

# INTRODUCTION: GOVERNMENTALITY TODAY

When I originally published this book in 1999 I had attempted to write a text that would introduce the concept of governmentality derived from Michel Foucault in a reasonably clear and concise way. I also wanted to provide an overview of the field as it stood at the time. To the extent that it succeeded in these tasks, the book proved fortunate enough to attract an able readership of those who have found it helpful, along with a number of other books, in pursuing their own empirical and theoretical research. The second edition follows the structure of the first, but with the addition of this Introduction, a new chapter on International Governmentality and a Postscript. Beyond that I have allowed the greater proportion of the initial text to stand. There are, of course, corrections, additions and deletions, with the aims of clarifying the exposition and expunging any errors of fact. I have not, however, changed its conceptual and theoretical framework or basic arguments and content. If certain diagnoses have been outrun by events, that was to be expected.

I was fortunate with respect to the timing of the book. There was enough published to make 'governmentality' an adventure but not so much as to constitute something so solid as to impose undue restrictions on an author who had appropriated the term for its title. Were such a book to be written today, it would be obliged to make close reference to Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France in 1977–8 and 1978–9, which were first published in France in 2004 and have since received the benefit of an excellent scholarly English translation by Graham Burchell (Foucault, 2007, 2008). Parts of the current edition, particularly on liberalism and neo-liberalism (in Chapters 2, 6 and 8), and on pastoral power, police and reason of state (in Chapter 5), have done this but as a supplement rather than replacement of the original text. I think, without overstating my own modest contribution to what is now a large, collective achievement in the humanities and social sciences, that there was already enough that is distinctive in the current book for it to be put before the educated public a second time.

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The reason for this is that, despite its own ambitions, the book was no simple introductory text. It was the outcome of more than a decade of deliberation on Foucault's methods and concepts in relationship to a wide range of socio-political, philosophical and historical thought and my more limited attempts to deploy his approach with in historical and contemporary social and political analysis.<sup>1</sup> While I acknowledged a great number of international scholars pursuing similar themes around the term 'governmentality', I pursued what in retrospect would be a determinedly singular path and certainly did not view myself as a member, leader or follower of a 'governmentality school'. The book was but one marker or signpost in what I hope is a far from completed series of historico-politico-sociological studies, for want of a better name.

An attentive reader has recently remarked that the fruits of this independent path have not been sufficiently or widely acknowledged. Whether this is true or not, I shall focus here on the distinctive contribution this book makes to the field of what, for better or worse, has been called 'governmentality studies' with no less authority than the afterword to Foucault's most relevant work on the subject (Sennelart, 2007: 390). Those singular elements of the book led me to other kinds of considerations that often questioned standard approaches not only in mainstream social and political science but in the 'Foucauldian' alternatives including, to some extent, aspects of these 'governmentality studies'. The 'singularities' already present in this book a decade ago allow me to connect it to our present. This is not so much a 'historical ontology', but what I would call, adapting Foucault, a 'critical ontology of ourselves and our present' (1986b: 50; 1986c: 96).

### **Singularities**

The reader might be struck above all by the concern in this book to place the then published fragments on governmentality within the much broader range and trajectory of Foucault's thought itself without allowing the term to congeal into a kind of dogma or become a mere social science methodology. This arose not out of an unwarranted fidelity to the 'founding father' but from my conviction that the conceptual lucidity, methodological clarity and, above all, critical ethos of Foucault's work provided us with an extraordinary set of resources on which to build this emergent domain of study. Yet, there is much in this book that draws from the theories, concepts and research of others including those at some distance from Foucauldian perspectives. There is also much here that was drawn from my own research and empirical study. The book's first singularity, then, is that it evinces a kind of wandering fidelity to Foucault with nevertheless a real attention to the precision of concepts.

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One component of this was the attempt to offer a conceptually coherent view of what I called an *analytics of government*. I sought, for pedagogical purposes, to clearly outline key concepts such as 'government' and 'governmentality' and to distinguish their several senses. I then set out what I viewed as the basic elements of that analytics of government as a study of what I called 'regimes of government' or 'regimes of practices'. Of great help here was Foucault's 'roundtable' discussion with historians following the publication of *Discipline and Punish* (1991b). That discussion is virtually concurrent with the governmentality lectures. Foucault emphasizes that his research concerns the conditions of acceptability of 'regimes of practices' that 'possess up to a point their own specific regularities, logic, strategy, self-evidence and "reason".<sup>2</sup> Yet I also sought to benchmark the coherence of this approach against Foucault's later methodological statements concerning ethical practices or practices of the self (1985, 1986b: 341-72). I thought that we should be able to use a common or, at least, intersecting vocabulary and approach whether we were concerned with ethical self-government or the government of states, economies, populations and individuals. Governmentality as a concept and approach provided a bridge to Foucault's later works of ethics. More importantly, it provided a way of linking the study of socio-political phenomena and that of ethical phenomena in a way which did not bind them too closely together within an overarching narrative as did the historical sociology of state-formation and Norbert Elias' theme of the civilizing process, however valuable each might be.<sup>3</sup> The presence of Gilles Deleuze's interpretation of Foucault's work was evident in my account of the different dimensions of an analytics of government, particularly his essay 'What is a *dispositif*?' (Deleuze, 1991). His wider reading of Foucault within the idiom of 'the fold' and 'folding' had provided me with a way to think about the relationship between power, identity and subjectivity in liberal societies beyond the dualities of inside and outside, state and civil society, liberalism and authoritarianism (Deleuze, 1988; Dean, 1996a, 2002a).

Another aspect of being careful to draw upon a wide range of possible insights offered by Foucault was to include considerations on how governmentality was related to Foucault's genealogical approach and ethos. My purpose was here stated clearly: to maintain an analytics of government as an instrument of criticism. Genealogy is characterized as *diagnostic* of the present by 'problematizing' taken-for-granted assumptions and an *anti-anachronistic* refusal to read the past in terms of this present. The reader will note the choice of the term 'criticism', suggesting something open, multiple and immanent to the regimes of practices under analysis, rather than 'critique' which, in the work of the Frankfurt School from Adorno to Habermas, would be conducted under universal norms and truths and pointing towards a necessary end. In this respect, this book draws upon and develops my earlier attempt to discuss genealogy as a 'critical and effective history' which is *critical* in that it engages in the restive

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interrogation of what is taken as given, natural, necessary and neutral, and *effective* to the extent that it upsets the colonization of knowledge by those trans-historical schemas and teleologies which claim to be able to account for the truth of our present (Dean, 1994a). In looking for another style of thought that most captured a similar ethos, I found in Max Weber a 'value-neutral' yet 'value-relevant' analysis of how we act upon ourselves and others that would stand in the service of 'moral forces', particularly when it could demonstrate 'inconvenient facts'. Moreover, the interpretation of Weber offered by Wilhelm Hennis (1989) underlined the significance of the former's focus on the *Lebensführung*, or conduct of life. The work of the political philosopher David Owen (1995, 1999), engaging with normative political theory, was an important touchstone for this ethos, and from him I derived the notion of an 'exemplary criticism' that was quite different from 'ideological critique'. Today I would add the terms themselves are unimportant; the distinction they marked was.

Of great assistance in the task of exploring the critical potential of this kind of study were the essays and introductions of Colin Gordon. Gordon, more than any other commentator, was sensitive to the creative forces within Foucault's work. To give one example, which I would find fundamental, Gordon argued in an early afterword that we cannot constitute the intrinsic logic of practices from the programmes, theories and policies of various advocates and authorities (1980). One source of critical potential of these studies, I would suggest, comes from showing the 'inconvenient' dissonance between the claims and objectives of programmes and rationalities of government and the 'intentional but non-subjective' character of regimes of practices, that is to say, their logic, their intelligibility, and even their strategy. This was the case for the programmers of empowerment and community activists in the Community Action Programs in the United States that commenced with the War on Poverty in the Johnson administration (Cruikshank, 1994). While they claimed exemption from power relations to empower those without power, these programmers and activists were agents within a regime of practices that could not help constituting and enmeshing 'the poor' within new and singular power relations and acting upon them in ways which sought a qualitative transformation of how they understood themselves as subjects. More broadly, I concluded, this disjunction was also a feature of liberal regimes of government. In *The Constitution of Poverty* (Dean, 1991), for example, I had tried to point out the way in which a liberal art of government that sought to limit the state in the name of individual freedom had extended, multiplied and even revolutionized the reach of both state and non-state governmental actors and institutions. Far from a simple case of an art of government which respected and worked through the liberty of the governed, classical liberal government, more or less successfully, yoked the poor to their responsibilities and moral obligations, and made working men dependent on the capitalist labour market and women and children dependent upon them. What

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was needed was not a critique that penetrated the falseness of ideologies to reveal real relations of subordination but to show how the production of true discourses was linked to regimes of intervention with all sorts of outcomes and effects. Today, practices of welfare for a number of decades have been invested with rights-based advocacy, activation programmes, and forced-work schemes without ever quite being identical to any of them. How, we might ask, have nearly two decades of workfare and neo-paternalist diagnoses re-described the operation of the American (or British or Australian) welfare system and turned it to different ends? How has this met with counter-discourses and counter-truths? What has been the realm of effects of this struggle, including on the manner in which potential 'claimants' conduct themselves?

A second singularity thus emerged in this book: to construe governmentality as a critical perspective and take much care to show how this was the case. This kind of criticism exemplified an ethical and political orientation to self-government without prescribing how freedom might be practised and without foregoing the necessary scepticism towards liberals who claimed to be governing through freedom, administrators who would activate the unemployed, community workers who would empower, for instance, the urban poor, and therapists who would liberate our innermost desires. This criticism was neither an adjudication of the things of this world by the court of transcendent morality or universal reason, nor a knee-jerk rejection against the rationalities through which contemporary life was organized. Yet I did not want to be content with turning an analytics of government into another merely empirical methodology, however precise, that could sustain the social sciences for some time. If I insisted on showing how an analytics of government remained critical without an undue obsession with its own normative commitments it was because it seemed that what was innovative in this work was that it could reject the posturing of grand and normative social theory and political philosophy without becoming a mere technique of thick empirical description. In a situation of yet another 'either ... or' blackmail, it was neither, as I put it at the time, a modernist nor a postmodernist project; it was not a 'meta-history of promise' of an incomplete modernity nor a Sombartian cultural critique of the nihilism of contemporary capitalism in which all was 'signs, speed, and spectacles'.

Gordon proved an invaluable guide in yet another way - in his sensitivity to multiple conditions which formed the intellectual, political and historical conjuncture of Foucault's work more broadly and his work on power and governmentality in particular. A third singularity of the present book was thus its awareness of the conditions of our thought and statements. Historians of political thought, such as Quentin Skinner (1988) and James Tully (1988), had given great emphasis to the categories of 'intention' and 'context' when trying to understand classical political thought. While not necessarily employing the vocabulary of this school of thought, one conclusion I drew was that social and

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political thought of the kind exemplified by Foucault was always in itself a form of action or intervention in a definite milieu. It seemed to me that we should ask of ourselves, as much as of Foucault, what we are doing when we propose a type of study, engage in a particular forms of analysis, or develop a singular concept. Using a relatively neglected paper by Gordon (1986), I argued that Foucault's genealogical work was conducted at a moment of 'limited political adversity' for an independent Left which was coincident with a receding Marxism and the challenges of a recharged and newly militant liberalism. Its ethos was connected to the involvement with 'local struggles' such as Foucault's work with the Groupe d'Information de Prisons, and to the diminishing viability of the 'really existing socialism', following the publication of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* in France in 1973-4 (Macey, 1993: 383-4).

This argument could well be extended when considering the emergence of the 'governmentality' theme in Foucault's work. According to Michel Sennelart (2007: 371-7), Foucault's engagement with a series of contemporary events, from his organization of the public appearance of Soviet dissidents in Paris during Brezhnev's state visit, and his involvement in the Croissant affair in late 1977, to his journalism and reflection on the Iranian revolution and its later consequences, have traces in the governmentality lectures. The idea of 'rights of the governed', raised in relation to the first of these events, will lead, via a concern with the debasement of the term 'dissidence', to the notion of 'counter-conducts' elaborated in the lectures in relation to medieval religious struggles (Foucault, 2007: 200-1). The governmentality lectures appear just after his statements on the case of Klaus Croissant, a lawyer for the 'Baader-Meinhof gang' (officially, the Red Army Faction), who had unsuccessfully sought asylum in France. In the course of his intervention on behalf of Croissant and those who had granted him asylum in France, Foucault developed his conception of 'the security pact' between state and population (2001: 427). He also came to differentiate himself from a certain style of leftist critique, which used the analytical grid of 'fascism' and 'totalitarianism' to express their solidarity with, or at least understanding of, European terrorism. As the lectures were ending in May 1979, Foucault responds to those who criticised his support for the Iranian Revolution by asserting the 'theoretical ethic' which 'is "antistrategic": to be respectful when a singularity revolts; intransigent as soon as power violates the universal'.<sup>4</sup>

The experience of European terrorism and its political effects helps us understand the theoretical moves represented by the governmentality lectures. As his colleague Pasquale Pasquino observed (1993: 73), he came to realize that the use of language of war to understand power would lead to an 'extremist denunciation of power'. The model of 'government' was presented as an alternative way of thinking about the power relations of contemporary societies. In a more practical way, the 1978-9 lectures seek to understand the post-war German 'economic miracle' in terms of the adoption of the 'model of the

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possible neo-liberal governmentality' rather than 'the model – so often discredited, dismissed, held in contempt and bathed – of the Bismarckian state becoming the Hitler state' (Foucault, 2008: 192).

If I emphasize, then and now, these various milieux, it is not in the service of a philological excavation of meaning in Foucault's changing statements but to make the point that the ethos offered by 'governmentality' was fashioned in relation to specific interlocutors and in a singular, and multiply conditioned, political environment. Foucault was not first of all developing a set of tools for empirical social science research – although that is one of the effects of these lectures – but taking a kind of action or rather, a set of loosely related actions, in a multiply conditioned domestic and international political situation. The challenge for us, it seemed to me, was not to ossify this perspective into a permanent and unchanging set of instruments of analysis but to adopt its ethos. Our present is different from Foucault's and from the decades of 1980s and 1990s in which governmentality emerged in the English-speaking world. Despite the avalanche of political and journalistic diagnosis of the 'death of neo-liberalism' and warnings of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, or even the election of Barack Obama, the present remains not a moment 'of total perdition' or a 'triumphant daybreak' but a 'time like any other, or rather, a time which is never quite like any other' (Foucault, 1994: 126). A consideration of Foucault's time enables us to consider our own, and obliges us, so I thought then and would argue now, to modify, innovate and sometimes to reject his and our own earlier concepts, approaches, arguments and analyses. The third aspect of this book that I think distinguishes it, then, is its emphasis on the role of the present as a condition and arena of our thought, statements, perspectives, analyses and, above all, concepts. The present is the standing reason for conceptual creativity.

The fourth singularity of the present book, which stems from its unwillingness to disconnect governmentality from Foucault's broader work, is the presence of serious analysis and reflection of different formations of power, which are not directly concerned with either governmentality or its liberal arts. The most obvious of these is the space given to the concepts of bio-politics and sovereignty. Whatever the strengths and limitations of the discussion here, I ventured that relations of power were not reducible to those captured by the concept and analyses of governmentality, however useful is the focus on rationalized attempts to guide conduct.

This emphasis on the irreducible multiplicity of power relations cannot be dissociated from methodological problems of how regimes of practices and relations of power are to be analysed in a way that distinguishes them from their liberal self-description or their programmatic rationality and conceptual ones of the relations between sovereignty, violence and exception today (Dean, 2002a, 2007). Around these themes, the critical and theoretical

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work of Giorgio Agamben, who raised the question of the relations between sovereignty and bio-politics made manifest in the 'camp' (1998), on the one hand, and the governmental use of the exception (2005), on the other, has proved impossible to dismiss *tout court* despite major reservations (Dean, 2004). In the criticisms of Agamben as grounding the analysis of power in the sovereign right of death, and lacking the necessary distinctions to analyse liberal democracies (Rabinow and Rose, 2006), we hear echoes of Foucault's criticisms of those who used 'fascism' as an 'analytical grid' for their politics of denunciation and state phobia and his discomfit with his own earlier views on bio-politics as intensifying the genocidal impulses of the state. We need to acknowledge Foucault's retreat from a certain extremist element or interpretation in the analyses of power and his break with certain of his colleagues. But we also need to acknowledge the multiplicity of power relations within liberal democracies and indeed within particular regimes of practices. The problem we have faced in recent times was not the imaginary fascism of the liberal-democratic state, but how sovereign and coercive rationalities and techniques, from the detention camp to workfare, were suddenly and unexpectedly re-implanted within the very territory of the liberal art of government.

The history of Foucault's own thought on governmentality perhaps makes intelligible the tendency to imagine that the liberal arts of government somehow re-inscribed or recoded the more dangerous and violent components of bio-politics or sovereignty and hence, perhaps, even rendered them safe, as I have argued elsewhere (Dean, 2007: 86–7). The 'headline' experiences of the first decade of the twenty-first century from the 'war on terror' to the use of pre-emptive military force to initiate major wars and the plainly inhumane treatment of refugees and 'enemy combatants' have surely put paid to this assumption of the relatively benign character of contemporary liberalism and an easy accession to the distinction, inherited from commonsense as much as scientific research, between liberal and authoritarian regimes (Dean, 2002a). In Foucault's time one of the greatest dangers lay in the radical left reflex which labelled every despised action of state as 'fascist' and thereby revealed a certain complicity with neo-liberal critiques. Today, it might lie in the easy assimilation of the entirety of what is bad to a now despised 'neo-liberalism' and the uncritical immersion of the liberal-left in the language of liberal-democracy, including 'civil society', 'governance' and 'security'. Much of the exercise of power, from the spectacular example of the international coalition invading Iraq, to the everyday treatment of detainees, refugees, Indigenes, suspected terrorists and welfare recipients, has been neither liberal nor especially governmental in recent times. In this respect, then, the concern in this book for 'authoritarian governmentality', and the admission that the concept not only applies to non-liberal forms of rule but to a large domain of rule in contemporary liberal democracies, sought to arm the



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reader with some of the necessary scepticism towards the programmatic claims of liberalism.

The concern for the multi-dimensional specification of zones of power within even a single regime of practices would lead to unexpected conclusions which, while not generating criteria for moral judgement, offer greater clarity. It might lead to the discovery of everyday kinds of governmentality within signal sites of the exceptional exercise of sovereignty such as at the US facility at Guantánamo Bay; or to use an example which moves in the other direction, it might lead to finding a sovereign decision on 'a life not worth living' (or at least living *with*) within the relatively mundane exercise of choice consequent upon prenatal testing. It is important to keep our conceptual vision open to this multiplicity and to resist turning 'governmentality' into an orthodoxy that prescribes the other types of thought with which it can have legitimate relations. You cannot be unfaithful without someone with whom to be unfaithful.

There is no reason why we should stop at these major power formations and, consistent with the genealogical approach, I was concerned to explore earlier forms of power, their rationalities and techniques. With regard to Foucault's notion of 'pastoral power', I sought to use it to examine the long-term trajectory of what we have come to regard as 'the social' and the trajectories on which Foucault would locate the 'welfare-state problem'. Again, Foucault's own published statements were sketchy although we are now aware that the pastorate occupied him for part of lectures five and nine and all of lectures six, seven and eight in his 1977-8 course. I sought to supplement Foucault's account with a kind of 'genealogy of the gift' drawn from Paul Veyne's *Bread and Circuses* (1990) on the history of the benefaction (*euergesia*) of the ruling class in the classical antiquity of Greece and Rome and Peter Brown's study (1992) of the challenge presented by Christian charity to traditional educational self-formation of the late Roman ruling class known as *paideia*. I suggested that the problem of the welfare state was more difficult and intricately interwoven with antique inheritances than Foucault allowed in his opposition between the 'city-citizen game' of the free citizen in a political community and the 'shepherd-flock game' of a living subject to be cared for, which appears in his Stanford lectures (1981). The welfare state, I suggested, also fuses an exclusive civic culture with the universality of charity without attending to the ethical cultivation of the motivation to give.

I argued, in broader terms, social and political struggles and transformations of authority relations happen less through ideas than through kinds of *habitus*, to borrow from both Pierre Bourdieu and Norbert Elias. They occur through the 'ethical comportments' inhering in different practices such as gift-giving and manifest as different relationships to self and others, to rulers and ruled, to rich and poor, to male and female, and to city and countryside. In terms *that* would be consistent with Foucault's lectures, the Christian asceticism of the

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priest and bishop, the practice of good works and almsgiving, and the inclusion of the poor, marginalized, and women in the early Christian Church, formed a series of 'counter-conducts' against the largesse of an aristocratic Roman ruling class cultivated by the training of its exclusive category of male citizens. Today, we have Foucault's catalogue of the counter-conducts of various groups to the pastoral power of the Church in the Middle Ages grounded in asceticism and its imperatives, communities, resistance to the role of the pastor and his sacramental power (Foucault, 2007: 204–10).

What is more clear today than when this book was written is that contemporary political struggles and spirituality are far more intimately connected than the narrative of a liberal art of government built on the tolerance of a privatized religious belief can allow. Rather than viewing current conundrums of 'the West' and varieties of Islam as ideological or civilizational conflicts, we could analyse religion in terms of the practices of training which constitute forms of asceticism or self-government, and how this self-government is linked to political government, to relations with others and to members of one's own community, and the obligations that all this imposes. An analytics of government that studies the fashioning of different *habiti* and ethical and political comportments out of the practices of religious faith could provide a useful perspective on the politics of religion in our present.

The final aspect that distinguishes the present work, I would submit, is its willingness to engage in a form of conceptual innovation and precision which is combined with a scepticism about received categories. While adapting the term 'advanced liberalism' from the pioneering work of Nikolas Rose (1993), I sought to ensure that the term did not become a kind of 'ideal type' readily applicable to a host of situations or reducible to the principles of an ideology. There were a number of strategies by which I sought to emphasize this. First, I distinguished between neo-liberalism, which I viewed as a range of programmatic rationalities of government, and advanced liberalism as an assemblage of rationalities, technologies, and agencies found in certain countries and regions. This would allow us to make clear that regimes of government were not manifestations of political principles or philosophies. Even within these more restricted definitions, I was careful to grasp and be open to multiplicity. I thus attempted to distinguish between types of neo-liberalism and contrasted not only classical liberalism with neo-liberalism, as Graham Burchell (1996) had usefully done, but between styles of the latter. Neo-liberalism was at best a number of theories, programmes and ideas with a family likeness. Similarly, I suggested, varieties of advanced liberalism could also be distinguished through the analysis or comparison of singular regimes of practices such as the different kinds of welfare reform with which I was familiar. One of the outcomes of the latter was the conclusion that rather than a 'death of the social' a new *post-welfarist regime of the social* could be viewed as taking shape in specific locale and practices.

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By pluralizing neo-liberalism and advanced liberalism, I further wanted to suggest that neo-liberalism existed within a field of contemporary rationalities but did not exhaust them. I mentioned populism, communitarianism and something I called 'neo-conservatism' as intimately woven both into the critiques of the welfare state and the desire to re-implant the virtues associated with a properly functioning civil society and the spontaneous orders, as Hayek had called them, of markets, morals, language and law. My account of advanced liberalism as a regime of government again emphasized plurality and allowed the possibility that it might acutalize, for certain populations, coercive and paternalistic treatment rather than a form of governing through freedom. It was not at all clear at the time this was completed (late 1998) that neo-conservatism would come to be a major formulation of programmatic political philosophy at a national level in the United States over the next decade or the extent to which 'welfare reform' would take on a work-enforcement approach under a neo-paternalism. The fact that the conceptual scaffolding I elaborated then allowed for both these eventualities underlines the value of careful specification of the limits of concepts, the working within singular regimes of practices, and sensitivity to the broad field in which governmental programmes are generated. Nevertheless it would soon become clear that the relationship between neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism was much more complex than I could have envisaged at this time and that neo-paternalist, and even sovereign coercive, technologies would come to take a more prominent part in the government of the populations of advanced liberal societies. I refer the interested reader to my efforts to address these problems elsewhere (Dean, 2007).

In the present book, a broader conceptual and theoretical front was opened up by the most sustained engagement with contemporary social theory, that of Ulrich Beck's theory of the risk society (1992b). While I assayed the existing governmentality literature on risk, emphasizing (again) the plurality of risk rationalities, technologies and regimes, I used that literature to argue both for the salience of risk and to avoid the inscription of this multiplicity within a realist narrative of contemporary society. I also argued that properly understood risk was a component of a 'reflexive government', a concept adapted from Samantha Ashenden (1996), in which earlier and different forms of governing, including forms of self-governing, become the means by which various programmes of government seek to govern risks. I proposed that a new trajectory had emerged alongside and interwoven with what Foucault had called the 'governmentalization of the state': a kind of 'governmentalization of government'. The singular arcs of risk and its authoritarian and liberal government in the twentieth century, and the tripartite series of a government of 'men and things', of processes, and of mechanisms of government, provided ways of organizing some of the themes of the book. The benefits of intelligibility often come with the cost of simplification, of course.

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As well as functioning as text and overview, I think this book can be characterized by these five singularities. First, it offered a concise and coherent exposition of the fragments on governmentality as an 'analytics of government' that drew upon a wide range of intellectual and critical resources offered by Foucault and others. Second, it attempted to maintain and make explicit the critical ethos and character of this study of governmentality. Third, it situated the appearance of governmentality within the field of the intellectual and political conditions that constituted its present, and thus raised the question of our own present. Fourth, it placed the concepts of 'government' and 'governmentality' within the broader conceptual field of relations of power, including those of sovereignty and bio-politics, and a genealogy which found significant points of orientation in pastoral power, reason of state and police. Fifth, it sought to grasp the multiplicity of ways of governing in contemporary liberal societies in order to stress the limits of the purchase of potentially ideal-typical categories such as neo-liberalism and advanced liberalism and to suggest the polymorphous domain of which they were only a part. This domain includes authoritarian and despotic practices within advanced liberal states, and non-liberal rationalities of government, including neo-conservatism and paternalism. All these were minor things, to be sure, but they constituted an orientation that ensured this book had its own place as a distinctive voice in the literature which was something more than a mere replication or application of what others were doing.

They all point to a major orientation that marks the present book. It is based on a kind of wager which says: if we are to understand our present, we need to do so not by the mere replication of others' ideas, or the application of others' theories or methods to an empirical domain, but by way of the production of concepts. The great benefit of doing so is that it engages with the concepts and theories of our present, it requires that we borrow, fashion, and refashion such concepts, and enables us to give them to others in turn to fashion and refashion in this relation to their own present. Concepts are a way of communicating with our environment and with that of others. They are a way of 'living life'.

### **A critical ontology of ourselves and our present**

Foucault once described a thesis of Georges Canguilhem in the following terms:

*To form concepts is a way of living and not a way of killing life; it is a way of living in complete mobility and not of immobilizing life; it is manifest amongst the billions of living beings which inform their milieu and inform themselves through it, an innovation that one may judge, as one*

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likes minor, or considerable: a very particular type of information. (1980a: 60; original emphasis)

In a sense this captures I think the ethos of Foucault's approach to concepts themselves. They never remain fixed; each formulation contains a modification, a transformation, however minute, until the concepts become something very different. It is not exactly forward progress; Foucault describes himself in these lectures as always having the right to change the plan, 'because, as you know, I am like the crawfish and advance sideways' (2008: 78). I have long been reminded of the graphic work of M.C. Escher in which, for example, a row of birds gradually becomes a row of fish through successive planes of metamorphosis. This, then, was the one thing I sought to attain in this and my other books: the production of concepts as a way of life. To do this, I was concerned with the modification and metamorphosis of concepts, based on very careful processes of distinction between different rationalities and different regimes. It seems to me that it is the production of these concepts, some big and some small, some with larger impact, some with only a little, each swimming or flying in their own direction, or maybe just crawling off to the side, that is of lasting value in the present volume.

The study of governmentality indicates an empirical terrain of the rationalities, technologies, programmes and identities of regimes of government. However, it cannot be reduced to that empirical terrain because studying governmentality is also about the production of new concepts in the course of that study, or in the course of using other scholars' study. The production of concepts multiplies possibilities of analysis; concepts come back combined with those of others, in different empirical domains.<sup>5</sup> Concepts of this type are never owned. Just as one borrows, within the ethics of proper citation and acknowledgment, and thus modifies and invents, so one expects one's concepts to be borrowed, changed and adjusted to other uses and 'mashed up' with other concepts. This ethos of the production of concepts as a way of life means that concepts become public in such a way that their proper use can never be dictated. They are always in this sense on loan. Empirical study and the production of concepts are one and the same process.

Our present is the privileged point of the production of concepts and empirical study, no matter how historical or theoretical. For Foucault, the problem of the present was philosophically inaugurated with the political writings of Kant. He argues:

There now appears a new way of posing the question of modernity, no longer within a longitudinal relationship to the Ancients, but rather in what one might call a 'sagittal' relation to one's own present-ness. Discourse has to take account of its own present-ness, in order to find its own place, to

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pronounce its meaning, and to specify the mode of action which it is capable of exercising within this present.

What is my present? What is the meaning of this present? And what am I doing when I speak of this present? Such is, it seems to me, the substance of this new interrogation on modernity. (1986c: 90)

The 'present' and who 'we' are in relation to it are of course problematic and must of necessity remain open and revisable; there are of course a multiplicity of presents, and a multiplicity of who we are in them which do not readily cohere into a convenient category such as 'contemporary experience', 'humanity' or even perhaps, *contra* Foucault's quote, 'modernity' itself (Dean, 1994a: 52). If we wish to view governmentality as less a technique of the empirical sciences and more in keeping with the ethos of concept formation in relation to our present, I would suggest that we continue to keep this openness. An analytics of government belongs with genealogy and its varieties, the different schools of the history of political thought, histories of the 'classical age' and of antiquity, political and historical sociology, and, despite differences, the variants of critical theory. It belongs with the 'gay sciences' and 'untimely meditations' at the margins of the authorized 'philosophical discourse of modernity'. What is philosophy if not the creation of concepts as a way of life? It is certainly not that which is co-extensive with the intellectual practice of professional philosophers. Actively engaging with the risks of a kind of intellectual dissidence means that we cannot reject those who share a critical engagement with the present as a site of conceptual innovation.

When Ian Hacking uses the phrase 'historical ontology' he admits quite correctly that he generalizes beyond Foucault's project and lacks the latter's political ambition and engagement (1999: 4-5). For, according to Foucault, this project 'has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them' (Foucault, 1986c: 96). The understanding given here of the domain of studies which gather around the concept of governmentality is animated by this critical ethos: it is concerned to make intelligible the limits and potentials of who we are and have become, and the ways our understanding of ourselves is linked to the ways in which we are governed, the ways in which we try to govern ourselves and others, and the ways in which this occurs under forms of knowledge postulated as truth by various authorities. By becoming clear about the limits, we open up the possibility of an action to accept or reject them, to show their contingent nature, or to add up the costs of transgressing them. Above all, the point of a critical ontology of ourselves and our present is to make us clear on these risks and dangers, these benefits and opportunities, so that we might take or decline to take action.

## INTRODUCTION: GOVERNMENTALITY TODAY

What if our statements, analyses and concepts are a form of action in themselves? Then we need to consider what kind of action they are and the potential consequences, if any, when we speak in a certain way, and study and analyse a problem from a particular point of view. This problem is particularly acute for those of us who commit ourselves to the fashioning of concepts as a feature of how we live our relation to our present. When we consider the stakes, those who make use of the concept of 'governmentality' cannot be above such responsibility.

**Notes**

1. On Foucault and other strands of thought, see Dean (1994a, 1994b, 1996a, 1998b); for social and political analysis, Dean (1991, 1992, 1995) and the contributions to Dean and Hindess (1998).
2. See Foucault (1991b: 75). The roundtable occurred on 20 May 1978. A full discussion of the context is found in Macey (1993: 403–5). I used this text to argue that, contrary to prevailing wisdom, Foucault was not a 'constructionist' (Dean, 1998b).
3. See Corrigan and Sayer (1985) and Norbert Elias (1978, 1982) and my responses (Dean, 1994b, 1996a).
4. The term 'security pact' is found in Foucault's 'Letter to Certain Leaders of the Left', published in *Le Nouvel Observateur* in December 1977 (2001: 426–8) just as the lectures on *Security, Territory, Population* were to commence. Foucault's response to the polemics over his support of the Iranian revolution is published as 'Useless to revolt' (Foucault, 2001: 449–53), which first appeared in *Le Monde* in May 1979. Quote is Foucault (2001: 453).
5. 'Reflexive government' appears for instance in studies and debates of the European Union (Rumford, 2002, 2003; Haahr, 2004; Walters, 2006); a 'post-welfare regime of the social' in the study of rural governmentality (Higgins, 2001; Higgins and Lockie, 2002) and housing policy (Flint, 2003); and the more abstract concept of 'the fold' and 'folding' in studies of contractualization in the Canadian public service (Ilcan et al, 2003; O'Connor and Ilcan, 2005).