

## **Chapter 2**

### **Governmentality and its Limits**

This book is concerned with looking at the contribution a concept of 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 reflexivity for granted (seeing them as conditions of late modernity), governmentality shows these things to be conceptualisations that contribute to (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 issue 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 examine whether governmentality can be applied to transnational and global governance, moving from an intra-societal approach to an inter-societal approach. What will be of particular interest here is whether we can make a distinction between a social understanding of governmentality as something that emerges in particular societies, and forms of governmentality that are transnational in character? To address this question we will contrast the development of governmentality within the EU project, and the imposition of various strategies and techniques by international organisations. In the case of an organisation like the World Bank, we see how certain techniques which are developed in the advanced liberal societies are nevertheless applied to regions with

quite different social conditions. We suggest that this reveals the uneven but combined nature of international relations, where some societies may not produce such forms of governmentality themselves, but are nonetheless exposed to them through their global interconnections. We will see how the documents of international organisations like the World Bank resonate with the kind of ideas discussed in the first part of the book – new forms of governance, networks, risk, social capital, globalisation, reflexivity and so on. And we will also see that these ideas can often be quite inappropriate outside of their advanced liberal social context – at least as far as the governance of local populations is concerned. But to make this point, we need to situate governmentality within a wider social ontology capable of explaining how and why techniques of governmentality can work in some societies but not in others.

### **Defining 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.

Foucault's work on governmentality does not emerge in any systematic form. Instead, it is developed in a series of lectures given at the Collège de France. In these lectures, Foucault is still clearly thinking through the concept as reflected in the fact that much of what he says about governmentality is contained in a lecture where his original intention was to talk about biopolitics (Foucault 2008: 317). While these lectures provide a number of general definitions of what governmentality is, the meaning of the term only really emerges through its application to various different contexts and through its use alongside various other concepts and ideas with which it intersects and engages. Even the most general definition of governmentality as the 'conduct of

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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).

conduct' (conduire des conduites)<sup>2</sup> requires considerable investigation. This definition suggests that governance takes place from a distance as the power to influence the actions of others. To understand this further, we have to see how government forms part of a triangle of sovereignty–discipline–government where its distinctive character derives from having population as its main concern (Foucault 2007: 108).

Looking at how the problem of government starts to emerge in the sixteenth century, Foucault first examines this in terms of disciplinary power – that is, a set of techniques centred on the body. By the eighteenth century he suggests a new form of power is also emerging which is concerned with people as a species rather than as individuals and which might be understood through the term biopolitics (2004: 242-3). Finally, it is through a consideration of population as the focus of government that Foucault distinguishes this approach from the techniques of surveillance and training characteristic of disciplinary power. As his lectures develop, this becomes the basis for the distinction between disciplinary power and a form of power called governmentality that works by respecting the 'natural processes' of the economic sphere (Foucault 2007: 353). The reason Foucault's lectures on biopower become instead an account of governmentality lies in this fascination with the specific rationality – liberalism – which emerges in the nineteenth century to deal with the problem of governing populations (Foucault 2008: 317). For liberal governance the idea of governing well is associated with the claim to respect freedom where government allows things to take their natural course. It works from a distance through the encouragement (or direction) of 'free conduct'. This particular form of power operates through a range of techniques – of observation, calculation and

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<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault *Dits et écrits IV* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), p.237. This term is not translated in this way in English versions of Foucault.

administration – and is expressed itself through an ensemble of ‘institutions, procedures, analyses, and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power’ (Foucault 2007: 108). Consequently, government comes to be understood as respecting the freedom of such processes through the deliberate self-limiting of government – an intrinsic part of governmental rationality (Foucault 2008: 10). *Laissez-faire* governance, based on the liberal principles of political economy, finds its expression in civil society and is legitimated through the liberal concern that one must not ‘govern too much’ (Foucault 2008: 319). This can be contrasted with sovereign power with its concern for territory and disciplinary power which functions in a more coercive and preventative way (Foucault 2007: 45). However, it is crucial to note how closely this liberal form of governance is connected to apparatuses of security. The idea of freedom for the mass of the population is of course an ideological illusion characteristic of capitalist society. As Neocleous has argued: ‘For all the talk of “laissez faire”, the “natural” phenomena of labour, wages and profit have to be policed and secured’ (Neocleous 2008: 31).

Thus two very important distinctions are required. First, it is necessary to distinguish between governmentality and disciplinary power and to consider how they are related. Second, it is important to distinguish between governmentality in a more generic sense and specific forms of governmentality – in particular, the contemporary 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. Foucault’s emphasis on the liberal element of rule – governing through the idea of free conduct, self-awareness and self-

limitation – distinguishes it from other types of power. This liberalism defines a problem-space of government, its appropriate forms of regulation and its self-imposed limits. It looks to the private sphere as a way to disguise the imposition of ‘market discipline’ as somehow an exercise in freedom. Foucault explains that there is an ambiguity within liberalism between a concept of freedom as human rights, and the idea, which we will concentrate on here, of freedom as the independence of the governed (Foucault 2008: 42). The latter, as Burchell comments, means that 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). Liberal discourse presents this realm as based on the rational and autonomous conduct of individuals free from state interference. However, this freedom and liberty is clearly a construction that is reinforced through a particular set of social practices and a normative discourse. Even Hayek admits that freedom is a cultural conception of something that has evolved over time, establishing a set of rules with their disciplinary effects. (Dean 1999: 157). As Dean says; ‘in order to act freely, the subject must first be shaped, guided and moulded into one capable of responsibly exercising that freedom’ (ibid., 165). 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’ (Burchell 1991: 139). Liberalism, Foucault tells us, works not through the imperative

of freedom, but through the social production of freedom and the ‘management and organization of the conditions in which one can be free’ (Foucault 2008: 63-4).

This can be seen most clearly if we turn to neoliberalism and some of the work of the ‘Anglo-Foucauldians’ like Dean, Rose and Burchell, as well as Foucault’s own comments in the recently published *The Birth of Biopolitics* on neoliberal forms of governmentality. An important question to address is what the ‘neo’ adds to liberalism. It certainly raises a question as to the naturalness and purity of liberalism if we have to distinguish between types of liberalism. As noted, pure liberalism is only an ideal type. Neoliberalism distinguishes itself precisely because of social and historical context. This context is provided by the unraveling of the postwar institutional settlement. The neoliberal discourse thus problematises the national solutions of the postwar states and argues the need to move away from centralised government activity, the welfare state and Keynesian forms of 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). Dean notes how this reconfiguration seeks 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)



This type of governmentality is all too familiar in countries such as Britain under the New Labour government. Neoliberalism engages in a process of ‘destatification’ by introducing the norms and values of the market to other areas of social life through the promotion of competition, initiative and risk-taking. As Foucault says: ‘The society regulated by reference to the market that the neo-liberals are thinking about is... a society subject to the dynamic of competition... an enterprise society’ (2008: 147). Instead of direct governance, the state steps back and encourages people to become more active, enterprising and responsible for their own decisions. Burchell calls this a new form of ‘responsibilisation’ where the governed are encouraged, freely and rationally, to conduct themselves in new ways (Burchell 1996: 29). The subject of government is given new obligations and duties. They are appealed to as citizens or consumers who are ‘free’ to take responsibility for their own life choices but who are expected to follow competitive rules of conduct with the logic of enterprise applied to our individual acts. Today’s language of governmentality tells us to become more enterprising people, more active citizens and more responsible beings. In Dean’s words, this is a cultural form of governance based on ethical orientations, self-responsibility and the moral obligations invoked by notions of freedom and the exercising of agency (Dean 2007: 73). We will later see this in evidence across a range of documents produced by the European Union and World Bank. However, although this discourse invokes moral issues of obligations, rights and responsibilities, ultimately everything is judged against the imperative of economic competitiveness. In doing this, neoliberalism works to define positive tasks for government through constructing the legal, institutional and cultural conditions for an artificial competitive game of entrepreneurial conduct which can be applied to

almost all areas of our social lives and which, as Foucault notes (2008: 173), is guaranteed by the state. We will look at how this intervention works to extend the norms and values of the market through apply technologies of competition, initiative and risk-taking 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, privatised 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). The discourse of globalisation provides a further spatial dimension to this process and helps to set out what is considered inside or outside the state, what is public or private, what is within the competence of the state, what can be managed and how.

The purpose of the above account of governmentality is to show just how much these ideas are related to the promotion of 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 recent 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 strategies 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 summarise the arguments of this section, we have suggested that while different readings of Foucault's arguments are possible, it makes sense to separate his concept of governmentality from the related ideas of disciplinary power and biopower (the latter is much more general in referring to how the basic biological features of human being are objects of a general strategy of power (Foucault 2007: 1)) by emphasising the specific forms that governmentality takes. We have suggested that Foucault's concept is most meaningful when seen in its specifically neoliberal form. This is particularly important when we consider the application of the concept to international relations because the nature of power relations across the globe means that this neoliberal form of governmentality is the one that is promoted by states, governments and international organisations. The issue then is whether it is really possible to implement a distinctively liberal form of governmentality on a global scale, but to do this we need to step back from governmentality itself and look at the wider social context in which governmentality operates.

### **Marxism and social relations**

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? It is clear from Foucault's own work – even if this element is often deliberately downplayed for fear

of appearing to be Marxist – that biopolitics, disciplinary techniques and governmentality are seen as emerging with the development of capitalist society. Other writers like Nicos Poulantzas (1978), Richard Marsden (1999) and Bob Jessop (2007) have explored this connection between Foucault's work and a Marxist study of capitalism. Foucault himself 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). To develop this argument, a Marxist approach to Foucault's work would consider how something like governmentality is related not just to the more manifest structures of governance, but also to the deep-rooted structures of capitalist production and accumulation. Marxist writers like those within the regulation school, for example, have looked at the complex relations between the deeper capitalist social relations and the institutional context within which the reproduction and development of capitalist social relations takes place. Their interest in the issue derives from an attempt to understand why it is that 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). Such statements suggest that while Foucault is concerned to analyse micro practices, he is

also interested in how these practices are taken up and used at a more macro level – for example, as part of a state strategy or a hegemonic project.

The relation between the micro and macro level is key to understanding how Foucault might be used to address the role of the state. In a well-known passage Foucault talks of the state as ‘superstructural in relation to a whole series of power networks’ (Foucault 2001b: 123). While this could be taken as asserting the primacy of micro relations – technologies of the body, for example – Foucault’s discussion can also clearly be read as establishing the interplay between networks of power and what he calls a ‘metapower’. Rather than undermining the role of the state, Foucault’s argument is to establish the basis of the state in a ‘series of multiple and indefinite power relations’ that allow this metapower to ‘take hold and secure its footing (ibid.)’. This is a ‘conditioning-conditioned relationship’ (ibid.) and provides the basis for the state to ‘codify’ a range of power relationships that ‘render its functioning possible’ (ibid.). Elsewhere Foucault talks of the way that micro-powers can be ‘colonised, used, inflected, transformed, displaced, extended, and so on by increasingly general mechanisms and forms of overall domination’ (Foucault 2004: 301). It would seem clear from these paragraphs that while much of Foucault’s work is concerned with redressing the balance by emphasising the role of micro-powers, he is clearly aware that these powers may be taken up and used by the state, or by ruling groups seeking to use them in particular ways as part of their governing strategy:

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. This argument has been picked up by those wishing to develop a relational view of the state (as opposed to an instrumental or reductionist one). Indeed Thomas Lemke suggests that Foucault's approach to the state is compatible with some of his Marxist contemporaries – notably Poulantzas – suggesting that:

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'. (Lemke 2003: 176)

This approach to the state is today best expressed in the work of Bob Jessop. For Jessop, Foucault allows us to see how the state combines, arranges and fixes existing micro-relations of power, which are then codified, consolidated and institutionalised (Jessop 2007: 152). This approach views state power as the 'contingent outcome of specific practices' (Jessop 2007: 66). While many poststructuralists might agree with this view, it is also compatible with arguments within historical materialism – for example the work of Poulantzas, regulation theory or the Gramscian school – which emphasises the complex interplay of diverse social forces and sees the state as a



strategic terrain and the site of the politics of statecraft. Jessop summarises his view of the state in the following way:

(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)

For Jessop, then, we have 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) and, we might add, secures the social conditions for capital accumulation. Such an approach maintains Marxism’s focus on the importance of relations of production, but its emphasis on the relational nature of the state’s institutional form is also in line with Foucault’s critique of essentialist views of the state. As Jessop puts it, Foucault rejects arguments that present the state as a calculating subject, instrument of class rule or product of economic relations of production, but at the same time he ‘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).

To summarise in relation to the project of this book, we find in some recent Marxist work, greater efforts to overcome reductionism and determinism through a more nuanced understanding of social relations and a non-essentialist understanding of the state. Maintaining 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, as Jessop shows, these institutions have to be understood in relation to state strategies and hegemonic projects which 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). Of course Foucault’s work on governmentality can be read in various ways, but there is plenty of evidence to suggest that reading him within this framework is justified. On the role of class and the bourgeoisie, for example, Foucault says that ‘between the strategy which fixes, reproduces, multiplies and accentuates existing relations of forces, and the class which thereby finds itself in a ruling position, there is a reciprocal relation of production’ (Foucault 1980: 203). Here, as in most other cases, Foucault’s point is usually to insist on the specificity of these relations and their mutually determined (rather than simply one-way or top down) nature.

Like recent Marxist scholarship, the theory of governmentality rejects a general view of the modern state, and sees it, not as a unified apparatus, but as an ensemble of different institutions and practices. While Foucault is at pains to highlight the micro-level, his work on governmentality clearly shows how such practices provide resources for macro strategies to be carried out by dominant social groups or by the government or state. Indeed we could even say that Foucault gives the state a very privileged role in providing ‘a schema of intelligibility for a whole set of already established institutions, a whole set of given realities’ (Foucault 2007: 286). And although the main aim of Foucault’s intervention is to show 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), we can clearly see that he believes this is 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 co-ordinate relations of power produce new effects and advance into hitherto unaffected domains. (1980: 199-200)

But why is it important to argue that a governmentality approach can fit with a certain form of historical materialism? We will address this as we go through the book. But two crucial points should be highlighted here. First, by setting governmentality within a wider social framework we can better explain how it works. As we shall see, some poststructuralist approaches to governmentality deliberately remain at the level of

strategies, and ignore or reject the idea of underlying capitalist relations. Our argument is that by providing this wider context we can better explain what is going on. Not only does this help account for how governmentality works, it also explains how it works differently in different places, or indeed how it might be fail or prove irrelevant in certain cases. Second, we can see that this approach not only fits with state theory, but actually requires it. We shall argue that this is especially important in the cases we study because in effect, *transnational or global governmentality identifies the state as the main social institution through which it can work*. Thus rather than undermining the state, we will see that the latest forms of global governmentality target the state and recognise it to be an essential social institution and that the success of governmentality depends upon it.

### **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, first of all, 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

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<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.

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 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 note how it creates rules that determine how best to solve certain problems – such as solving balance-of-payment deficits – which require the sort of economic restructuring that only a strong intervention by the IMF itself can provide (ibid., 18). This then 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 between this constructivist approach and the Foucauldian idea of discourse. Note, for example, the authors' argument that 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). Ruggie's work is influential in representing liberalism as something embedded in intersubjective norms and constitutive rules (what he calls 'embedded liberalism'). Neoliberalism is understood as representing new social purposes and constitutive rules of value communities. Teschke and Heine's criticism of this work claims that Ruggie tries 'to explain changes in international economic regimes without economics and changes in political regimes without politics' and that his approach ends up obscuring the social processes and political mechanisms 'that generate conflict and compromise, crisis and successful institutionalisation'. While emphasising value communities, this approach is unable to provide any extra-ideational explanation of why it is that changes in values may occur. (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, the neo-Gramscian approach tends to define 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 or anti-realist. 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 significant 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. Whereas neo-Gramscians in IR have been sidetracked by debates about whether there is a new transnational ruling class based on a shared world consciousness,<sup>5</sup> a governmentality approach would point us away from the idea that global changes have to be attributed to conscious agents by suggesting that governmentality is something ontologically prior to the agents who may enact it. This moves our starting point away from consciousness and towards the idea of politics as

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

a strategic field (something equally significant in Gramsci's own work) and expressed by Foucault in the following terms:

the formation of discourses and the genealogy of knowledge need to be analysed, not in terms of types of consciousness, modes of perception and forms of ideology, but in terms of tactics and strategies of power. Tactics and strategies deployed through implantations, distributions, demarcations, control of territories and organisations of domains which could well make up a sort of geopolitics. (Foucault 1980: 77)

There are of course neoliberal and transnational actors whose ideas and beliefs require consideration, but to understand their actions, we have to look at how they draw upon already existing practices, strategies and institutions within a 'strategic field of power relations' (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.

But although Foucault is useful in pointing us away from conscious intervention by highlighting the techniques and practices of discipline and control, there is also a danger of focussing too much on the micro level and missing out on issues of global power, inequality and the unevenness of the international system that historical materialism is 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> But rather than leave it at this – as some Foucauldians are prone to do – we then need to distinguish these strategies from actual regimes, institutional structures 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 by 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.

Unfortunately, the ontological stance adopted by most poststructuralists prevents them from exploring this deeper and wider context within which governmentality works. We have suggested that the latter is the only way to explain its conditions of possibility and hence the ways in which it may or may not be working in different social contexts. Yet in IR we find some writers – in this case Laura Zanotti – explicitly arguing against this sort of approach saying that instead of ‘asking under which conditions and through what kind of interventions democratization can best be achieved’, we should focus on governmentality as a ‘rationality’ and concentrate on its ‘mechanisms’ and ‘political effects’ (Zanotti 2005: 462). This tendency to avoid a deeper social ontology by giving primacy to the rationality and strategic effects of governmentality is even more explicit in Larner and Walter’s comment that: ‘What we have called global governmentality entails a move of “bracketing” the world of

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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).

underlying forces and causes, and instead examining the different ways in which the real has been inscribed in thought' (Larner and Walters 2005: 16). Such an approach cannot but end up emphasising governmentality as a political rationality, which is useful in explaining the discursive power of governmentality, but is unable to go any further than this and explain the power relations that lie behind the discourse. The normal poststructuralist response to this would be to claim that there is nothing (no deep structures, causes or mechanisms) that lies behind the discourse, or else that power relations are internal to the discourse itself. According to our more realist view, this position ultimately cannot explain governmentality's conditions of possibility, and by ruling out examination of its social, structural and institutional context, it cannot make any meaningful causal claims about its possibilities and limitations. A realist approach would argue that in any case a 'bracketing of the world' is impossible and that rather than avoiding ontological questions, this sort of approach simply embraces a flat ontology. While this is usually implicit in most poststructuralist approaches, Larner is surprisingly explicit here, arguing

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)

Rose's phrase 'empiricism of the surface' is indeed a nice term in describing the rejection a deeper realist ontology. The problem is that it effectively fetishes the exercise of power while ignoring the reality of its causes. While this might work in certain cases – here Walters is concerned with the workings of European governance – it cannot, for example, explain why it is that governmentality works in particular ways in some (European) societies, but encounters a different set of problems in others. While another study by Neumann and Sending notes how 'Foucault's discourses typically expose glitches between the programmes for government and the actual governing practices' (2007: 679), only a deeper social ontology can explain why those glitches might occur. We will see that this is particularly important when it comes to studying governmentality in an international context, because the international is marked, above all else, by differentiation of social context. Having set out the social and philosophical issues at stake, the rest of this chapter will therefore examine how a study of the differentiated nature of international relations leads to a multi-level analysis of the ways that governmentality works and the different forms it takes depending on wider social context.

### **Governmentality and international relations**

Having seen how a governmentality approach compares to other theories in IR, the next task is to start looking at some of the applications of governmentality and to draw out some of the theoretical issues relating to the wider framework within which governmentality operates. We left off in the last section suggesting that governmentality needs to be placed within a wider social ontology if we are to make sense of its application to an international context. Of course this might be said of any

social context, but what we have in mind here is that the international is special because it is made up of multiple social contexts. Indeed if we follow Justin Rosenberg we can define the international as the domain of inter-societal interaction and co-existence (Rosenberg 2006: 311). However, in making this point, he goes on to emphasise that this inter-societal coexistence is uneven; indeed, ‘the phenomenon of the international arises from the socio-historical unevenness of human existence’; but at the same time, the distinctive characteristics of the international must be ‘explained by analysis of the resultant condition of ‘combined development’ (ibid., 313). Hence this concept, borrowed from Trotsky, shows how societies are ‘combined’ and ‘causally integrated with a wider social field of interacting patterns of development’ (Rosenberg 2006: 321). For Rosenberg the idea of uneven and combined development is characteristic not just of certain countries but also of the very idea of the international itself. It is, he says, ‘an intrinsic characteristic of social development as a transhistorical phenomenon — its inner multilinearity and interactivity’ (ibid., 327).

As we shall see in the next chapter, Rosenberg develops a strong critique of globalisation theory. His argument is that by methodologically foregrounding space and time, globalisation theorists empty social relations of any specific content (Rosenberg 2005: 8). If we now start to raise the question of whether there is such a thing as global governmentality, we are faced with the same need to avoid making claims that overstate the global transformation of social relations without clearly recognising the different social dynamics of various parts of the international system. If, for example, we see governmentality as a product of particular types of society in certain parts of the world, then we should reject arguments that suggest that while

governmentality develops as an account of domestic situations, it is relatively easily extended to the international arena.<sup>7</sup> The problem with the argument for global governmentality is precisely the tendency to flatten out social relations and to minimise the kinds of differences highlighted by uneven and combined development. If we follow our earlier understanding of governmentality in its specifically liberal or neoliberal form, then the uneven nature of the international raises serious issues concerning where this particular form of rule can apply. Of course we can always make the case that different types of governmentality operate in different places. Larner and Walters suggest that we can find various forms of governmentality ranging from imperialism through to European integration. They introduce the idea of a new regionalism to describe recent developments in international governmentality that govern from a distance through the active consent of states and populations (2002: 398). But as they themselves note, this particular type of governmentality is far more relevant to something like the European Union whereas ‘areas like sub-Saharan Africa are relatively bare spots on the map... [where] networks of capital and information associated with postindustrial progress are sparse and stretched’ (ibid.: 421). When we move to look at the role of international organisations we will be concerned with the nature of these ‘bare spots’ since they pose the most significant questions. We may well want to ask governmentality theorists what added value the concept brings to the study, for example, of lawlessness in Sierra Leone and the displacement of populations by war or the role of guerrilla movements and village chiefs (Luke 1996: 492). Can we not say that this represents the exact opposite of governmentality – i.e. the failure to manage local populations and regulate social

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<sup>7</sup> Ronnie Lipschutz writes that: ‘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).



space through liberal means? If local populations are to be managed, surely there are cases where the idea of coercive disciplinary power is far more appropriate than pretending that we are witnessing governmentality operating from a distance through the responsabilisation of individual conduct? Hence it is important to try and be clear exactly where governmentality is operating and not to try and claim that all forms of biopower are also at the same time instances of governmentality. For example, a recent volume *Globalization under Construction* (Perry and Maurer 2003) claims to be about governmentality, but should biopolitical issues like Spanish immigration, South East Asian workers in the Gulf, identity in Hawaii or the global sex industry really be considered as governmentality?

If we deploy the concept of governmentality in the field of international relations then there are clearly multiple areas we could examine. There is no possibility of covering all such issues in this one book. We will not, for example try to follow up our above example of Sierra Leone, although it is certainly true that there is a great interest among IR scholars in whether governmentality can be applied to local security operations. In particular, the study of the operation of private security companies in different parts of the world is a popular option. If we are to call this governmentality then we can perhaps say that these privatised security companies are operating at a distance from both the local state and foreign powers which no longer hold, or care to hold, a monopoly over the legitimate use of force and so, consequently, security spans both public-private and local-global divides (Abrahamsen and Williams 2007: 132). With multiple actors involved, the provision of security becomes a competitive game governed by market rules. This is of course a game contrived by neoliberalism rather than by pure free market rules. The result, as Leander and van Munster explain, is

security governance ‘taking place through a set of (quasi-) markets imbued with entrepreneurial values and inspired by a hands-off approach to governance’ (Leander and Van Munster 2007: 202). This in turn works to ‘depoliticise’ security and to frame it, like other forms of governmentality, in a technocratic way. Looking at this through the case study of Darfur, Leander and van Munster write that:

Within the scheme of neo-liberal governmentality the regulation of actors takes place through the employment of private sector technologies of performance such as benchmarking, best practice schemes, codes of conduct, performance indicators and auditing. In line with the view that governing through (quasi-) markets is the most effective way of dealing with problems, the purpose of these technologies is to push control out of the allegedly unaccountable and non-transparent bureaucratic sphere towards the constant scrutinizing gaze of consumers and other stakeholders such as NGOs and other humanitarian organizations. (Leander and van Munster 2007: 209)

Thus far, the idea of governmentality works well in describing the *provision* of security. But this is precisely the problem insofar as the neoliberal discourse of security provision is being imposed in places quite different to the ones where these discourses and practices first emerge. If neoliberal practices were already contrived in their way of operating, this imposition on very different parts of the globe takes their artificiality to a new level. And in contrast to neoliberalism in advanced liberal societies, the outcome is usually quite different, often disastrously so. The proliferation of private security companies in Africa occurs not because these countries can easily be governmentalised, but usually because of the failings of public

provision of security, most notably the lack of a strong and effective state capable of either directly providing security or effectively devolving its provision to others. The absence of these conditions means that governmentality can be imposed, but it cannot develop deep roots and thus fails in its immediate aims.<sup>8</sup> Yet the theorisation of this usually attempts to fit security into the governmentality box, talking of how security takes a networked form, different from the old hierarchies of power, collapsing old spatio-temporal boundaries, using new information and communications technologies, set within a new risk mentality and responsible to a set of stakeholders (see Dupont 2004). Of course a lot of this is true of the advanced liberal societies, but little attempt has been made to show how difficult it is for such things to work outside of these societies. Furthermore, little mention has been made of how the dynamics of international society are often quite the opposite of this – hierarchical, coercive and directly disciplinary. This would require us to adopt a social ontology that goes deeper than just examining techniques of governmentality and to look at the social conditions of possibility that either allow types of governmentality to develop, or which can lead to more serious social problems. In contrast to most of the governmentality literature, Abrahamsen and Williams mention how:

The colonial legacy, combined with economic and political factors, have made the production of a ‘citizen identity’ in many African countries highly problematic, and this lack of social cohesion is arguably a source of many of the continent’s security problems. The privatization and globalization of security can potentially exacerbate this situation. (Abrahamsen and Williams 2006: 19)

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<sup>8</sup> For example, a study of private security in Kenya by Abrahamsen and Williams suggests that this is largely a chaotic affair, with little legislation or regulation and no oversight or monitoring of security practices, services, and training (2006: 15).

While neoliberal forms of governmentality in the advanced liberal societies may not necessarily be desirable, we can at least see how they can operate. Outside of these advanced liberal societies where this type of governmentality has emerged, it is hard to image the same techniques working effectively. When the social conditions for neoliberal governmentality are not present it is difficult to imagine governance taking place from a distance through the exercise of freedom. While the provision side may perhaps be described in these terms, the actual practices cannot be. We have seen throughout the developed economies a process of commodifying more and more areas of social provision or, in the above case, the commodification of security. Yet this process works alongside and requires liberal forms of state governance. If this is not present in other parts of the world then we have to consider alternative descriptions – either seeing this process as ‘failed governmentality’ or to consider how these interventions actually revert to more coercive forms of power in regulating populations. This is precisely the point at which governmentality needs to be understood in relation to disciplinary power and the kinds of techniques, institutions and apparatuses described by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* rather than in his governmentality lectures. While social theorists might talk up the idea of governmentality working effectively in different parts of the world, social reality is always a harsher judge of such exercises.

The same is the case in relation to interventions by international organisations like the World Bank and IMF. Clearly things have changed since the overtly coercive policies of structural adjustment. Instead these institutions link support to practices of ‘good governance’ and ‘capacity building’ that recognise the enabling role of states in

creating the best conditions for markets to function. This change of approach is evident in the World Bank's 2002 Development Report which suggests that a 'strong and capable state is necessary to support markets' (World Bank 2002: 36). Another way this is done is by promoting the idea of local ownership of development projects and by trying to engage civil society and local groups. In discussing the way that NGOs contribute to new forms of governmentality, Sending and Neumann examine how these organisations 'are constituted as self-associating units through "technologies of agency" whose political significance resides both in their capacity to convey and mobilize the preferences and concerns of individuals' and communities, and in their capacity to carry out regulatory functions' (Sending and Neumann 2006: 658). Looking at the wider picture, critics like Chandler (2006), Cammack (2004) and Kiely (2007) have noted that what really happens here is that Northern dominated institutions dictate what counts as good governance while poorer states are forced to take responsibility for implementing these policies. Promoting the ideas of transparency and anti-corruption allows for a depoliticised, technological approach which, along with appeals to the rule of law can be used to blame local practices and actors if things go wrong. The consequence, according to David Chandler, is to integrate states into networks of external regulation, while also denying ultimate responsibility for the relationship; obfuscating imperialist power by making the exercise of power appear as empowering rather than dominating (Chandler 2006: 77). This would seem to fit perfectly with descriptions of governmentality as the setting of boundaries for what can or cannot be done, while responsabilising local agents to 'freely' do the right thing. In the words of Fine: 'Education, good governance, policy ownership, and democracy are all about doing what the WB/IMF would do but also appearing to do it by yourself and willingly' (Fine 2003: 12).

Of course there is also the small matter of whether these interventions actually work. In the 1990s the World Bank recognised that there were problems with its structural adjustment programmes by attempting to bring the state back in. The new approach of ‘building institutions for markets’ means emphasising good governance, the rule of law, efficient and transparent decision-making, local ownership and effective intervention. But if the state is already weak, and if civil society is quite different from the Bank’s ‘Western model’, it is hard to see how these new programmes can fare any better, especially if the ultimate goal remains the promotion of open markets. As with security policies, it is difficult to imagine how these imposed or implanted techniques of neoliberal governmentality can survive in a different context from the one where they initially developed. Yet they are imposed because institutions like the World Bank and IMF are so bound up with the dominant neoliberal rationality that they are unable to see the world outside of this discursive framework. Here it is useful to bear in mind the nature of the word ‘governmentality’. As Miller and Rose usefully suggest, the term contains two aspects of the governing process – one relating to ‘rationalities’ or ‘programmes’ of government, the other relating to ‘technologies’ of enactment. One represents the world in a particular way; the other is a way of acting upon it (Miller and Rose 2008: 15). International organisations operate according to the former even though the latter is often wholly inappropriate. This is clearly something that should not happen; yet it is the peculiar nature of the international as a series of different overlapping societies each with its own social and historical specificities. This means that developing countries suffer a modern version of uneven and combined development insofar as they are locked into the social conditions of their own particular development, yet are subject to the strategies and techniques of

the advanced liberal countries who dominate the activities of the major development organisations and other forms of global governance. It would take a significant stretch of the imagination to believe that in these cases such organisations succeed in promoting the health, wealth and well-being of populations through advanced liberal techniques of governance from a distance through the freedom and autonomy of responsibilised individual actors.

### **Global governmentality?**

The matter of whether these interventions by international organisations really work could perhaps be posed differently. Instead of thinking that the aim of institutions like the World Bank and IMF is to improve the conditions of the local population, perhaps there is some other, more global motive. This broader aim would be to secure open markets across the globe. Of course the neoliberal view is that liberal markets and poverty reduction go together; as the IMF suggests: ‘Countries that align themselves with the forces of globalisation and embrace the reforms needed to do so, liberalizing markets and pursuing disciplined macroeconomic policies, are likely to put themselves on a path of convergence with advanced economies’ (IMF 1997: 72). This argument has been questioned by a number of writers, Kiely, for example, notes that a belief in the importance of openness to global markets seriously underestimates the ability of developing countries to break into new export markets, suggesting that in fact these policies increase uneven development by giving competitive advantage to already developed countries (Kiely 2007: 434). But because the World Bank and IMF are wedded to the view that openness to the global market is the solution to all problems of development, then if, for some reason, such pro-market policies do not

result in economic growth and poverty reduction, this must be considered something to do with the country itself, its own internal practices, lack of democracy, lack of empowerment of women and local groups, lack of transparency and over-reliance on the wrong type of regulation and state intervention.

The World Bank understands this through the idea of good governance. It suggests that:

Good governance includes the creation, protection, and enforcement of property rights, without which the scope for market transactions is limited. It includes the provision of a regulatory regime that works with the market to promote competition. And it includes the provision of sound macroeconomic policies that create a stable environment for market activity. Good governance also means the absence of corruption, which can subvert the goals of policy and undermine the legitimacy of the public institutions that support markets. (World Bank 2002: 99)

Defining good governance in this way allows for a normalising discourse that sets standards by which to judge the achievement of certain domestic goals and which can be used to blame countries when these standards are not seen to have been achieved. These norms are not imposed but are applied using a complex process of assessment of compliance. Indeed, as Cammack notes, an organisation like the World Bank promotes ownership because it:



recognises that it lacks the means to enforce the strategy itself, and because the legitimisation of its project *vis-a-vis* citizens around the world depends upon its adoption by national governments, which remain indispensable intermediaries in the project. But at the same time it proposes that governments should maintain a policy matrix for external inspection at any time. (Cammack 2004: 204)

This notion of external inspection provides a good way of understanding governance from a distance and subjects states to what Mark Duffield calls ‘metropolitan monitoring, intervention and regulation’ (Duffield 2002: 1066). We can look at the way international organisations compile data and indexes and use a range of benchmarks and performance indicators to assess compliance with certain rules, norms and performance targets. Various examples of these include the World Bank’s World Development Indicators and Global Development Finance databases, the Millennium Development Goals Indicators, the World Economic Forum’s Global Competitiveness Report and the OECD’s Main Economic Indicators. The guiding criteria are economic ones, an example of what Foucault means when he says that governmentality takes political economy as its method of intervention. In discussing neoliberalism he writes: ‘The market economy does not take something away from government. Rather, it indicates, it constitutes the general index in which one must place the rule for defining all governmental action’ (Foucault 2008: 121). A number of governmentality theorists have done interesting work on this issue by applying it to the way government action is defined (or appraised) by international organisations. Jacqueline Best sums up this approach in arguing that a governmentality approach ‘provides us with some of the tools necessary to understand the ways in which these

political economic imperatives have been internationalized and institutionalized in recent years – through the non-juridical logic of international standards, the calculating metric of transparency and the entrepreneurial ethic of self-responsibility’ (Best 2007: 102). The issue of transparency is particularly interesting as a way of disciplining states and economies and international organisations publish a range of indicators to scrutinise whether different countries have managed to meet satisfactory performance targets or to compare how well countries have managed in relation to one another. In other words, neoliberal governmentality constitutes states on the basis of global standards of conduct and competitiveness rather than seeing them as socio-political entities (Fouquier 2008b: 118).

What is interesting about these arguments from the point of view of a global governmentality approach is that they are now focussing on states rather than populations as the target entities. How consciously the theorists do this is open to discussion and debate. Fouquier is clearest in stating that governmentality is not only about how states and governments act on populations, but also how global institutions act on states:

While much governmentality research has focused on how neoliberalism has come to inform multiple practices on the part of state authorities, the argument here is 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. (Fouquier 2008a: 308)

This is clearly quite a different issue from that of how governmentality works on local populations and it returns us to our starting point: how we define governmentality and what it is that governmentality is referring to. It is true to say that explaining the failure of governmentality to improve the conditions of local populations is part of the task. This can be done through exposing the dogma and social conditioning of international organisations and their personnel. The bureaucrats, officials and policy makers who populate these institutions are themselves subjects whose understanding has been constructed within a particular epistemic field which makes them see the world in a particular way even if this is wholly inappropriate to problem solving in less developed countries. But if at one level of analysis we can explain these interventions in terms of discursive conditioning, at another level these interventions are more deliberate and have a different target. If the idea of global governmentality is to have any sort of meaning then it should be redefined as techniques aimed at regulating the behaviour of states and governments. We have seen how this takes different forms – benchmarking and targets, practices like good government and transparency and openness to the discipline of global markets. For Fougner and others, this would represent some sort of governmentality once removed insofar as the issue is not really that of the regulation of populations; indeed it may not even matter to the international organisations that liberal techniques of governmentality are not effective in different local contexts so long as a system of global governmentality can be established which is successfully able to regulate the behaviour of states.

But how then can we accept arguments by Fougner, Merlingen, Zanotti and others that global governmentality targets states when we have argued that governmentality

is primarily concerned with populations? By arguing that this is governmentality once removed, we are suggesting that global governmentality is aimed at states rather than populations, but that this way of regulating state behaviour takes place *through* the targeting of populations. While we have said that Western forms of governmentality cannot really succeed in non-Western social contexts, we are now also suggesting that these specifically global forms of governmentality are concerned with the regulation of local populations only insofar as this assists in 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. 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 will develop this argument in more detail when we examine the role of the World Bank. However, it should be clear now that a comparison of the World Bank and the European Union indicates not only a similarity of discourse, but also raises the interesting issue of the level at which governmentality can operate.

## 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 the 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.

Governmentality is also defined by its historical context. Thus contemporary forms of governmentality have to be seen in relation to the emergence of neoliberalism and the response to the unravelling of the postwar institutional settlement. This can be seen in relation to both national forms of economic regulation and state intervention, and the international regimes of economic and financial stability associated with the Bretton Woods system. While it is important to look for regional variations, clearly the dominant form of governmentality is this neoliberal version. Among its essential features is a further questioning of the limits of state power and a focus on the market through the introduction of rules of competition and the construction of an entrepreneurial model of conduct. While neoliberalism promotes the freedom of individual conduct, this conduct is ‘responsibilised’ and urged to be reflexive about its own behaviour. We have seen how national governments have sought to introduce policies through a promotion of strategies and techniques of competition, risk taking, insurance, benchmarking and best practice. This is combined with more sophisticated techniques of data gathering and surveillance in order to regulate populations from a distance. While this is promoted through the idea of the exercise of freedom and limiting government, we should move beyond this discourse and see these interventions as a particular form of regulation. For Foucault, this ‘regulation of society by the market’ requires that the mechanisms of competition ‘play a regulative role at every moment’ (Foucault 2008: 145).

All this can be seen in the advanced liberal countries as well as in the development of regional institutions like the European Union. We compare the global governmentality of international organisations like the World Bank with the development of governmentality inside the European Union precisely because the latter is a transnational project that 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 techniques of governmentality 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 whereas other parts of the world have to rely on cruder disciplinary practices to manage populations. But while the *population* of the EU can be governmentalised a lot more easily, this does not necessarily mean that governmentality does not apply to other parts of the world. Rather, our argument depends on the level of analysis.

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. Our arguments on this matter are first that we would not expect to find neoliberal forms of governmentality as emergent social features of those societies that do not have advanced liberal economies, but second that we can still expect to find international organisations trying to export these techniques to other parts of the world either directly, or as part of some sort of global governance agenda. While some parts of the world may not have the social conditions of possibility necessary for this type of governmentality to organically emerge, international organisations, as reflective of the rationalities present in the advanced liberal societies may still try to force these techniques on other parts of the world. 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, if judged on what they claim to do, are still highly inappropriate to the social conditions in which they are deployed. Insofar as the World Bank and IMF are institutions dominated by the advanced liberal countries (in terms of their officials, financial and voting structure, etc), 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 in a different local environment.



To theorise the wider context, and to explain the intersection of the social and the international, we have suggested making use of Rosenberg's approach to uneven and combined development. This approach shows why a set of techniques developed in one part of the world can be imposed on another part of the world. Indeed it allows us to go deeper than the act of imposition, since this itself is a product of the very nature of capitalist development. 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). The uneven part of the process indicates how governmentality will have uneven and unpredictable results; the combined part shows that it is the very nature of the international that allows this to occur. The second part of this book develops this point by comparing governmentality in the European Union with global governmentality as promoted by the World Bank. As already outlined, our argument is that neoliberal management of populations works – to a certain extent – in European countries because of the nature of their social relations, but that in other parts of the world governmentality struggles to manage populations in such a way. Instead, concern for populations becomes an important pretext for a different sort of governmentality that operates at the level of government and state.

However, the main reason for examining the EU and the World Bank is to highlight the *similarities* of ideas that play such a large part in the neoliberal discourse that both these institutions support. We are particularly concerned with the role played by contemporary social theory insofar as it tends to reinforce new forms of governmentality rather than criticising them. Foremost among these theories, as the next chapter will show, is the idea of globalisation. But even as people start to grow

weary of the over-statement of this idea, so a whole range of associated concepts work to support a particular way of seeing the world. These include various understandings of governance, networks, flows, social capital, risk, knowledge and reflexivity. Our suggestion is that these ideas reproduce a certain view of the world which reflects its surface appearance, but does not get beneath the surface to look at underlying social relations. Indeed, if we may use Dean's words here, what we have is a world without markings, a 'scratchless' world, a world of surfaces and flows; networks and governance (Dean 2007: 203). In fact Dean is describing neoliberalism, but it can equally be said of the uncritical theories that claim to be analysing the world but instead end up reinforcing the dominant worldview. Our claim, then, is that most contemporary social theories lend their support to contemporary forms of governance and that together with the more practical work of institutions like the EU and the World Bank they contribute to neoliberal governmentality in its various forms across the world. Hence the importance today of criticising these ideas *as* governmentality by giving the concept *of* governmentality a critical and cutting edge.