique of our present selves that

makes thinkable and assists the creation of other possible ways of living. It is this second sense of critique to which Foucault attaches his own work:

> I shall thus characterize the philosophical ethos appropriate to the critical ontology of ourselves as a historico-practical test of the limits we may go beyond, and thus as work carried out upon ourselves as free beings.
>
> (Foucault in Poster 1992: 309)

In a 1978 lecture, 'What is Critique?', Foucault argued that critique was an 'attitude' contemporaneous with the beginnings of governmentality in the sixteenth century having the general form of 'the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth' (Foucault 1997 [1978]: 32). The moment of ideological criticism has passed, but the need for a practice of critique as a troubling of truth regimes remains.

We would not deny that the governance literature has accomplished telling readings of criticism – Nikolas Rose's trenchant comments on the use of the public/private binary to interpret the history of masculine gender dominance would be a case in point (Rose 1987). Nor do we wish to maintain that critique is not immanent or even explicit in the governmentality approach. It is clear, for example, that much of the writing on techniques of the self is overtly critical. Ewick (1993), for example, makes perfectly clear the problems created by the commodification of disciplinary regimes for fitness of body and mind, which in her view not only establishes an insidious 'voluntary' regime of subjection, but also allows the exercise of harsh regimes in a period when these would be totally unpalatable as features of most public programmes. Likewise, it is impossible to read Cruikshank's (1994) analysis of 'self-esteem' programmes without recognizing its nexus with critique both of the programmes themselves and of feminist underestimations of their political significance.

Critique, then, is present, but both its form and extent are limited. Moreover, the literature lacks Foucault's own passionate engagement with the social movements of his/our time. For all Foucault's principled insistence on a separation between the academic work of the genealogist and the political life of the citizen, the readings of his academic books are conditioned by his specifically political writings. We refer, in particular, to a corpus of interviews and occasional articles, texts that are frequently neither clearly academic nor popular: political writings that are often used as simplified introductions to his major books. No parallel political corpus exists in the governmentality literature, although, to be sure, Anglophone theorists do not have at their disposal the French media's custom of interviewing prominent intellectuals. Moreover, the rhetoric deployed in recent governmentality literature appears more neutral than that of Foucault. The significance here is that it was Foucault's literary style that coded for his normative position (Bouchindhomme 1992: 223). The suggestion, then, is that the rhetorical shift signifies a normative shift.[3]

In summary, our argument is that the critical orientation of genealogy is being weakened at a time when other critical literatures, including Marxism, feminism

and queer theory, are under considerable political pressure from the ascendance of neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism. The earlier tension between pessimism of intellect and optimism of will that yielded an extraordinary lyricism in genealogical prose has proven difficult to sustain intergenerationally. It might be argued that the change is a desirable one, but let us at least diagnose it as change, either the twilight of critical genealogies or the growth of political heterogeneity and potential conflict within the history of the present.

## Government and contestation

Despite statements to the effect that the broad aim of the governmentality approach is to generate a post-social politics that is a successor to socialism, efforts in this direction have been few (for instance, Hindess 1987) or are being undertaken by others whose work, while not unsympathetic to this literature, is not part of it (see Hirst 1994). However, Graham Burchell has initiated an important line of inquiry in his investigation of the ethics of genealogical work and the possibility for a 'diagnostic' genealogy:

> Historians of the present . . . have a concern for the *selectivity* of what exists as a covering over of what might exist. This gives genealogical analyses a kind of diagnostic value in the sense that, by plotting the historically contingent limits of present thought and action, attention is drawn to what might be called the costs of these limits: *what does it cost existence for its truth to be produced and affirmed in this way?*
>
> (Burchell 1993; see also Barry *et al.* 1993)

The metaphor of diagnosis as developed above would suggest a quasi-therapeutic assessment of symptoms after exposure to toxins: the genealogist as physician practising in either the clinic or the public health system. Burchell asserts the complexities of diagnosis, cautioning that no fixed cost can be unequivocally assigned to a given mode of existence, but provisionally suggests that 'the costs of what exists be seen as a function of an assessment of the possibilities for individuals, either singly or collectively, to transform their goldfish bowls without falling back into another one in which those possibilities [of existence] are more narrowly and strictly constrained' (Burchell 1993: 280). While here Burchell sees the intellectual as an assessor of goldfish, earlier in his argument he had compared the intellectual to an unhappy goldfish in a bowl. This shift illustrates some of the limitations of the 'diagnostic' model: the equivocal status of diagnoser in relation to the diagnosed and inattention to the building of a reflexive relation between diagnoser and diagnosed. To pursue his piscine analogy, the result is a bypassing of questions about relations among goldfish, even different schools of goldfish, and potential dialogues among them.

Strictly speaking, the diagnostic model may not be applicable to governmentality work for epistemological reasons. In order to suggest a provision assessment of what advanced liberalism 'costs to existence', an assessment of its effects

would be necessary. As mentioned above, governmentality studies are an analytics, not a philosophical theory, nor an empirical sociology of social relations. Is it possible to assess costs and effects solely at the level of an analytics? Studies of government have constructed their theoretical object as one of political rationality and technologies, a restriction that precludes problematizing effects, and thus presumably eliminates the possibility of assigning costs to any mentality of rule. Thus, as long as we retain a set against examining 'the messy actualities' of social relations, the diagnostic value of governmentality studies will be weak and the general modelling of critique on diagnosis will have marked limitations.

Moreover, in the area of governance studies the diagnostic model would seem inapplicable. In order to suggest a provisional assessment of what neo-liberalism 'costs to existence', an assessment of its effects would be necessary. However, studies of government have constructed their theoretical object as one of political rationality and technologies, a restriction that precludes problematizing effects, and thus presumably eliminates the possibility of assigning the costs to existence of any form of governmentality, including neo-liberalism. Thus, as long as they retain a set against examining 'the messy actualities' of 'what actually happens', the diagnostic value of governmentality studies is weak and the general modelling of critique on diagnosis has marked limitations.[4]

In tandem with the attenuation of interest in the role of the public intellectual, the understanding of what constitutes government has been recast in more restricted ways over the past generation. Foucault's definition of governmentality envisioned it as:

> the ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, its principal form of knowledge political economy and its essential technical means apparatuses of security.
>
> (Foucault 1979: 20)[5]

Gordon's (1991) commentary on governmental rationality equated investigations of government with inquiries into the 'rationality of government', stating that Foucault used 'art of government' and 'rationality of government' interchangeably, with rationality of government being 'a way or system of thinking about the nature of the practice of government (who can govern; what governing is; what or who is governed), capable of making some form of that activity thinkable and practicable both to its practitioners and to those upon whom it was practised' (Gordon 1991: 3). Subsequently, Rose posed the investigation of government over the last three centuries in the West as focused on 'problematics of rule': 'the ways in which rulers, of all stripes and hues, have posed themselves the question of the reasons, justifications, means and ends of rule, and the problems, goals or ambitions that should animate it' (Rose 1993: 288). Very abstract restrictions on what governmentality is to study, that is, what its theoretical object is taken to be, once again place constraints on the relations between genealogy and critique. If rationality of government is understood as the replies

given by rulers to questions they pose themselves rather than as discursive practices of rule – the latter containing the former – then the theoretical object is constrained to describing mentalities of rulers, a much more restricted inquiry than the institutions, procedures and practices of government found in Foucault's earlier work. The ambiguities in Foucault's work on governmentality were resolved in favour of this restricted object. Elsewhere it is clear that Foucault, among others (e.g. Hindess 1982), repeatedly asserted that politics also is to be seen as a matter of struggle in which the outcome cannot be forecast because it is dependent upon the realization and deployment of resources, tactics and strategies in the relations of contest themselves. This highly fluid interpretation of power centres social relations, and to that extent it is perhaps surprising that such a view is virtually excluded from governmentality work.[6] Rather, as we stress, politics appears as a 'mentality of rule' (Miller and Rose 1990), largely evidenced in the texts of government. However, the resulting imagery of politics, and its effects on the ways in which programmes of government may be understood, militate against a critical understanding of the relations and effects of rule. Accordingly, they work against linking governmentality thinking to the development of a critical practice of politics.

The governmentality literature has inherited this limited theoretical regard for contests and resistances, placing them within the category of sources of programmatic failure (Hunt and Wickham 1994). Given its centring on discourses and programmes of rule – the programmers' vision of government – the role accorded to contestation can only be the negative one of an obstacle to rule. Even where resistance is described in the governmentality literature (as in Hunt and Wickham 1994), it is accorded neither the constitutive role that Foucault makes available for it through the denial of its exteriority to rule nor the possibility of providing a counter/reverse project or alternative goals or procedures for governance. This theoretical silence in govenmentality work persists despite abundant evidence that contestations, resistances and social antagonisms shape rule through systematic provision of alternatives. For example, critiques of prenatal diagnosis and 'new reproductive technologies' have been made by women's health organizations and feminist groups since the early 1980s and these critiques have clearly been reflected in some jurisdictions in the reshaping of the government of pregnancy (Weir 1996). This may be viewed by the medical profession (i.e. from the programmer's viewpoint) as merely obstructionist. But it is clear that the programmes (for example, the current round of reforms proposed in Canada) closely reflect some of the concerns and alternatives proposed in counter discourses. Yet this is only one and a rather limited way in which contestation is related to rule, for it may also serve to destabilize a regime of government and depose it either from without or – say through the absorption of contradictory, counter discourses into rule – from within (O'Malley 1996; Shearing 1995).

Such possibilities are rarely if ever mentioned in the governmentality work. Its tendency to view the formation of governmental programmes from the programmers' perspective virtually precludes this, for the effects of contestation

and resistance are viewed only as obstacle and failure, and, in turn, failure is understood primarily as a source of reform and innovation *by the programmers* (Hunt and Wickham 1994; Miller and Rose 1990). A considerable political danger follows. As one of us has suggested with respect to the politics of professional knowledge:

> [p]rofessional practices conferring freedom have been the subject of continuing phases of critique since their inception. To erase this history of counter discourses from the history of the professions would be to collapse genealogical work on the liberal profession into a liberal problematic of governance and to sever its relation with subjugated knowledges. . . .
>
> (Weir 1996)

Extending this point to liberal rule generally, it makes clear that far-reaching consequences follow – not the least of which is the insulation of governmentality work from other analytics that promote contestation. For an approach professing an orientation towards maximizing contestation, this is a serious problem. Indeed, Mariana Valverde (1996) has identified a tension between the work of the governmentality school and feminist research, largely as an effect of the failure to incorporate, or even recognize the existence of, feminist counter discourses.[7] The virtual silence within governmentality work on postcolonial perspectives on race and gender is of equal concern.

The separation of contestation from rule, together with the subordination of contestation to rule at the analytic level, leaves little space for theorizing the productive engagement between them. This may be reinforced by the practice in genealogical work stemming from Foucault to restrict inquiry to 'serious statements' and the sources containing serious statements. In 'The discourse on language' a distinction is created between 'serious statements' that are repeated, transformed and give rise to new statements, and what we will call 'everyday discourses' that are casual and transient (Foucault 1972: 220). Resistance is a form of social antagonism that commonly occurs at the boundary between serious statements and everyday statements (see Scott 1990), and thus the restriction of genealogical studies to serious statements severely hampers the possibility of dealing with resistances and contestations in any sustained way. If this argument is admitted, then it follows that the strict boundary (which in any case Foucault argued was not a clear line) between serious and everyday discourses is breached and a broader range of social institutions and actors needs to be accepted as sources, together with increased sensitivity to their existence in the ongoing work of elaborating and negotiating political rationalities. As to the forms of 'agency' that are contingent upon this direction, we would agree with Judith Butler's provisional formulation of agency as resignification:

> To be constituted by language is to be produced within a given network of power/discourse which is open to resignification, redeployment, subversive citation from within, and interruption and inadvertent convergences with

other such networks. 'Agency' is to be found precisely at such junctures where discourse is renewed.

(Butler 1995: 135)

The serious statements of governance are never able to insulate themselves from reconstitution by agency in this sense, agency that may take the form of simple social variation or that of social antagonism.[8]

The demand that all critical theory identify Resistance at the end of every article has a long history within oppositional politics; it is not one we would endorse. Nor do we wish to present all analysis of contest as resulting in a conveniently collective actor, for it is clear that many forms of contestation have not taken the form of a collective actor (Scott 1990). The oft-heard criticisms of genealogists for failing to theorize 'agency' have frequently been the anguished cries of violated humanists who judge theory by its success or failure in producing subjects of history who finally come into their own, preferably heroically. None the less, those whose aim is to create knowledge that will assist social contestation must perforce take on the difficult work of understanding actual and possible contests and struggles around rule. We are not recommending that university-based intellectuals continue to have leadership fantasies about mapping out programmatic politics. So, too, no single political practice can be read off from any body of social and political theory. Our preferences are more modest in wanting to claim a warm textual spot for a variety of micro to macro critical practices, most completely lacking grandeur. Those whose aim is to create knowledge that will assist social contestation should take on the difficult work of understanding actual and possible contests and struggles around rule, and our theories should enable rather than prevent such projects.

## Conclusion

In many respects, the varying concerns raised in this paper may be brought together in an overall concern about the viability of one of the governmentality literature's central assumptions, namely that there exists what we may refer to as the 'moment of the programme'. While it is inescapable that we engage in a degree of hypostatization, idealization and reification of rationalities and programmes in order even to talk of them, the cumulative effects of the problematic features of governmentality work arguably create an insular and *episodic* vision of rule. The tendency to separate out programmes from the processes of their 'messy' implementation, and the related silencing of the constitutive role of contestation, almost inevitably produces a characterization of programmes as if they can be captured or encapsulated at a moment that exists *between* successive implementations, failures and evaluations. Indeed, it is only through such an analytical image that many programmes can be thought of as *distinct* from their implementation – many programmes exist only in the process of messy implementation. Ironically this applies most particularly to those governmental programmes towards which the governmentality research rightly wishes to

direct attention, namely programmes *not* associated with formal 'state' policies – with their white papers, discussion papers, launches, manuals and evaluation reports.

Closely linked to this is a consequent tendency to see programmes as if they are written by one hand, rather than multivocal, internally contested and thus, in a sense, always in change and often internally contradictory.[9] There is a distinct danger that such variability and contestation will be ignored or consigned/attributed to the arena of implementation. Thus Miller and Rose (1990), in what is possibly the most sophisticated theoretical account of this issue in the literature, list sources of programmatic failure as including staff and agents charged with implementation who hijack, transform, sabotage or misinterpret the programme during the implementation 'phase'. But is it always possible to assess who is a programmer and who an implementer in such contexts – especially where the programme is not formally identifiable in a single *core* of texts (or indeed, any texts)? In many instances, therefore, it is possible to think of programmes as coherent, systematic and as ideal typical *'perfect knowledges'* (Miller and Rose 1990) only by virtue of such problematic exercises of attribution to the programme or to its implementation.[10]

It is perhaps here that the attempt to hold theory at arm's length from politics, or at least critique, begins to come apart. As we have argued, in evacuating social relations from its analysis of the political, most notably in the theoretical exclusion of contestation and diversity among the governed, much of the governmentality work would seem to short-circuit its capacity to contribute to the formulation of a 'progressive' post social politics. We would now add to this the claim that the concomitant tendency to idealize programmes as perfect knowledges, to subject their internal variability to selective valorization or exclusion according to the identification of an overall logic, or ideal typification, has the same effect. Here, however, the principal political difficulty is that the accounts provide an image of rule so consistent, coherent and integrated, so univocal, that it becomes difficult to prise apart a space for any political intervention. This difficulty is exacerbated by the jaundiced view of critique, which gives little impetus to the execution of such an exercise. Perhaps this is one source of the sense, more than occasionally felt in the literature, of an admiration for liberalism and even neo-liberalism *and* for the sense, equally salient, of political pessimism.

None of this, we believe, is a necessary feature of governmentality work. Recognition of a constitutive role for contestation (among rulers, and between and among those who are ruled); analysis of implementation and its integral place in what appears as the often illusory moment of the programme; development of a critical stance and an accompanying lexicon; all these appear quite possible without interrupting any of the positive contributions that were mapped out at the beginning of this paper. Indeed, within the governmentality literature, work of this sort already has been carried out. This includes work with explicit political aims or implications – for example, to develop strategies for selecting and evaluating among elements of new liberal programmes that may be turned to progressive purposes (e.g. Shearing 1995), for identifying critical points for

political intervention that may deflect programmes onto more open trajectorie (Cruikshank 1994) or simply to locate the 'dark side' of liberal governanc (Valverde 1996).

Clearly, there is much that should be promoted and nurtured in governmen tality work, just as there is much that is worthy of being jettisoned and whicl which we, at least, regard as inessential baggage. Our argument is that it shoulc be (re)connected with critical theorizing. Our argument thus is aimed neithe at preserving nor at rejecting governmentality work, but at deflecting it from : course which may consign it to political irrelevance. Certainly we do not wisl to suggest that a new methodological or analytical conformity be imposed or the literature. Quite to the contrary, we seek to preserve this in part by pre- venting such a uniformity emerging by default. As yet, there has been remark- ably little *debate* around central issues – or indeed around any core issues – within the literature. As well as the issues to which we have attended in this paper, we could add questions of epistemology, analytical style and questions of methodology – including those of identifying which texts are to be adjudged definitive of a political rationality or programme – and so on. Such debate may validly have been eschewed in a fledgeling literature, but it would appear suf- ficiently robust now to face the implied risks of internal critique. The danger rather, perhaps already becoming visible, is that in the absence of such con- structive tensions and debate, the governmentality literature will lose its dynamism and degenerate into ritualized and repetitive accounts of 'governing' in increasingly diverse contexts.

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## Notes

1   The continued referral throughout this paper to 'the governmentality literature' reflects the point made by the editors of *The Foucault Effect* (Burchell *et al.* 1991) that our authors have in common something rather different from membership of a school or subscription to a manifesto. What they share is a particular exploratory passion, striving to capture and analyse across a range of modern manifestations (reason of state, police, liberalism, security, social economy, insurance, *solidarisme*, welfare, risk management and others) a dimension of historical existence which Michel Foucault, perhaps, did most to isolate and describe.

2   We specify 'Anglo' here because we do not believe that the same contraposition of genealogical work and criticism has occurred in the Francophone world. In Germany, the

question does not really arise given the minimal presence of Foucauldian work there (Dinges 1994).

3   We use Foucault for the purposes of comparison in order to diagnose a generational shift, not to play the tedious game of pitting the fathers against the (mostly) sons, or out of nostalgia for a silver age in baser times.

4   As we have stressed, we regard this set as extrinsic to the nature of governmentality work, and clearly some examples of the literature not so limited have carried out critical analyses in terms of effects and process (e.g. Cruikshank 1994; Weir 1996; O'Malley 1996).

5   To this he added the historical tendency of government gradually to dominate other forms of power and the governmentalization of the state.

6   The term 'excluded' does not mean 'rejected'. It would appear quite consistent for example with Miller and Rose's (1990) discussions about political 'implementation'. The point rather is that these processes are regarded as external to governmentality work.

7   In this, there are of course resonances or continuities with the legacy of Foucault more generally (Ramazanoglu 1993).

8   In Bakhtinian terms, we would suggest the need for greater sensitivity to social hetero- glossia. Indeed the lack of interest in theorizing social antagonism that marks the govern- ance literature may be an aspect of a theoretical practice that centres authoritative speech practices to the neglect of heterogeneity and variation in textual/speech practices. So too, the concept of heteroglossia provides an analytical means of thinking discursive variation while avoiding the presumed division between the orderliness of truth regimes vs. the chaos of the particular.

9   This is, of course, to be distinguished from contests between programmes, on which Miller and Rose (1990), for example, are quite clear: 'The world of programmes is hetero- geneous and rivalrous, and the solutions for one programme tend to be the problems for another'. It is not our contention that the governmentality literature excludes conflict and heterogeneity, only that it views such processes from within the eye of the programmer, and that (partly as a consequence) it does not build a theoretical place for multivocality within programmes.

10   For Rose and Miller, programmes are congenitally failing precisely because '[r]eality always escapes the theories that inform programmes and the ambitions that underpin them; it is too unruly to be captured by any perfect knowledge'. A similar position appears to be maintained by Barry *et al.* (1993) in turning away from the analysis of the history of implementation. This contrasts, for example, with the position outlined by Foucault (1991) which was that the difference between programmes and their implementation 'is not one between the purity of the ideal and the disorderly impurity of the real'. In practice there is much more correspondence than this implies between the position of Rose and Miller, for example, and Foucault. They would concur that *programmes* are not ideal types pre- cisely because 'they induce a whole series of effects on the real . . . they crystallize into institutions, they inform individual behaviour, they act as grids for the perception and evaluation of things' (Foucault 1991). Our point is not in conflict with this. Rather, it is that the *depiction* of the programmes tends to take the form of an ideal type, rendering pro- grammes more consistent, systematic and univocal than will usually be the case.

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