

## **Putting governmentality in its place: ontological and international limits**

This book is concerned with looking at the contribution governmentality can make both to an understanding of contemporary social theory and to global politics. This first section of the book will explain the concept of governmentality and will then use the concept to examine a range of other social theories. It is argued that in comparison to these theories, not only does the governmentality approach provide a more critical account of contemporary society, but in fact it can also explain the *uncritical* role these other theories play in reproducing contemporary society's dominant forms of governance. The other theories, by contrast, reproduce the dominant rationality of governance by naturalising the very things that governmentality throws into question. Whereas most contemporary social theory takes certain things like risk, networks and social capital for granted (seeing them as conditions of late modernity), governmentality shows these things to be (reversible) strategies, technologies and techniques.

This chapter will set out what is meant by governmentality. Although this is a concept that we clearly wish to utilise to maximum effect, it is also our responsibility to show the problems that the concept presents. The first part of this chapter wrestles with the meaning of the concept and tries to ascertain exactly what governmentality refers to. We will see that this is a difficult task given the nature of Foucault's own work on the subject, and our interpretation will try to narrow down the meaning of the concept by looking at its relation to disciplinary power and biopolitics and stressing, above all else, an understanding of the concept in relation to liberalism and neoliberalism. Ultimately it will be this neoliberal version of governmentality that will be of use in trying to understand the problems raised in contemporary social theory.

This is the first sense in which we wish to explore the limits of governmentality – that is to say, the limits of what the concept itself should refer to. This will be done by contrasting neoliberal governmentality to other types of power. However, there are two other important limits of governmentality that will be explored. One of these continues the point about the relation between governmentality and other types of power by stressing that to understand governmentality we need to see it in relation to a wider social field that includes other types of power, but also the social conditions that make these forms of power effective. These social conditions explain how and why governmentality works in the way it does. A study of these conditions also shows why governmentality works better in some societies than in others. This then leads to the third limit of governmentality, and justifies our move into the field of international relations. The second part of this book will be concerned to show how governmentality works in different parts of the world, moving from an intra-societal approach to an inter-societal approach. What will be of particular interest here is the distinction between forms of governmentality that develop in particular societies, and forms of governmentality that are imposed by international organisations. These latter forms are developed in the advanced liberal societies, yet applied to regions with quite different social conditions, thus revealing the combined but uneven nature of international relations. We will see how the documents of international organisations like the IMF and World Bank resonate with the kind of ideas discussed in the first part of the book – networks, risk, social capital, globalisation, reflexivity and so on. And we will also see how inappropriate these are outside of their advanced liberal social context.

## What is governmentality?

It is tempting to see governmentality as a concept that marks a rupture with old ways of thinking just as it is tempting to view Foucault's work on power generally as a rejection of traditional understandings of power as top-down, hierarchical, centralised, repressive and possessed by a particular group, social body or institution. It is more fruitful, however, to see Foucault's work as complementing and supplementing, rather than displacing altogether, these conceptions, or as qualifying and giving nuance to our understanding of how power works. When looking at the specific form of power that Foucault calls governmentality, we should note that Foucault talks not of the end of sovereignty or state power, but the emergence of the triangle sovereignty-discipline-government with its new concerns for population and the optimisation of health, welfare, happiness and labour productivity. Rather than rejecting the idea of sovereignty (or, to use his expression, cutting off the King's head<sup>1</sup>), Foucault is concerned with how sovereignty is affected by modern developments in disciplinary and governmental techniques that regulate and order the behaviour of people within a given territory. But although this does not represent a turn away from the question of sovereignty and the state, it does require a shift in focus. As Foucault puts it, 'rather than asking ourselves what the sovereign looks like from on high, we should be trying to discover how multiple bodies, forces, energies, matters, desires, thoughts and so on are gradually, progressively, actually and materially constituted as subjects' (Foucault 2004: 28). It is this focus on the way that social discourses help in the shaping of these subjects that shall be at the centre of our study. And it is on this basis that both contemporary social theory (with its focus on the subject) and traditional IR theory (with its focus on sovereignty) will be challenged.

However, while the concept of governmentality might help in giving nuance to our understanding of both sovereignty and the constitution of subjects, there is also the opposite danger that it becomes a catch-all category that can be applied far too generally and without discrimination. This is not helped by the fact that the concept of governmentality is not developed in a systematic piece of work, but gradually emerges in Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France, with the meaning of the term being modified (and becoming more general) as his argument progresses. By the time of his 1982 lectures Foucault is talking of governmentality as 'a strategic field of power relations in the broadest and not merely political sense of the term' (2005: 252), something that he relates to his arguments about the government of the self. There is certainly no reason why this should not be seen as a legitimate reading of governmentality. However, if this is the route taken, then it seems that there is little to distinguish the idea of governmentality from that of biopower and its two subdivisions of biopolitics (the more general management of populations) and anatomopolitics (the management of individual bodies including the government of the self).

In the lectures that are now published as *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault starts by talking of how the problem of government (rather than governmentality) breaks out in the sixteenth century. This is government in a more general sense, relating to populations and conduct (2007: 88). These new problems come to be

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<sup>1</sup> For a good discussion of why we should not take Foucault's call to cut off the King's head (Foucault 2001b) to mean that Foucault is opposed to the sovereignty discourse, or indeed is suggesting an alternative discourse of politics as a continuation of war, see Andrew Neal (2004).

managed by the introduction of economy into political practice although such practices only really break free from the constraints of sovereign power in the eighteenth century (ibid., 95, 101). Later we find Foucault referring to that earlier emergence as a type of governmentality, albeit one that is contrasted with a new economic reason guiding *raison d'État*:

A new governmentality is born with the *économistes* more than a century after the appearance of that other governmentality in the seventeenth century. The governmentality of the *politiques* gives us police, and the governmentality of the *économistes* introduces us, I think, to some of the fundamental lines of modern and contemporary governmentality. (ibid., 348)

Foucault says that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries see the emergence of techniques centred on the body and he sees this in terms of disciplinary power. But in the eighteenth century a non-disciplinary form of power is also emerging, operating at a different level. This is more like biopolitics and is concerned with people as a species rather than as individuals (2004: 242-3). In the earlier *Society Must be Defended* lectures Foucault starts to talk of population as the focus of government, a process different from the techniques of surveillance and training characteristic of disciplinary power. In his later lectures, this becomes the basis for the distinction between disciplinary power and a governmentality that works by respecting the 'natural processes' of the economic sphere so that the idea of governing well is associated with this respect for freedom. This freedom of the economic sphere is clearly different from the seventeenth century regulation of territory (Foucault 2007: 353). Political economy requires the self-limitation of government, allowing things to take their natural course. This becomes governmentality from a distance, or a distinctively liberal or *laissez-faire* form of governance that finds its expression in civil society, legitimated through the liberal concern that one must not 'govern too much' (Foucault 2008: 319). Foucault links governmentality to a new type of security arguing that whereas discipline regulates everything and is protectionist and centripetal, security is more open and lets more things happen (Foucault 2007: 45). Whereas discipline functions in a preventative way, *laissez-faire* is indispensable to the new rationality of government (ibid.). This distinction between governmentality and disciplinary power will be crucial when looking at applications in IR and the regulation of populations in different parts of the world.

Foucault's historical account of forms of power moves from the feudal state of justice to the administrative state based on regulation and discipline, to a state defined more by its population than its territory. This is the state that calls upon economic knowledge and apparatuses of security. In all cases, the state is understood in correspondence to a particular society (Foucault 2007: 110). Foucault writes that we live in an era of governmentality going back to the eighteenth century when the state began to be transformed by new techniques of government. For Foucault, these new forms of government are the very things that allowed the state to survive, leading him to make the well-known argument that 'what is really important for our modernity ... is not so much the statization of society as the "governmentalization" of the state' (Foucault, 2001a: 220). While this process has a long history, Foucault's argument seems particularly well suited for describing current thinking on rolling back direct state involvement in various social and economic matters, bringing the state into cooperation with a complex network of other social institutions and giving the state

more of a managerial role as an overseer of certain social processes. This also seems to reflect the apparent trends in the world around us, as well as linking to current theories about the globalisation of world politics, the transnationalisation of social institutions and the hollowing out of the state. Above all, it fits with the current dominance of neoliberal thinking and matters of ‘what should or should not fall within the state’s domain, what is public and what private, what is not within the state’s competence, and so on’ (Foucault 2007: 109). The next crucial distinction we must therefore make is between governmentality in a more generic sense and specific forms of governmentality – in particular, the all important (neo) liberal forms. Indeed, a focus on the distinctively liberal character of governmentality is necessary if we are to maintain the above-mentioned distinction between governmentality and disciplinary power.

Under liberalism, emphasis is placed on the role of the market and the private sphere as a way of imposing discipline, this ‘market discipline’ being legitimated by liberal discourse as natural and free from state interference. As Burchell comments, the ‘objective of a liberal art of government becomes that of securing the conditions for the optimal and, as far as possible, autonomous functioning of economic processes within society or, as Foucault puts it, of enframing natural processes in mechanisms of *security*’ (Burchell 1991: 139). Moreover, under liberalism, individual subjects are constituted as autonomous and rational decision makers. But the freedom and liberty of the subject is a social construct, created through social practices that reinforce rational normalised conduct. The connection between freedom and rationality is noted in Burchell’s point that ‘an essential and original feature of liberalism as a principle of governmental reason is that it pegs the rationality of government, of the exercise of political power, to the freedom and interested rationality of the governed themselves’ (ibid., 139). Neoliberalism, if we follow these arguments, can be viewed in a similar way with the market presented as a natural realm that should be kept free of state interference. Neoliberalism can be seen as distinct from classical liberalism because it is a specific reaction to the historical condition of post-war national state regulation. Neoliberal discourse problematises post-war solutions to the issues raised by the concept of biopolitics – the health, wealth and well-being of populations – by stressing the need to move away from centralised government activity through the welfare state and Keynesian forms of government intervention. As Harvey notes, the marked shift under neoliberalism is from government (state power on its own) to governance, defined as ‘a broader configuration of state and key elements in civil society’, but where the state is still an active player in producing the legislation and regulatory framework (Harvey 2005: 77). We can also follow Dean here in examining this coincidence of historical context, individualisation and free conduct:

the neo-liberal critiques of the welfare state sought to redeploy the ‘free subject’ as a technical instrument in the achievement of governmental purposes and objectives. Contemporary liberal rule rediscovers freedom as a technical modality ... The notion of freedom and the free conduct of individuals once again becomes the principle by which government is to be rationalised and reformed. (Dean 1999: 155)

Despite setting itself up as a neutral doctrine of non-intervention into market mechanisms, neoliberalism, we have noted, is a political discourse concerned with the governing of individuals from a distance. If we look at how the concept of

governmentality has been taken up and developed in the Anglo-Saxon 'governmentality studies' literature, we can see how this applies to recent trends. Burchell, for example, looks at recent processes of 'responsibilisation' where the governed are encouraged, freely and rationally, to conduct themselves in new ways (Burchell 1996: 29). People are told to take charge of their own well-being and take rational decisions to avoid social problems like unemployment and poverty. Today's language of governmentality tells us to become more enterprising people, more active citizens and more responsible beings. This is discussed in terms of rights, obligations and moral responsibility, but the economic dimension still seems the dominant one. The shift from state mechanisms to self-regulation follows changes in work relations while the dominant discourse is of the risks and benefits of rational decision-making and performance optimisation. This applies the logic of enterprise to our individual acts. These ideas appeal to us as active individuals like citizens or consumers but they also act as ways to form and shape new subjects, selves or agents. Power now gets exercised over 'free subjects' who are faced with various new possibilities in a globalising world. The exercise of freedom takes the form of the behaviour of a consumer expected to follow competitive rules of conduct. With neoliberal governmentality we see the extension of the norms and values of the market to other areas of social life, as reflected in the widespread application of such terms as competition, initiative, risk-taking and prudence across various social domains. A concept such as risk, for example, renders social life into calculable forms and thus facilitates governmentality. These arguments, developed in the work of François Ewald (1991) and Jacques Donzelot (1988), are taken up in IR, for example, by Aradau and van Munster, to look at how, following the war on terror, privatized risk management has become part of a global governmentality. Underwriting terrorism, it is argued, is tied to the neoliberal economy (Aradau and van Munster 2007: 193). We will see that this raises questions concerning the level at which governmentality operates.

The purpose of the above account of governmentality is to show just how much these ideas are related to individualised rational conduct. This in turn helps us to see neoliberalism in a new light. While the discourse of neoliberalism promotes the idea of freedom from regulation, we can see that it is in fact a very specific form of regulation of conduct. This more social understanding of neoliberalism is particularly important given the current world economic crisis and claims that neoliberalism has been discredited. For neoliberalism is much more than the simple ideology of free market economics. Neoliberalism is a specific form of social rule that promotes a rationality of individualised responsibility (which we might add is particularly influenced by a critique of postwar welfarism and dependency culture). Clearly these are arguments that match well with developments in today's advanced liberal societies and will continue to be promoted, for example in the development of the European Union, irrespective of the economic situation. Although there has been widespread criticism of policies that have allowed banks and other financial institutions to behave in a reckless way, this does not mean that the governmental rationality of neoliberalism itself will be rejected, quite the contrary. This will be used to justify even greater emphasis on the importance of rationalised and responsible self-conduct. In fact the World Bank and IMF have already had these kinds of internal discussions in the 1990s. Recognising the failure of full-scale free market policies, these organisations took a more institutional approach to development. This led some to draw the mistaken view that they had turned away from neoliberalism and

developed a new post-Washington consensus. In fact, their development policies can be seen as moving closer to the type of neoliberal governmentality described above by insisting on greater institutionalisation of economic policies. Instead of insisting on the rolling back of the state, the Second Generation reforms were, to use Graham Harrison's expression, more concerned with the *nature* of state action. This meant an emphasis on institutional capacity building, finance management, technical assistance and a whole range of policy imperatives (Harrison 2004: 18-20). At no point has the role of the free market been questioned. Instead the new emphasis is on institutions that will help better facilitate market conditions and how to make this more effective through the promotion of greater institutional transparency, financial and civil service reforms, the development of a more dynamic civil society and the empowerment of responsible individuals. As the effects of the financial crisis in the West continue to be felt, it will be this greater emphasis on institutional reform (in the interest of promoting markets), rather than a rejection of the free market, that will drive policy. And this institutional reform will be nothing more of a continuation of what governmentality theorists already understand as neoliberalism.

To conclude this introduction to governmentality we should therefore note how governmentality might be read in a generic sense, but also as relating specifically to liberal and neoliberal forms of governance. If we are to make sense of Foucault's distinction between disciplinary (or more directly regulative forms of power) and governmentality as governance from a distance, then we need to talk of governmentality in a distinctly (neo) liberal sense. This form of governmentality operates through the idea of freedom and the limiting of direct political or state intervention (although paradoxically this is a deliberate political / state strategy). When we go on to look at examples from IR, we need to ask a set of questions. Do such accounts fit with a distinctly neoliberal form of governmentality? If not, should we use the term governmentality in a more generic sense? Or should we talk about these interventions as disciplinary power instead? Perhaps there are elements of both that can be brought together under the general heading of biopolitics. In a sense, precise use of terms does not matter so long as the most important distinctions are maintained. But this piece will go with the distinctly neoliberal interpretation of governmentality and will therefore raise the question of applicability of the concept on these grounds.

### **Social relations and the state**

To put governmentality to work, we need to know something of the wider context in which it operates. If contemporary governmentality has a specifically neoliberal form, we have to ask something of the conditions that make this possible. What, then, are the social conditions of possibility for governmentality itself?

At the most basic but fundamental starting point, we should begin with a discussion of the nature of capitalist society, its inherent tendencies like the drive to accumulate as well as the conditions under which capital accumulation takes place, that is, the relationship between mode of production and other strata of the social formation. As the terminology indicates, my suggestion is that this is most usefully dealt with by some sort of Marxist analysis, although Marxists working in the sociological field have generally produced more sophisticated explanations of this relationship than those working in IR. Moreover, work by Nicos Poulantzas (1978), Richard Marsden

(1999) and Bob Jessop (2007), among others, have linked this Marxist analysis to Foucauldian analysis. Against criticisms of such a starting point, we can point to the way Foucault himself premises his discussion of discipline, biopolitics and governmentality on the development of capitalism, while on the status of Marxism, Foucault notes that it is ‘impossible at the present time to write history without using a whole range of concepts directly or indirectly linked to Marx’s thought and situating oneself within a horizon of thought which has been defined and described by Marx’ (Foucault 1980: 53).

If we are to take a more Marxist approach, then the immediate question that arises is the relationship between what Marxists would see as the deep structures of capitalist production and accumulation and the more manifest political structures of society. In recognition of the uneven character of social relations and the fact that capitalism does not reproduce itself automatically, approaches that emphasise the need for social regulation through state and other institutional regimes might fruitfully be examined. This should not be confused with IR approaches to regulation, be they neoliberal or constructivist since these tend to operate on the horizontal plane of practices and interests, but rather the more socially stratified ‘depth analyses’ characteristic of the Marxist schools of regulation theory with their focus on such things as regimes of accumulation, modes of regulation, state strategy and hegemonic projects.

This is not the place to go into the complexities of the different approaches to regulation and the strengths and weaknesses of each school. The main issue is a general one which is to point to the way that regulation approaches recognise that focus must shift from inherent laws of capitalism to the social and institutional context within which the reproduction and development of capitalist social relations takes place. In this way it is possible to understand why, despite serious systemic contradictions, antagonisms and crises, capitalism is able to survive and reproduce itself. Summarising the regulation approach, Jessop points to its advocacy of the concept of *regime of accumulation* to explain the ordering of production and consumption over a period of time and a corresponding idea of *mode of regulation* to explain the ‘emergent ensemble of norms, institutions, organisational forms, and patterns of conduct that can stabilise an accumulation regime’ (Jessop 2002: 93). These arguments are nicely summarised by Alain Lipietz:

The mere *possibility* of a regime is inadequate to account for its existence since there is no necessity for the whole set of individual capitals and agents to behave according to its structure. There must exist a materialization of the regime of accumulation taking the form of norms, habits, laws, regulating networks and so on that ensure the unity of the process, that is the appropriate consistency of individual behaviours within the schema of reproduction. This body of interiorized rules and social processes is called the *mode of regulation*. (Lipietz 1986: 19)

We can see how these suggestions might provide a bridge between the central importance of capitalist accumulation, the social conditions within which this accumulation takes place, the institutional framework necessary for the organisation and regulation of capitalism, and an emphasis on norms and patterns of conduct, the ‘how of which’ might just be explained by Foucauldian concepts like governmentality and disciplinary power. As mentioned, Jessop (2007) has recently set out a particular

reading of Foucault, that fits into this theoretical approach. Governmentality is considered in light of specific forms of social (and state) regulation which in turn are requirements for capital accumulation and the reproduction of the capitalist system. Part of this relates to the specific use that can be made of the mechanisms of individualisation and normalisation (Jessop 2007: 143). Jessop argues that Foucault's work on governmentality shows how practices of biopolitics 'come to serve capital and the modern state' (ibid., 246). We can see this, for example, in Foucault's statement that: 'In order to protect capitalist wealth it was necessary to constitute the populace as a moral subject' (Foucault 1980: 41). While elsewhere he says that the moralisation of the working class is 'the strategy which allows the bourgeois class to be the bourgeois class and to exercise its domination' (Foucault 1980: 203).

A Marxist focus on the centrality of capitalist production need not lead to economic determinism, but it does provide a social and economic context that helps us to understand the conditions within which different forms of regulation take place. It points to the importance of various social institutions, most notably the state, while Jessop raises the importance of the idea of state strategies and hegemonic projects to show how state interventions are shaped by the interests of various groups. This makes capitalist development local, social and political, depending on various struggles, strategies and historical compromises (Hoogvelt 1997: 106). Indeed, Jessop links his argument to those of Gramsci and Poulantzas to explain the role played by different social groups and class fractions in the institutionalisation of social relations, or as Michel Aglietta puts it, 'the institutionalisation of social relations under the effect of class struggles is the central process of their production' (Aglietta 1987: 29).

Next we must address the question of the state since this is something that is crucial to both the compatibility of governmentality with a wider social ontology and to the relation between microphysics and macro structures. Foucault's account focuses on governmentality through political administration as a way of showing how state, government and civil society are interlinked. The theory of governmentality rejects a general view of the modern state, and sees it, not as a unified apparatus, but as a network of different institutions and practices. Power operates, not from a single source, but through a diverse set of procedures and techniques. Foucault is less concerned with the possession of power than with its exercise, application and effects, and how it circulates through the social body. He argues that the methods of government are not invented by the ruling groups but rather, they utilise what already exists, adopting, adapting and developing them for their own purposes. This is the way in which we should understand Foucault's comment that the state is 'superstructural' (Foucault 2001b: 123). Micro-powers may then be 'colonised, used, inflected, transformed, displaced, extended, and so on by increasingly general mechanisms and forms of overall domination' (Foucault 2004: 301). But even though they may be utilised, techniques of power do not originate from a social group. This reverses the normal way we see this process. Domination is the result of a hegemony that articulates the effects of micro-powers. The exercise of and resistance to this hegemonic form of power becomes multiple and diverse.

To summarise, it seems clear that Foucault prefers to start from the micro level. However, he certainly does not wish to remain at this level:



I think we have to analyse the way in which the phenomena, techniques and procedures of power come into play at the lowest levels; we have to show, obviously, how these procedures are displaced, extended, and modified and, above all, how they are invested or annexed by global phenomena (2004: 30-1)

It is this that makes Foucault's arguments compatible with non-reductionist forms of Marxism. Indeed, we can go further and say that Foucault's arguments not only move from the micro to the macro, but also at times suggest a two-way movement in that

the great strategies of power encrust themselves and depend for their conditions of exercise on the level of the micro-relations of power. But there are always also movements in the other direction whereby strategies which coordinate relations of power produce new effects and advance into hitherto unaffected domains. (1980: 199-200)

He goes on to say that 'in order for there to be a movement from above to below there has to be a capillary from below to above at the same time' (ibid., 201).

Foucault's arguments about the state can be read in two ways, either as emphasising contingency (e.g. Dillon 2007: 44) or else as an anti-essentialism, not that far from the kind of analyses being done by Foucault's Marxist contemporaries. This point is made Thomas Lemke:

Foucault expanded his microphysics of power to social macrostructures and the phenomenon of the state... With this analytics of government, Foucault established a theoretical connection to a tradition within French Marxism that approached the state less as a fixed institutional ensemble or bureaucratic apparatus than as the 'condensation of social relations of power' in Nicos Poulantzas's formulation or 'ideological state apparatuses' in Louis Althusser's. (Lemke 2003: 176)

Jessop gives a clear account of what a less post-structuralist, more Marxist reading of Foucault would look like:

to study governmentality in its generic sense is to study the historical constitution of different state forms in and through changing practices of government without assuming that the state has a universal or general essence. This is why Foucault criticized analyses of the state (and/or states) as a juridico-political instance, a calculating subject, an instrument of class rule, or an epiphenomenon of production relations. Nonetheless, whilst eschewing any general theory of the state, he certainly explored emergent strategies (state projects, governmentalizing projects) that identified the nature and purposes of government (as reflected in alternative forms of *raison d'état*) in different contexts and periods. (Jessop 2007: 37)

So although he rejects certain essentialist views of the state, it might still be claimed that Foucault strongly endorses the idea of the contemporary state, indeed sees it as essential to governmentality, the very thing that people might be tempted to say takes

the place of the state.<sup>2</sup> As he says: ‘The state is what must exist at the end of the process of rationalization of the art of government. What the intervention of *raison d’État* must arrive at is the state’s integrity, its completion, consolidation, and its re-establishment’ (Foucault 2007: 287). For Jessop the essential relationship is that between micro powers and state power. Foucault shows ‘how existing power relations were not only codified but also consolidated and institutionalised. The state is crucial here in combining, arranging, and fixing the micro-relations of power’ (Jessop 2007: 152). A Foucauldian approach allied to a sophisticated state theory is capable of capturing these complexities. If read in the right way we find, as Jessop suggests, ‘powerful arguments about states as sites of statecraft’ (2007: 66).

For Jessop this produces a paradox where on the one hand ‘the state is just one institutional ensemble among others within a social formation; on the other, it is peculiarly charged with overall responsibility for maintaining the cohesion of the social formation’ (2007: 79). These complicated issues that range from Foucault’s analysis of practices at the micro level through to the state’s relation to capital accumulation are summarised in Jessop’s account of the relational nature of the state:

- (1) the state is a set of institutions that cannot, *qua* institutional ensemble, exercise power;
- (2) political forces do not exist independently of the state: they are shaped in part through its forms of representation, its internal structure, and its forms of intervention;
- (3) state power is a complex social relation that reflects the changing balance of social forces in a determinate conjuncture; and
- (4) state power is capitalist to the extent that it creates, maintains, or restores the conditions required for capital accumulation in a given situation. (Jessop 2007: 29)

### **Social and philosophical context**

Having looked at the wider context within which governmentality operates, it is necessary to make the case for why we should focus on the idea of governmentality to explain certain ideas and their place in the world. This will be done in a rather negative way by looking at alternative positions and criticising their understanding of nature of the social world. In particular, this section is keen to support the philosophical arguments of scientific realism<sup>3</sup>, with its emphasis on the importance of the kind of underlying structures and material relations discussed in the previous section. The claim is that the governmentality approach can fit with this sort of realist social ontology whereas the alternative positions to be examined undermine our efforts to understand the significance of social structures and material conditions. Within the IR literature, the two most significant approaches that address issues of

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<sup>2</sup> Or as Michman and Rosenberg claim, the governmentalisation of the state ‘represents an expansion of the state beyond the traditional sphere of sovereign power’ (2002: 137). This is in contrast to another Marxist piece on governmentality that claims that governmentality challenges the view of the state as the main source of social order (Pearce and Tombs 1998: 567).

<sup>3</sup> We must be particularly careful to distinguish realism in this philosophical sense from realism as it is used in IR. Realism in a philosophical sense means the belief in the independent existence of reality, separate from the ideas we have of it. Although this may seem like common sense, this is clearly at odds with the constructivist and post-structuralist approaches that claim that reality is a world of our making or a discursive construction. Realism in the IR or political sense is the belief that states are the main actors in world politics and that they are motivated by self-interest, something entirely separate from the issue of whether the world exists independently of our knowledge of it.

structure, agency and the nature of the social world are constructivism and neo-Gramscian theory.

The best way to introduce the constructivist approach is to begin with a recent book that seems closest to our own project. *Rules for the World* by Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore takes up the constructivist emphasises on how rules shape attitudes, behaviour and expectations and links this to a theory of bureaucratic culture and the institutionalisation of these practices and understandings. This is also an interpretative approach insofar as emphasis is placed on how the rules are understood and interpreted. Consequently Barnett and Finnemore focus on international organisations as examples of bureaucracies that use their expert knowledge to exercise power, tell us what the main problems are, and regulate and constitute the world in certain ways (2004: 9). The emphasis on bureaucracy leads to the claim that this is a self-perpetuating system insofar as ‘bureaucracies use their rules to help create or constitute the social world and tend to do so in ways that make the world amenable to intervention by bureaucracies themselves’ (ibid., 18).

This approach tells us how bureaucracies (international organisations) use expert knowledge to classify, constitute and regulate the world. Classification takes place through the creation of categories of problems and the empowerment of particular actors. These organisations fix meanings, establish boundaries and articulate and disperse rules and norms (ibid., 32). This approach, placing emphasis on rules combined with a theory of bureaucratic organisation, is applied to organisations like the IMF and UNHCR. In the case of the IMF the authors write: ‘The IMF creates rules governing how best to solve balance-of-payment deficits through economic restructuring, rules that in turn often require greater levels of intervention by the organization’ (ibid., 18). This reinforces an internal culture where international organisations create a shared understanding of their mission and core functions and goals, their symbols and values (ibid., 19).

This is an approach to international relations that is well worth engaging with. It ties in with how we would wish to analyse international organisations insofar as the book’s analysis emphasises the way the activities of these organisations is an expression of both liberalism and rationalism. This is seen in the way that such organisations place emphasis on the role of the individual, and the promotion of democracy and the market. The rationalist nature of bureaucracy means that legitimacy comes from following the proper procedures (ibid., 166-67). Today this can clearly be seen in the language of an institution like the IMF with its stress on transparency, democratic deliberation and local participation (ibid., 170). There are also some similarities with a Foucauldian idea of discourse: ‘Actors use frames to situate events and to interpret problems, to fashion a shared understanding of the world, to galvanize sentiment, as a way to mobilize and guide social action’ (ibid., 33).

Part of the problem with constructivism, and this book in particular, is that the desire to emphasise rules and norms leads to an overstatement of the importance of international organisations. In opposing neorealist and neoliberal theories of IR that emphasise the importance of state behaviour, it is argued that these mainstream theories simply see international organisations as passive sets of rules through which states act, rather than as actors in their own right. Political realists would counter that

it is absolutely essential to see international organisations like the UN, IMF, World Bank and WTO as driven by the interests of the dominant states who participate in them and that any other view than this is simply in denial as to where real power lies in world politics. A more Marxist approach, as sketched above, would raise further questions about this constructivist focus on institutions, ideas and practices since it is unclear exactly where things like material conditions of production fit in. As we saw, a focus on material production is a useful starting point for understanding just what sort of role states and international organisations can play in world politics. By contrast, the constructivist position has a tendency to suggest that these international organisations exist in their own world of rules and norms without tying this down to some sort of material framework. This point is made by Benno Teschke and Christian Heine in their critique of the influential work of John Gerard Ruggie (1982). This work is influential because it looks at liberalism as embedded in intersubjective norms and constitutive rules. Neoliberalism is understood as representing new social purposes and constitutive rules of value communities. The criticism is that:

Ruggie wants to explain changes in international economic regimes without economics and changes in political regimes without politics ... an aggregate notion like 'social purpose' obscures the social processes and political mechanisms at work that generate conflict and compromise, crisis and successful institutionalisation... there is no extra-ideational explanation of changes in value communities. (Teschke and Heine 2002: 170)

This takes us to more general problems with constructivism and its equivocation regarding the issue of the material world. Alexander Wendt, in opposing Kenneth Waltz's neorealist view of international structure<sup>4</sup>, argues that we should see the world in social rather than material terms. And because the basis of sociality is shared knowledge, he claims to take an idealist view of structure (Wendt 1999: 1,20), seeing structure and structural change in cultural rather than material terms. Now while there is no doubt that cultural and ideational factors are an important part of the social world – indeed this very book is all about this issue – there must be serious concern about just how this idealist view of structure would deal with the kind of Marxist account of social relations described above.

The constructivist critique of materialism is based on the idea that it leads to a reductionist or mechanical understanding of social relations. However, we have stressed that a Marxist account of social relations can start from the importance of production without necessarily implying reductionist materialism. Indeed as Wendt himself notes, the Marxist notion of production implies relations of production and various ideational aspects (ibid., 94-5). Production is a social, cultural and political process as much as a brute economic relation and productive forces cannot be considered independently of the social relations that organise them. In the broadest sense, capitalism is unimaginable without private property relations and these in turn are established through a legal framework guaranteed by political sovereignty and an ideational belief in their legitimacy. A Marxist approach that starts from the significance of mode of production can reject determinism by stressing how the mode

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<sup>4</sup> Where he argues that the structure of the international system (anarchy) compels states to act in a self-interested way and that power in the international system is based on the distribution of material capabilities (Waltz 1979).

of production contains social relations inseparable from political, cultural and ideational factors.

This would seem, therefore, to be an ideal time to introduce the ideas of Gramscian scholars to explain these complex relationships. Unfortunately, a study of the neo-Gramscian literature in IR reveals remarkable similarities to constructivism. For example, Robert Cox's influential application of Gramsci's ideas also emphasises an idealist reading of historical structure as a combination of thought patterns, material conditions and human institutions (Cox 1996: 97). As with constructivism, this defines social structures in terms of the institutionally inscribed intersubjectivity of different agents. The main aspect of social life is conceived of in terms of intersubjective relations that crystallise over time. As a constructivist might note: 'Structures are socially constructed, i.e., they become a part of the objective world by virtue of their existence in the intersubjectivity of relevant groups of people' (Ibid., 149). This begs the question that if structures are the crystallisation of intersubjective relations, where do the intersubjective relations themselves come from?

It must seem a little odd to have engaged in such a discussion of structures when Foucault's work would clearly not fit with many of these arguments and may indeed also be accused of being idealist. Elsewhere (Joseph 2004) I have argued how Foucault's work shifts from a structuralist account that places great emphasis on discursive framework to a more materialist account that moves away from structuralism. At no point does Foucault reject materialism, but he shifts from a view that material things are bound up with discourse to a view that material practices and discursive ones stand alongside one another. Perhaps the most satisfactory statement on this is found in the *Archaeology of Knowledge* where he writes that: 'Archaeology also reveals relations between discursive formations and nondiscursive domains (institutions, political events, economic practices and processes)' (Foucault 1989: 162). Elsewhere he distinguishes between intradiscursive, interdiscursive and extradiscursive dependencies, the latter being 'between discursive transformations and transformations outside discourse: for example, the correlations studied in *Histoire de la Folie* and *Birth of the Clinic* between medical discourse and a whole play of economic, political and social changes' (Foucault 1991: 58). And there are opportunities to take Foucault's work in a realist direction by focusing on some of the ontological insights, while leaving behind the more troublesome epistemological claims.

In any case, the issue is not whether Foucault's whole work is compatible with philosophical realism, but whether the concept of governmentality can be taken in a realist direction that fits with some of our other arguments about social structures and material conditions. We have already suggested that this is possible and that by fitting governmentality to a wider framework it is possible to overcome the intersubjectivism of alternative positions. For example, whereas neo-Gramscians in IR have been sidetracked by debates about whether there is a new transnational ruling class,<sup>5</sup> a governmentality approach would point us away from the idea that world changes have to be attributed to conscious agents by suggesting that governmentality is something ontologically prior to the agents who may enact it. There are of course neoliberal and transnational actors, but to understand their actions, we have to look at how they draw

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<sup>5</sup> E.g. Cox (1987), van der Pijl (1998).

upon already existing practices, strategies and institutions. Foucault calls this wider context a ‘strategic field of power relations in their mobility, transformability, and reversibility’ (Foucault 2005: 252). Within this field conduct takes place, but it is also the very basis upon which the ‘conduct of conduct’ is established. This helps move the discussion away from an agent-centred approach that speculates on who might be doing what to whom by setting such activities within a particular set of practices, institutions and rationalities.

Foucault is useful in pointing us away from conscious intervention by highlighting techniques and practices of discipline and control (which may be more subtle than the political realist focus on power as something exercised over people). But there is a danger of missing out on the macro implications of the above – of global power, inequality and the unevenness of the international system, issues that Marxists and political realists are better at highlighting. One way to deal with this potential danger is to emphasise that governmentality is primarily a matter of techniques, practices and strategies.<sup>6</sup> It should thus be distinguished from actual regimes, networks, states and the wider question of hegemony in the international system. These are the entities through which governance takes place while governmentality is more to do with the techniques, procedures and tactics, through which governance is enacted. If governmentality is regarded more as a set of techniques and practices, then the issue to address becomes that of how the techniques of governmentality can best operate – in which societies, which instances and occasions, through which institutions and organisations – and how effective they can be in various different geopolitical contexts. In other words, this is not so much a case of biopolitics replacing geopolitics as a complex combination of the two, acted out in different contexts.

Given the above description of governmentality we must be very careful when using the concept in IR. The liberal aspect of contemporary governmentality is quite explicit and, as Hindess puts it, what ‘distinguishes liberalism... from other approaches to the government of the state is its commitment to governing as far as possible through the promotion of certain kinds of free activity and the cultivation among the governed of suitable habits of self-regulation’ (Hindess 2005b: 26).<sup>7</sup> To what extent can something that places so much emphasis on the creation of free subjects, individualisation and self-responsibilisation really be applied outside of its liberal context (i.e. to non-liberal parts of the world)? That is not to say that international institutions cannot operate in a neoliberal way and try to impose governmentality on others. But there is a big difference between a society having its own conditions for governmentality and a society having governmentality thrust upon it by outside institutions and organisations. Moreover, there must be (social) limits to the effectiveness of strategies that reflect a Western imaginary, as indeed there are limits to the power of international institutions in the first place. To the extent that international institutions have agendas driven by neoliberalism, is what they are doing really best described as governmentality or some sort of combination of governmentality and other things?

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<sup>6</sup> As Foucault suggests: ‘Can we talk of something like a “governmentality” that would be to the state what techniques of segregation were to psychiatry, what techniques of discipline were to the penal system, and what biopolitics was to medical institutions?’ (Foucault 2007: 120).

<sup>7</sup> Having said this, elsewhere (2005a) Hindess notes how liberalism has a more disciplinary element and cannot just be government through freedom. The fact that governmentality often has to revert to discipline is an indication of the limits of the rationality of governmentality, particular at the international level.

## Governmentality and international relations

Having seen how a governmentality approach compares to other theories in IR, the next task is to look at some of the applications of governmentality to IR and to draw out some of the issues relating to the wider framework within which governmentality operates. It will be argued that because the international domain is highly uneven, contemporary forms of governmentality can only usefully be applied to those areas that might be characterised as having an advanced form of liberalism. In raising this as an explanation for the international limits of governmentality, the argument necessarily returns to the issue of the social limits of governmentality. For to explain why governmentality applies to some situations more than others, we have to go beyond the limits of the concept itself and explain what it is that makes governmentality possible in the first place. This necessarily entails a deeper social ontology than many governmentality theorists are prepared to accept.

The internationalisation of the governmentality concept usually equates it to some sort of global governmentality or rationality of global governance, something that is captured in a comment of Mitchell Dean's:

If a 'global governmentality' is today propounded by multiple agencies (for example, WTO, IMF, OECD), it operates through both the existing arts of domestic government within nation-states and as an attempted extension and generalization of them across the planet. It thus seeks to move from a liberal art of government to a planetary *nomos* or world order. (Dean 2005: 53)

My argument is that the desire of *nomos* is different from the actuality of world order and that while the *nomos* of governmentality is attempting to extend and generalise itself from the advanced liberal societies to the rest of the world, the fact that the rest of the world does not enjoy the same conditions of advanced liberalism means that the *nomos* of governmentality has great difficulty turning itself into a world order. Under such difficult conditions, the attempted application of governmentality to other parts of the world soon reverts back to something more basic, or else is closer to what Foucauldians would call 'disciplinary power' rather than fully fledged liberal governmentality. Theorists of governmentality therefore have to be very careful to distinguish the governmentality present in advanced liberal societies from the attempts by liberal international institutions to spread these techniques elsewhere.

This point can be further developed in relation to a comment from Ronnie Lipschutz: 'Foucault wrote only of national governmentality, with each separate (state) order constituting its own sphere of discipline. As we shall see, the extension of this idea to the international arena is rather straightforward' (Lipschutz 2005: 15). The second part of this book aims to show that this is not at all the case. What Lipschutz's claim downplays is an essential feature of the international that makes it different from domestic societies – what Rosenberg (2006) refers to as its uneven and combined character. This alone makes international governmentality difficult in practice even if there is a will to try and impose it. There is also the not inconsiderable matter of no international equivalent of the state to utilise the micro-practices of governmentality should they actually exist in these different parts of the world. For Foucault a body like the state is indispensable for governmentality: 'The state is therefore a schema of

intelligibility for a whole set of already established institutions, a whole set of given realities' (Foucault 2007: 286). We are now, however, dealing with an international context made up of many states and societies.

Justin Rosenberg's recent argument for the significance of uneven and combined development claims that the international actually comes into being because of the co-existence of more than one society and that the international domain should be defined as an 'inter-societal field of multiplicity and difference' (Rosenberg 2007: 44). This inter-societal coexistence is, however, uneven with societies existing at different levels of development. Yet at the same time these societies are 'combined' and 'causally integrated with a wider social field of interacting patterns of development' (Rosenberg 2006: 321). Of course, Trotsky's account of the position of semi-feudal Russia in the developing capitalist world is the best example of this uneven and combined development, but for Rosenberg this is characteristic of the very idea of the international, 'an intrinsic characteristic of social development as a transhistorical phenomenon — its inner multilinearity and interactivity (ibid., 327). Rosenberg uses such a definition of the international against the claims of globalisation theory, but it can be used against all claims that there are 'global' developments of social relations where these claims fail to recognise the different social dynamics of various parts of the international system. We will return to the idea of the international as uneven as a constant reminder of the dangers of over-extending the governmentality concept (and in particular the case for 'global governmentality', and how instead we need to highlight the differences in its realisation in different parts of the world. The problem with the argument for global governmentality is the tendency to flatten out social relations and to minimise the kinds of differences highlighted by uneven and combined development. Instead, it is necessary to look at how well governmentality 'fits' with particular cases and if it does not fit particularly well, to determine whether this is a problem at the conceptual level, or a problem with governmentality in practice. In both cases, a wider social ontology is required if the limitations are to be explained.

Now clearly, where the social conditions necessary for contemporary governmentality are not present, international institutions might choose to act to try to change the situation. For Sending and Neumann governmentality can help us to understand how global governance works: 'Studying global governance through the lens of "governmentality" enables us to study how different governmental rationalities are defined by certain rules, practices and techniques, and how such rationalities of rule generate specific action-orientations and types of actors' (Sending and Neumann 2006: 668). But if Foucault's insights on governmentality are primarily concerned with liberal societies, can they really be applied to situations where such conditions are absent? Strategies of global governance are consistent with neoliberal forms of governmentality. The World Bank and IMF take a normative stance in their emphasis on the need for recipient states to open up markets to competition, cut back on direct state involvement in economic processes and disperse such functions across civil society. Zanotti rightly sees recent arguments as a form of governmentality through the discourse of 'good governance'. The deeds of each government are calculated and the 'international arena ...is in this way constituted as a field of knowledge and political intervention' (Zanotti 2005: 480). A similar argument in Merlingen (2003) looks at the pressures exerted by IGOs on governments. But where does this leave the idea that governmentality is about the regulation of populations?



What we have in fact is a sort of governmentality once removed. For we have said that Western forms of governmentality cannot really succeed in non-Western social contexts without the kind of developed economic, social and political institutions that neoliberal governmentality requires. But if we follow Merlingen's argument (or that of Fouquier<sup>8</sup>), then perhaps governmentality is not so directly about the issue of the regulation of local populations but rather the regulation of the behaviour of states. We will see how this argument might be made in relation to the 'good governance' discourse of international organisations. Recent initiatives like the World Bank's Poverty Reduction Strategy and the UN Millennium Development Goals can be said to be placing regulative demands on states, requiring them to engage in far-reaching reforms and open up their processes of governance and policy making to international scrutiny. The problem now is whether it is appropriate to use the term governmentality to refer to the regulation of the behaviour of governments and states rather than to populations. Of course we might come up with the compromise formulation that this sort of governmentality is an assessment of the behaviour of states that is in turn based on their ability to regulate or manage local populations. This is interesting insofar as there might then be a serious discrepancy between governmentality as the methods used to monitor and assess the behaviour – or performance – of states (by international organisations) and governmentality as the regulation of populations (by local states and institutions). We might still be left with the problem of institutions trying to apply the wrong sorts of techniques of governmentality to non-Western populations. But if we follow David Chandler's argument, then this is a secondary issue since 'the concern is less with the problems of regulation, or even the needs and interests, of failed states than it is with the more central question of the evasion of political responsibility' (Chandler 2006: 191). As we shall see in the next chapter, for Chandler this is 'Empire in Denial' where 'new forms of international control attempt to evade responsibility and accountability for the exercise of power' (ibid.,10). Chandler himself thinks that this situation has more to do with Western powers evading political responsibility rather than establishing efficient governmentality.<sup>9</sup> But it might just be that governmentality works as the means to establish what could be called 'responsibility from a distance'. If so, then we are required, once more, to talk of the wider sets of social power relations in order to explain the role governmentality plays. This is something that will be examined further in the next chapter.

Another option for governmentality theorists might be to claim that the governmentality approach is less concerned with the specific situation in a particular society, than with global society in a more general sense. The problem with this approach is that it relies on the idea that we can move from arguments about civil society to arguments about *global* civil society, something that is obviously a highly

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<sup>8</sup> Fouquier is most explicit about this writing that 'states are themselves increasingly subjected to a form of neoliberal governance in the contemporary world political economy – in the sense that they are constituted and acted upon as subjects with a rationality derived from arranged forms of entrepreneurial and competitive behaviour' (2008: 308).

<sup>9</sup> He argues that 'it would be wrong to see these practices as a continuation of past forms of empire or of new forms of Foucauldian governmentality. In fact, the drive to extend these forms of regulation stems from the evasiveness brought about by the problems of legitimising power rather than the desire to exercise power more effectively' (Chassssss4cw2zqandler 2006: 191).

contested concept. To start with civil society, Sending and Neumann give a clear statement of its significance to governmentality arguments:

We have found that civil society is increasingly defined as a field populated by political subjects whose autonomy, expertise and ability to responsibly channel political will-formation has become crucial to the tasks of governing. We have identified a governmental rationality where political power operates through rather than on civil society. Governing is performed through autonomous subjects, not on passive objects. (Sending and Neumann 2006: 669)

The problem this poses should be obvious – by taking a social category like governmentality, they depend on the existence of civil society – for this is the social arena through which governmentality is dispersed; by choosing to apply this social category to international relations by invoking *global governmentality*, they must depend for its effectiveness, on the presumed existence of global civil society. But in reality this may help explain the case studies they have chosen which rely heavily on the role of NGOs in setting the agenda for international campaigns – landmines and population policy. The claim is that if governmentality requires civil society then global governmentality requires global civil society through which to operate.

We will say more about the ‘follies’ of global civil society in the next chapter. In keeping with our argument about the unevenness of the international, we might add that any actually existing global civil society is patchy and uneven at the very least. What is interesting from the point of view of governmentality theory is less the issue of how global civil society produces the conditions for governmentality than how governmentality produces global civil society. As Bartelson (2006) has argued, global civil society is a construction that we are told to believe in and thus, in a sense the idea of global civil society reproduces the mentalities of governance, even if its own existence is questionable or overstated. In Bartelson’s words, ‘theories of global civil society are not to be understood primarily as theories *about* global governance at all, but rather as theories that help to justify a distinct set of practices and institutions of global governance, both firmly centered on nongovernmental agents of a specific breed’ (2006: 386). For Bartelson, this construction is necessary to deal with theoretical questions about globalisation and we may extend this argument to ask where the social and political processes of global governmentality take place: ‘Answering such questions in a theoretically coherent fashion implied positing a social reality ontologically elevated over and above the world of domestic societies’ (ibid.). We might conclude therefore that global civil society is something that is invoked by governmentality and is more its outcome than its condition of possibility. At best, something like global civil society exists in a very uneven sense, more emergent in certain spheres than others. This makes it very difficult to talk of global governmentality in a general sense. Yet at the same time the governmentality approach has the advantage of allowing us to point to ideas like global civil society (as it might also point to risk society, network society or reflexive modernity) as the effects of specific techniques, rather than as more deep-rooted conditions of late modernity.

The same sorts of issues apply to Nancy Fraser’s recent contribution to the governmentality debate. Her suggestion is that Foucault’s theory of governmentality

refers to the period characterised by Fordism and that today's postfordist, globalised world requires a rethinking and extension of the concept of governmentality. The correctness of this reading of Foucault has been effectively questioned by Lemke (2003), however, some of her arguments remain important:

the ordering of social relations is undergoing a major shift in scale, equivalent to *denationalisation* and *transnationalization*. No longer exclusively a national matter, if indeed it ever was, social ordering now occurs simultaneously at several levels... What is emerging, therefore, is a new type of regulatory structure, a multilayered system of globalized governmentality whose full contours have yet to be determined. (Fraser 2003: 165-6)

The overstatement of the process of transnationalisation is something we have already questioned, however the issue of different scales and layers of governmentality is helpful in pointing to the unevenness of the international. Yet despite this unevenness, governmentality is being applied, albeit sometimes ineffectively, sometimes with contradictory effects, at different levels, in different regions and on different scales. Again, this might usefully be dealt with through the idea of uneven and combined development where the different levels and scales come up against one another despite their different dynamics. As Rosenberg puts it: 'This phenomenon — in which the results of one instance of social development enter into the conditions of another — arises directly from the pressures and opportunities of inter-societal coexistence' (Rosenberg 2006: 326). Restating the argument that governmentality shows how state, government and civil society are interlinked, we see how at the international level we have a very complex combination of different states, civil societies and forms of government.

As well as being careful about where governmentality can be applied, we also have to be careful to state what sort of governmentality is being applied. There is a need for governmentality theorists in IR to be more specific and not just give a general description of governmentality as the governance of populations according to a certain rationality, but to specifically examine the neoliberal form of governmentality. Foucault's account of the emergence of governmentality sees its origins in the sixteenth century, but of course this account of the government of conduct is different from how governmentality works today. Foucault sees governmentality in relation to population, but whether governing focuses specifically on the individual as in neoliberal governmentality, or groups, institutions and spaces more generally, is a matter of historical analysis. Indeed, Sending and Neumann identify the process of governing through individuals rather than over them as belonging to the last two decades of the twentieth century. In this specific period we see 'the emergence of a new governmental rationality. Here, civil society became conceptualized in "horizontal" terms, and individuals were simultaneously defined as objects of government and subjects with rights and autonomy' (Sending and Neumann 2006: 661). Lest we see the emergence of a new governmental rationality as some free floating development, let us remember how these changes are rooted in a deeper set of social relations that would, for example, explain changes in governmentality in relation to (although not reducible to) changes in the regulation of capitalism and the restructuring that followed the breakdown of the postwar system of regulation and accumulation.

Larner and Walters offer an account of different types of governmentality ranging from imperialism through to European integration. When it comes to the latter, it is clear that they are talking about neoliberal governmentality with a ‘decentred conception of power’, and government ‘at a distance’ (Larner and Walters 2002: 415). They introduce the idea of a new regionalism to describe recent developments in governmentality: ‘Whereas imperialism embodies a strong element of paternalism and authoritarianism, regionalism is a more liberal art of international government. It seeks to govern states and populations with their active consent’ (2002: 398). We might then recognise that this new regionalism applies far more to Europe than to most other parts of the world. As Larner and Walters note: ‘At present, areas like sub-Saharan Africa are relatively bare spots on the map. The networks of capital and information associated with postindustrial progress are sparse and stretched in these zones’ (2002: 421).

If we follow this point, then the concept of governmentality does not necessarily bring anything new to an analysis of lawlessness in Sierra Leone, the displacement of populations by war or the role of guerrilla movements and village chiefs (Luke 1996: 492). These phenomena could be explained without reference to governmentality insofar as they are not defined in relation to (or contrast with) the management of populations, individual conduct or the regulation of social space. We might say that governmentality applies to these cases only insofar as it does not apply, in which case concepts like ‘contragovernmentality’ (Luke 1996) should provide an explanation of why this should be the case (in non-advanced liberal societies) if they are to be of any explanatory value. However, governmentality might be a useful concept in giving an account of how private security companies operating in West Africa (and elsewhere) have taken on roles otherwise associated with the state. Again, what is of interest here might be the tendency of these techniques to fail, given the lack of a liberal capitalist social base that they can draw upon to encourage the self regulation of populations. In this context the concept of neoliberalism is soon stripped of its specifically Foucauldian aspect and reverts to the more familiar idea of privatisation of state functions, promoting the free market and, in the case of Africa, policies of structural adjustment encouraged by international organisations like the IMF. We might note how this actually undermines the basis for policing and security in the Foucauldian sense of encouraging individualised self-regulation and responsabilisation (see also Abrahamsen and Williams 2007: 137). Here again, what is of interest is whether such techniques of neoliberal governmentality are really appropriate given the specificity of international relations and the absence of conditions of advanced liberal society in many parts of the world. Simply put, governmentality may be applied, but it cannot be guaranteed to succeed. The current reconstruction projects in Iraq and Afghanistan might also be considered in this light.

If we are to persist with applying the concept of governmentality to new forms of private security, then it is necessary to specify what aspect of governmentality matters in each case. In the case of private security in Africa, Leander and van Munster are surely correct to write that the concept:

captures the specificity of present neo-liberal forms of governmentality where government imbued with entrepreneurial values is working through the development of quasi-markets... This focus is helpful in thinking about the implications of private security, since it directs attention away from whether or

not the state is losing control/authority to private companies to the more substantial issue of the ways in which neo-liberalism reconfigures how insecurities should be governed. (Leander and van Munster 2007: 203)

But this argument must be qualified insofar as the entrepreneurial impulse of neoliberalism and the techniques used to govern security may not square with one another in countries where it is not so much a case that the state is losing control, but that it may not have been in control in the first instance. Techniques that have developed in the advanced liberal societies are then imposed. What we see in Africa, in the area of security and elsewhere is a drive to neoliberal governmentality coming from the outside, something quite different from the governmentalisation of Western societies. The dogmatic imposition of neoliberal governmentality on societies which would otherwise lack the social base to develop their own forms of governmentality, and which lack stable bodies like the state that Foucault considers essential to the intelligibility of governmentality, must surely have consequences in terms of the effectiveness of such techniques. Although this process might look like governmentality from the point of view of its emphasis on privatised forces, given this lack of a social base and appropriate social institutions, what can neoliberal governmentality achieve in terms of its aim of regulating populations and responsabilising individual conduct? The drive to governmentality, with its entrepreneurial impulse and techno-managerial discourse may be real, but whether governmentality can really be deployed effectively is another matter. In the case of security, what we usually find is a reversion to the threat of brute force or else the limiting of security to specific area (and a more narrowly disciplinary role), rather than the widespread application of sophisticated techniques of self-regulation.<sup>10</sup> Clearly we need to separate the question of whether governmentality is being applied from questions of whether these countries can in fact be governmentalised.

Instead of just claiming governmentality as a new explanatory category, theorists should also explain these failures of governmentality and the arrogance of international institutions in trying to apply techniques based on advanced liberal society to completely different social conditions. This cannot be anything other than a new type of imperialism based on ideological arrogance. Indeed Rojas (2005) suggests this in her discussion of governing through aid. Aid becomes an instrument of global governance which establishes a power relationship between donor and recipient. The new techniques and technologies used to 'govern from a distance' may have the character of neoliberal governmentality, but they will certainly not manage to stimulate an indigenous form of governmentality that would continue to operate in the absence of the interventions of international institutions which 'assist, advise, and constrain the conduct of postcolonial states' (Hindess 2005a). Given this, we might be entitled to conclude that the new governmentality looks rather like the old imperialism.

So too might be the case with the War on Terror. For Ronnie Lipschutz the War on Terror is a good example of governmentality. He says, 'The agents and institutions of counter-terrorism seek to impose a particular order on unruly populations, especially those found in so-called rogue and failed states, but also in the more

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<sup>10</sup> In the emerging literature, Merlingen comes closest to saying this, albeit only briefly: 'international governance, even if driven by a commitment to the promotion of the infrastructure of freedom, resorts to illiberal techniques of discipline and policing to conduct the conduct of countries' (2003: 370).

disciplined industrialized states' (Lipshutz 2005: 13). As far as the latter are concerned, governmentality might be an appropriate concept, although even here the techniques used might still be said to be closer to coercive and disciplinary forms of power. As to the populations in the rogue states and failed states, the idea that this might be described as governmentality (at least as its dominant character) is clearly wrong. It is precisely the conditions producing the failed states that rule out the more subtle techniques of governmentality. The exercise of power in these cases must rely on brute force. As Lipshutz goes on to say within a few pages, 'The September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington, DC constituted a disruption of the global regime associated with neo-liberal governmentality; the responses by the US government in Afghanistan and Iraq involved resort to more direct forms of power insofar as neither self-discipline nor external discipline were considered adequate' (ibid., 15).

Another problem with the governmentality approach is its tendency to become a substitute for an analysis of the state so that governmentality gets redefined as a focus on how non-state institutions work. This is a problem because it goes against the argument that local states are actually essential to governmentality and that governmentality works least well in those places where states are weakest. And it is also a problem in giving more power to international institutions, transnational actors and global civil society than they actually deserve. But it also moves the meaning of governmentality away from a specific focus on the micro management of the conduct of populations, something that is not at all the same as the arguments that states are not the main actors. A good example of this conflation of two quite different positions is an article by Ferguson and Gupta (2002) which correctly notes how African states, for example, have always been weak, hence international agencies often directly impose 'structural adjustment' policies, for example cutting spending, setting currency exchange rates and so on. But how does calling this 'transnational governmentality' really help our analysis? What added theoretical purchase does this phrase bring? If we take neoliberal governmentality to mean the micromanagement of conduct within populations, then areas such as sub-Saharan Africa would seem to be places where conditions for governmentality least apply. The fact that the state in these countries is weak and that because of this international institutions can attempt to enforce their policies is not the same thing as saying that the populations of these countries can be subjected to techniques of individualised self-conduct or that various local institutions can become self-reflexive and monitoring agencies. Power is imposed by the institutions described as representing 'transnational governmentality' precisely because of a lack of local governmentality. But when it comes to the effectiveness of these policies, then if considered by the criteria of governmentality, they are generally ineffective. International institutions like the IMF and World Bank are deluded enough by their own power and rhetoric to try to impose policies that might have some effect in advanced liberal economies. If we are concerned with how techniques of governmentality build lasting social cohesion, then clearly areas like sub-Saharan Africa are currently non-starters.

The European Union project would seem a more fruitful area for understanding the governing and administration of populations through promotion of 'freedom', the rights and entitlements of subjects, freedom of movement, participation in economic processes and so on (Walters and Haahr 2005: 47). Other features of governmentality in Europe include the contriving of markets, the definition of subjects in relation to

economic categories, rights defined in relation to specific functions, considerations of public security (ibid., 63), making citizens participate, building social networks, promoting an active democratic project, monitoring, mediating and devolving responsibility, promoting standardisation and harmonisation and facilitating the information revolution. The Schengen policies would seem a much clearer and extensive application of the nexus security-territory-population, than would the activities of NGOs or private companies in Africa. Indeed, with a topic like security and immigration, it is clear when looking at arguments about governmentality (see Bigo (2002) for instance) that they apply much more to areas like the EU. Quite simply, the EU has the necessary socio-economic conditions of possibility that make the sophisticated techniques of governmentality possible. In other parts of the world the management of populations may have to rely on cruder disciplinary practices.

To conclude this discussion, let us take the following comment by Walters and Haahr: ‘Advanced liberalism is all about governing in ways which seek to elicit agency, enhance performance, celebrate excellence, promote enterprise, foster competition and harness its energies’ (2005: 119). Again, let us ask; does this apply more to the policies of international institutions in Africa or to the dynamics of the European Union? Clearly governmentality fits better with the EU. We may debate whether it applies to other areas, but clearly we cannot say that it applies to all areas equally. Two options are available to us. One is to say that governmentality applies to places like the EU, but not to places like sub-Saharan Africa. Here we are dealing with the limits of the *concept* of governmentality. Another option is to say that the techniques of governmentality are being applied in both cases, but that the EU can be governmentalised a lot more easily due to the nature of its social conditions, while in the case of sub-Saharan Africa, social conditions present a rather different challenge. If those approaches that choose to describe these efforts as governmentality (or global governmentality) want to take such a line, then the onus is on them to talk about the failures of governmentality in practice. Yet these accounts rarely discuss the failures and limitations of governmentality because their focus usually remains at the level of the techniques employed, something that limits the ability of these theories to discuss the underlying social context that makes governmentality meaningful. We will discuss this ontological matter shortly.

### **The limits of governmentality: global and ontological**

It should be clear then that the concept of governmentality can help explain the way that advanced liberal societies work. But if this is so, then necessarily there will be limits to the workability of governmentality in other parts of the world where conditions of advanced liberalism do not apply. This requires us to ask questions of those seeking to use governmentality to explain world politics. Exactly what does global governmentality mean? Are governmentality theorists attempting to understand global politics through a concept that applies to only a part of the world or which applies to different societies in very different ways? If it is a matter of comparing societies, then of course this will not do. Governmentality might apply to the states of Western Europe, for example, but can it really be applied to states in the Middle East (or at the very least, can it be applied in the same kind of way)?

However, global governmentality might be taken to mean an international regime, network or set of institutions that takes an increasingly neoliberal character. This might most clearly be identified with certain international bodies like the UN or IMF. Here we can clearly find evidence, as Sending and Neumann have shown, of such institutions *attempting* to employ neoliberal governmentality in terms of their dominant discourse and practices. Theorists of governmentality still have to deal with the matter of the influence of these institutions and whether or not it is fair to talk about global governance as having the kind of influence some theorists suggest. In part this depends on the debate as to whether we have moved beyond state-based governance to an international order. But the question remains as to whether such international bodies can really impose neoliberal forms of governmentality on those parts of the world where the social base of advanced liberal capitalism does not really exist.

Here we might find a complicated answer to the question. For the governmentality theorists could be right to argue that international institutions attempt to employ neoliberal governmentality, however the reality of the matter is that attempts to employ such governmentality in practice have uneven consequences. Recognising this offers the governmentality approach an escape route. Clearly governmentality cannot explain events in all societies given their very different social bases and levels of development. However, global governmentality might be used to explain attempts by international institutions to apply global governance even in those areas where it is doomed to fail. Then the concept of governmentality does come to represent contemporary global politics. But it does so in the paradoxical sense of indicating the limits of a certain approach, painting a picture of the world where governmentality is applied and works and where governmentality is applied and fails. An interesting project, for example, is to look at the new policies of the World Bank post-Washington Consensus, and to see how the ideas of good governance (efficiency, impartiality, transparency, competition, empowerment) are applied to African states with the emphasis now more on institutional reform rather than straight structural adjustment. Critics have shown just how widespread but also how misguided these ideas are.<sup>11</sup>

If we take governmentality approaches to be explaining how governmentality is applied in different parts of the world as the dominant form of global governance, then surely governmentality theory is obliged to tell us why governmentality works well in some places and not in others. To do this those using the concept must move away from excuses about middle level theory<sup>12</sup> and explaining the 'how' but not the 'why'. To account for the varying degrees of applicability of governmentality, we have to pay attention to its conditions of possibility. This means recognising that governmentality on its own does not explain all there is to know about contemporary international relations; rather it exists in a wider context. To explain why governmentality works in particular (advanced liberal) societies, we need to examine the nature of those societies more deeply, to look at what it is about them that makes governmentality possible. This means an examination of underlying social relations. Despite Foucault's own talk of the development of capitalism, the spread of political

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<sup>11</sup> The best critical account of the World Bank's role in Africa is Harrison (2004). For the change in approach see World Bank (1997). Looked at through the lens of governmentality, one sees just how important is the role of the state in promoting the regulation of markets and civil society.

<sup>12</sup> See Larner and Walters 2004: 4.



economy and a new concern for population and workforce, many of the followers of Foucault are not prepared to talk of such conditions of possibility, only of the practices of governance themselves. Here we see the final limit of governmentality. It explains a particular set of practices and techniques, but something else is required to explain the context in which these practices and techniques can best operate. Quite simply, for governmentality to be a useful concept, it must be part of a wider social ontology that can account for its successes and failures and hence the uneven nature of the international terrain.

As mentioned, governmentality scholars are often unprepared to do this. Larner and Walters go so far as to say ‘What we have called global governmentality entails a move of “bracketing” the world of underlying forces and causes, and instead examining the different ways in which the real has been inscribed in thought’ (2005: 16). Governmentality theorists often have what might be called a flat ontology in that they are not prepared to talk of underlying causes, processes or structures. Again, Walters is quite explicit about this:

Here I want to argue the case for shifting our attention away from questions of deep structures and institutional processes, and toward an understanding of European integration at the level of mentalities and rationalities of government. This involves what Nicolas Rose has nicely termed an ‘empiricism of the surface’, a much greater concern with the identification of ‘the differences in what is said, how it is said, and what allows it to be said and to have an effectivity’ (Rose 1999: 57). (Walters 2005: 157)

This is a good example of how governmentality approaches have a tendency to focus too much on the mentality aspect, that is, the idea of governmentality as a *nomos* or political rationality. This misses out on its social, structural and institutional possibilities and limitations. The reality of governmentality depends on a wider social context that cannot be explained simply by reference to the ‘how’ of governmentality practices and techniques or the discursive aims, means and ends. To remain at this level, as Walters suggests, is to embrace a flat social ontology that is unable to answer the crucial questions of limitation and applicability.

Neumann and Sending write of how ‘Foucault’s discourses typically expose glitches between the programmes for government and the actual governing practices, and these glitches should be studied for their own sake’ (2007: 679). Actually these glitches show precisely the limits of governmentality and the difficulty of applying it to all regions since the international cannot be treated as just another society but is something characterised by its profound unevenness and lack of a homogenous liberal social base. To deal with such issues requires a deeper social ontology. To ignore such questions as Walters suggests is to end up fetishising liberal techniques at the expense of an analysis of social context.

The irony is that the perceived advantage of the governmentality approach is precisely that it is more societal than mainstream IR theories. If this is to be the case, then we must be aware of the particular nature of *different societies*, not try to give governmentality such a generalised form that it explains all social relations across the globe. The international is characterised, above all else, by its uneven nature, its different stages of development, its different spatiality, and its varying social forces.

Neumann and Sending raise the issue of how Foucault shifts the focus of the functioning of power from 'territory' to 'society' (2007: 692), but quite simply, the international cannot be treated as *a* society without creating a great deal of problems. Indeed the current reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq have a lot more to do with the stubbornness of territory rather than the susceptibility of these societies to techniques of governmentality.

Neumann and Sending note that 'liberalism is a particular logic of governing – a form of power that is characteristic of modern society, which operates indirectly by shaping and fostering autonomous and responsible individuals' (2007: 694). Given this definition, can the idea that power is exercised over 'free' subjects really be applied to Afghanistan? Do we find in sub-Saharan Africa the exercise of power through free and autonomous individuals? Can the rationality and ethos of liberalism really be applied to the Middle East? Insofar as international society can be liberalised, then yes. But we must not do the job on behalf of the neoliberals in claiming something to be liberalised when it is not. Jan Selby has made the point that a number of recent applications of Foucault to IR end up 'being used less to interrogate liberalism, than to support what are in essence reworked and reworded liberal accounts of international politics' (Selby 2007: 334). The ironic danger of over-applying the concept of governmentality in IR is to reinforce the ideological claim that we live in a liberal international order. Given that governmentality is intimately connected to liberalism (or in today's specific form, neoliberalism), IR theories of governmentality tend to take for granted the spread of (neo) liberalism through international institutions. In reality we have suggested the international order is far from liberal, and far from being liberalised despite the best efforts of neoliberals to speak or act as if it were. So paradoxically one of the most useful aspects of a governmentality approach should be to point to exactly those situations where it cannot be applied, or where institutions are trying to apply it, thus ignoring the uneven and illiberal character of much of the world and the lack of conditions of operation.

Sending and Neumann might be right to criticise global governance approaches on the basis that 'their ontology and concomitant analytical tools are not equipped to grasp the content of the processes of governance itself' (2006: 653), but governmentality approaches themselves tend to lack the ontological and analytical tools to grasp the *causes* of governance. While Foucauldians will reply that the aim is to explain the how, not to get caught up in the why, without the causal why, the range and limits of how governmentality works are impossible to explain. Any theory of the international that utilises the concept of governmentality must at the very least be supplemented by a theory like uneven and combined development. Explaining the inappropriateness of governmentality, whether as an explanation, or as an attempted practice, is as much a part of the theoretical task as accounting for its influence. Indicating areas where governmentality might face difficulties also helps in pointing to the possibility of resistance and counter-hegemony. This requires looking at the interplay between different social structures, agents and projects. But those governmentality approaches that avoid discussion of 'deep structures' and wider social context render themselves unable to discuss how governmentality differs in different parts of the world and therefore how social struggles might develop.

## **Conclusion**

The central argument this book makes about governmentality can now be summarised.

The governmentality approach is a useful tool in explaining *how* governance works in contemporary societies. However, in order to make the concept work, it has to be properly located by relating it to other social processes. The suggestion here is that it can be put to work within a more sophisticated Marxist framework that rejects reductionism by developing a more relational and stratified understanding of the social world. Governmentality then comes to explain an important part of this social ontology, but it cannot act as a substitute for a wider and deeper examination of social relations. These are the things that explain *why* governmentality is important.

This wider and deeper examination of social relations, among other things, helps to explain the sort of governmentality we are talking about. As noted, it is hard to pin down a precise meaning of governmentality in Foucault's own work. While it is quite possible to take a general view of governmentality based on Foucault's definition of modern government as 'the conduct of conduct', we soon have to move to something more specific if we want to explain the *how* of contemporary governance. An examination of the specificity of forms of governmentality is necessitated once we insist on an examination of wider social context. Since this book is concerned with contemporary forms of governmentality, we need to look at the particular conditions that show *why* governmentality takes particular forms.

This narrows down the study of governmentality to governance in advanced liberal societies. Here we find such ideas as government through the promotion of freedom, the connection between liberty and security, a continual questioning of the role and limits of government, a responsabilisation of the conduct of subjects, a dispersal of power through the social body and the application of an entrepreneurial logic to social processes.

Once we move to the international situation we find that we have to account for quite different social relations in different parts of the world. The issue now is whether the type of governmentality characteristic of advanced liberal societies is possible across the globe. The argument here is that it is not since the social conditions of possibility necessary for this type of governmentality are present in some societies but not others. However, while recognising that neoliberal forms of governmentality can only develop in certain places, there may still be an attempt to export this type of governmentality elsewhere.

Here attention shifts to international institutions like the World Bank and IMF. Our study will look at how these organisations attempt to bring governmentality to various parts of the world. This turn to governmentality has been encouraged by reflection on the failures of free market structural adjustment programmes. But is it argued that these types of governmentality are still highly inappropriate to the social conditions in which they are deployed. Insofar as the World Bank and IMF are Western institutions, they attempt to implement the governmentality characteristic of their own societies. This is of course lifting governmentality out of its social context, something that cannot succeed.

The rest of this section will now look at some key ideas in contemporary governmentality. The second part of the book will examine the application of these ideas to two very different parts of the world.