Foucault Studies

REVIEW

Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, 2nd Edition (London: Sage, 2010), ISBN: 978-1847873842

At the time of publication, the first edition of Mitchell Dean's influential text, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (1999), elaborated an analytics of government through which the ever-changing rationalities and technologies governing advanced liberal societies could be diagnosed and contested. With the ideal of the welfare state receding, neo-liberal principles and objectives were becoming ascendant, prompting many to take an interest in Foucault's lectures on the history of governmentality and emergence of neo-liberalism; but Foucault left no extended methodological commentary on genealogy and its application to the study of governmentality. Much of the importance of Dean's first edition of *Governmentality*, then, resided in the fact that it was among the first comprehensive and systematic attempts to advance the conceptual tools and dimensions of analysis needed to perform this type of study.[1] The analytics of government he put forward in the first chapter has been frequently drawn upon by scholars in a broad range of disciplines, sometimes even outside of the social sciences and humanities.

The second edition of Dean's *Governmentality* has been released amidst a global crisis in capitalism and, as he discusses in the post-script, at the beginning of an emergent crisis in neo-liberal governmentality as well. "In searching for models for governments to adopt, leaders are [now] looking at the same examples of too much government that, according to Foucault, were the targets of neo-liberal critiques: Roosevelt's New Deal and Keynesian techniques of macroeconomic demand management." (262) It is precisely because of such an unexpected reversal in the fortunes of neo-liberalism that Dean's second edition of *Governmentality* will continue to be of lasting influence, as it offers the analytical resources to diagnose the ongoing transformations in the arts of government, whilst rejecting any teleological schemas about our socio-political future. Following Foucault, the focus always remains on discerning the possibilities and limits conditioning our experiences in the present, thus opening a thought-space in which to deliberate on whether the possibilities are to be acted upon, or the limits transgressed. (14)

Aside from the post-script on the problematization of neo-liberalism, the additions to the second edition include a new introduction and a chapter on international governmentality,

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[1] Another notable text to elaborate a method for the study of governmentality is Nikolas Rose's *Powers of Freedom: Reframing political thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

the latter indicating many possible avenues for further analysis. Every chapter found in the first edition has been carried over to the second. Also, the body of the text has been considerably modified, particularly in terms of the inclusion of supporting material from Foucault's lecture series, *Security*, *Territory*, *Population* and *Birth of Biopolitics*. In short, there is a considerable amount of new and interesting material in the second edition to make it worthwhile and instructive, even for those who are already familiar with the first edition of this important text. For the purposes of this review, I will concentrate on the additions to the second edition.

The new introduction is somewhat surprising with Dean reflecting on the "singularity" of his approach; such that he is carrying out a sort of biography of his intellectual formation and influences, as well as the overall trajectory of his work. He stresses that he is not a member of a "governmentality school" who is elaborating an empirical methodology for the social sciences. (5) It often appears in the introduction that Dean is trying to put some distance between his work and the rest of the governmentality literature, which has been charged – by Dean among others – with repeating liberal formulas of rule as opposed to analyzing and criticizing them.[2] Instead, following Max Weber, Dean's work has attempted to engage in a style of criticism "that would stand in the service of 'moral forces', particularly when it could demonstrate 'inconvenient facts'." (4) The most significant of these inconvenient facts which Dean's approach underlines is the immanent disjuncture between the rationality of the programme and the strategic intentionality of the regimes of practices which these programmes attempt to modify or reform, a critical insight that is lost in those governmentality studies that remain at a purely descriptive level. The inconvenient fact that programmes do not necessarily have the desired effects, and that government, the conduct of conduct, is a utopian activity that frequently results in failure, is what gives governmentality studies their critical purchase. While Dean acknowledges Colin Gordon's influence in conveying this critical aspect of Foucault's genealogies, it has also been recognized throughout much of the governmentality literature, so the degree to which it might be considered among the 'singularities' of Dean's approach is somewhat limited.

When Dean formulates his analytics of government in Chapter 1, he expresses a clear concern with the rigor of his analytical concepts and their critical function. Nevertheless, in Chapter 2 it turns out that his primary concern rests with the genealogical ethos guiding the analysis, which he characterizes as a "militancy grounded in scholarly moderation." (56) Again recognizing the influence of Gordon's commentaries on Foucault in his work, Dean describes in some detail the political environment of the 1970s within which Foucault's genealogical project first emerged. This proved to be the beginning of a period marked by limited political adversity but accompanied by considerable intellectual hubris, particularly with the hyper-theorization evinced in Marxist theories of state. Whereas Marxist theorists frequently denounced liberalism as a bourgeois ideology, Foucault's reflections on governmentality and neo-liberalism were intended to serve as an impetus to political invention in the arts of government, where an independent Left intellectual culture could make a contribution

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[2] Dean's discussion of what he calls the "reinscription thesis," whereby governmentality studies reproduce liberal norms, can be found in his most recent monograph, *Governing Societies: Political perspectives on domestic and international rule* (Berkshire, England: Open University Press, 2007), 86-87.

to this by way of concept formation. Thus Dean regards "the production of concepts as a way of life" (13) and explains the significance of this ethos to the study of governmentality, and to our political and ethical practices more generally. Whether or not governmentality studies that embrace this creative task will come to have an impact outside of intellectual circles remains to be seen, but the current twin crises of capitalism and neo-liberalism make transformations in the way that government is thought about and practiced seem almost inevitable.

While it is difficult to assess the extent to which some of the singularities discussed in the new introduction are, in fact, singular to Dean's approach, one is more readily apparent than the rest, namely his refusal to privilege the modality of power of government, however broadly it is defined. In this regard Dean is surely much closer to Foucault than most of the governmentality literature, for the scope of his analyses remain purposefully broad, examining the complex, shifting relations between biopolitics, sovereignty, and government. The historical transformations in these power formations are examined in Chapters 4 through 9 as Dean traces the emergence and operation of the dispositional, processual, and reflexive models of government. The unifying focus of these chapters is on the trajectory of "the governmentalization of the state," one of Foucault's enigmatic phrases that Dean carefully unpacks through the analytics of government.

When giving an account of the governmentalization of the state, Chapters 4 through 9 appear to restrict this type of analysis to the history of domestic government. But the new chapter on International Governmentality serves as a palliative to this, indicating that the analytics of government is just as applicable to the international political domain. While Dean recognizes the existing contributions made by studies of "global governmentality," which have analyzed a diverse array of programmes directed at governing the conduct of populations and other political entities in a global civil society, the purpose of the chapter on International Governmentality is to recount Foucault's substantive historical work on the art of international government; thus it draws extensively from Foucault's recently translated lectures series, *Security, Territory, Population*. As indicated above, this Chapter suggests many avenues for further analysis, particularly for scholars who are prepared to historicize the terms and vocabularies that are otherwise taken-for-granted in disciplines such as international relations and international political economy.

Dean notes in the post-script that, despite the decade which has passed since the first edition, "the methodological injunctions of an analytics of government are largely intact." (262) *Governmentality* not only provides the most systematic and exhaustive account of this method and the genealogical ethos underpinning it, but gives a sense of urgency to the creative task confronting intellectuals on the independent Left today: the future is open, so now is the time to make an intervention on our modes of thinking about government, to problematize, reformulate, and, above all, invent by way of the production of concepts. In his very formulation of 'governmentality,' Foucault was doing just that.

Michael Lait
PhD Student
Department of Sociology
Carleton University

Ottawa
Canada
mlait@connect.carleton.ca