Neoliberal Political Economy and the Subjectivity of Crisis; Why Governmentality is Not Hollow

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Abstract

This paper revisits Foucault’s understanding of the importance of subjectivity for politics, focusing in particular on his claims concerning the sorts of demands placed on the subject by contemporary capitalism. Moves to extend the application of Foucault’s analysis of liberal modernity to the realm of world politics have met with heavy criticism lately. According to David Chandler, for example, the idea of a ‘global governmentality’ rests on the fundamentally unreliable premise that contemporary globalization is driven by a kind of hyperbolic or imperial cosmopolitanism. Such arguments, he suggests, fail to recognize the progressive hollowing out or ‘attenuation’ of the political that in fact makes liberalism impossible in the late-modern era. In response to this argument, and recent similar arguments made by Marxists, this paper attends to what Foucault referred to as the "consciousness of crisis" that grounds the project of neoliberal governmentality. It is Foucault's contention that neoliberal capitalism has a consciousness of itself as a theory which seeks to incite entrepreneurialism to the point of crisis. In this sense, to speak of a crisis of political legitimacy is not to speak of a kind of mass passivity or 'checking out,' as Chandler might put it, but rather as an emergent form of behaviour that has been elicited or produced in a population. In order to escape Chandler’s resentment of the failure of populations to live up to their responsibilities as political individuals then, this paper draws on the theory of neoliberal governmentality. Understood principally as a summoning of entrepreneurial behaviours, the paper suggests that neoliberal governmentality affords us an opportunity for shifting the question of responsibility away from the sort of sovereign individualist platform elaborated by Chandler and towards a platform grounded more in the context of a dynamic and flexible global capitalism. To explore these issues, the paper contends, we should supplement Foucault's few rudimentary remarks on the subjectivity of neoliberal capitalism with the more fine-grained methods of ‘postliberal’ economic analysis, such as that found in the works of Hardt and Negri.

Bio

Nicholas J. Kiersey is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Ohio University - Chillicothe. He has published research on 'world state' theory, scale and biopolitics in the War on Terror, and the EU’s attitude to Turkish accession. His current research focuses discourses of neoliberal capitalist subjectivity and the ‘debate about empire’ in IR theory.
Introduction

This paper revisits Foucault’s understanding of the importance of subjectivity for politics, focusing in particular on his claims concerning the sorts of demands placed on the subject by contemporary capitalism. Moves to extend the application of Foucault’s analysis of liberal modernity to the realm of ‘global’ politics have met with heavy criticism lately. Some have adopted a more Marxist perspective to suggest that Foucault’s methods are simply not cut out for the study of situations where power differentials are present, such as those common in world politics. Given that Foucault’s project was focused on the paradox of power under conditions of freedom within domestic contexts, these critics aver, he would likely have had little to say about the structure of global capitalism and the imperialist subjection it thrusts upon the marginal nation-states of the world. For some then, the very idea of a ‘global governmentality’ suggests a certain obfuscation of the patterns of quite illiberal capitalist exploitation that prevail in globalization. However, if this critique seeks to insert a rhetoric of imperial power into our analysis of world politics, another critique breaks with this materialist orientation to challenge Foucauldian International Relations (IR) on the grounds that it invests far too much faith in the potential of post-territorial politics. As David Chandler argues, the premise upon which the global governmentality thesis rests, that contemporary globalization is driven by a kind of hyperbolic or imperial cosmopolitanism, is fundamentally unreliable. For a progressive hollowing out or ‘attenuation’ of the political effectively constrains the very possibility of any meaningful form of global liberalism today.

Both of these critiques bring important challenges to the table for Foucauldian scholarship in IR. For example, in their demands for attention to the ongoing acts of ideological reproduction which help to hide the arbitrary, imperial nature of world politics, Marxist critics
invite analysts of governmentality and biopolitics to account for the considerable role played by
the imperatives of a global capitalist economy in shaping ideologies of security. Such work is
important for, as I have argued elsewhere, economic considerations have received short shrift in
much of the literature on the biopolitics of the War on Terror. Similarly, Chandler challenges
Foucauldian research to clarify just what is meant by the term ‘liberalism’ and how exactly the
different sorts of subjects recruited in the production of globalization can be said to be ‘liberal’.
This said, however, both formulations seem to skip over central components of Foucault’s
ontology. For example, while it is clear that Marxist IR theorists broadly share Foucault’s
concern for the impossible demands that capitalism makes of the subject, they systematically
overlook the reasons why Foucault refused to fetishize economic relations. Chandler, for his part,
rebukes scholars of global biopolitics for exaggerating the subjective energies available to global
liberalism. Yet he does so on the grounds that they gloss over the complete failure of
contemporary “political elites” to create any coherent program of globally shared values. This
claim is remarkable given that it belies such a decidedly liberal aspiration for sovereign
individual responsibility, an ontological category which Foucault spent a good deal of his career
trying to refute.

In response to these arguments, this paper attends to what Foucault referred to as the
"consciousness of crisis" that grounds the project of neoliberal global governmentality. It is
Foucault's contention that neoliberal capitalism has a consciousness of itself as a theory which
seeks to incite entrepreneurialism to the point of crisis. In this sense, to speak of a crisis of
political legitimacy is not to speak of a kind of mass passivity or 'checking out,' as Chandler
might put it, but rather as an emergent form of behaviour that has been elicited or produced in a
population. The paper thus draws on recently published transcripts from Foucault’s lectures at
the Collège de France in the late 1970s which show quite conclusively that Foucault was curious about the role of capitalist norms and values in the constitution of contemporary liberalism. Indeed, more importantly for this paper, we can see in Foucault’s short discussion of the American strain of neoliberalism, which is arguably the more ascendant version in the current context, a concern with the manner in which contemporary capitalism relies on the market as a potential vector for the solicitation of specific norms of individual responsibility.

To be sure, not all theories of global governmentality and biopolitics address the role of economic ideology in contemporary globalization. To some extent, this can be attributed to the fact that Foucault’s only sustained treatment of the issue remained unpublished until recently. Nevertheless, the new lectures do present us with an interesting opportunity to revise our understanding of the sources of neoliberal governmentality’s globalizing impulse. As we shall see, Foucault’s own discussion of neoliberalism suggests that the security sought by biopolitics is mediated by a fundamentally economistic horizon of thought. Otherwise expressed, it is less a discourse of cosmopolitan rights and more a discourse of economic utilitarianism that determines what may be said to constitute a secure life. Foucault was interested in the desire of neoliberalism to provide social security by eliciting an economic or entrepreneurial responsibility from its subject. Governmentality desires both to rule a human whose life it understands to be a fundamentally transactional phenomenon and to instil in that human a certain sense of what counts as responsible behaviour in the marketplace of his life.

Importantly, such a reading of contemporary liberalism stands in marked contrast with Chandler’s assessment of the study of global biopolitics as simply a naïve engagement with cosmopolitan theory, and places Chandler’s resentment of the failure of global populations to live up to their political responsibilities as individuals in a more nuanced context. Indeed, it shifts
the very question of responsibility away from the sort of sovereign individualist platform elaborated by Chandler towards a platform grounded explicitly in the normative logic of global capitalism. At the same time, however, Foucault’s reading of neoliberalism takes place more on the level of knowledge than ideology, displacing the need to derive governmentality from capitalist relations of production per se. To explore these issues, I argue that we should supplement Foucault's few rudimentary remarks on the subjectivity of neoliberal capitalism with the more fine-grained methods of ‘postliberal’ economic analysis, such as that found in the works of Hardt and Negri.

Debating Global Governmentality, Global Biopolitics

Literature in International Relations (IR) theory on the theme of global governmentality and the closely related notion of biopolitics is by now widely acknowledged. Much of this literature takes its cue from Foucault’s more explicitly political texts, such as his classic History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, and, more recently, the 1977-1978 Collège de France lectures, published in English as Security, Territory and Population. To summarize these texts very briefly, in these various sources we find Foucault distancing himself from the Marxist understanding of the state as somehow being the servant of dominant class power, subordinating this question as merely a facet of a broader politics of subjectification in which the subject of government is ‘free’ but implicated in his or her own ‘subjectivation,’ or self-government. Thus the subject is constituted or “lead” to regulate his or her own “modes of action”, both as they might affect his or herself and his or her self’s possible range of actions of others. As part of this discussion, one finds Foucault making an argument that political life in liberalism is distinguished from earlier forms by a unique commitment to deterritorialization. Thus, if governmentality refers to the ‘conduct
of conduct,’ it achieves a certain hegemony in the seventeenth century in the desire to produce security by eliciting the sorts of behaviours that are deemed becoming of the idealized citizen of a territorial state. However, while this concern with territorial security never quite fades, in the nineteenth century it is subordinated more or less to a logic of government focused the statist goal of, simply, the “administration of things” or the “right disposition of things”.

One key point to take from this focus on disposing things correctly is that modern government is far more interested in divining tactics and strategies for the maintenance of a certain order than in specifying the particular ends of that order. As Foucault notes, the stakes of governmentality revolve around “problems” and “techniques” of government – indeed, these are the “only real space of political struggle and contestation.”

In IR theory, however, much of the work inspired by Foucault has focused on the ancillary concept of biopolitics, which many read as referring to the emergence of a specifically modern reflexivity of governmentality in relation to its own need for order and stability. Foucault himself sets the agenda for this argument by suggesting that modern liberal societies seek security not in the service of the state or any sovereign power or master but, rather, in the name of “the biological existence of the population” itself.

This theme of biopolitics has played large in Foucauldian IR, especially in the analysis of globalization and the transnationalization of security imperatives under conditions of relative interdependency. Julian Reid, for example, has provided an in depth study of the War on Terror on these grounds, citing emerging redundancies between the ‘homeland security’ strategies of various nation states as indicative of a kind of novel, hyperbolic transnationalization of the logic of biopolitics. Here, Reid shows that the defense of society in biopolitical security is legitimated by notions of what life is, and what it is for. Foucault, Reid suggests, believes that modern
liberalism reads human life as a somewhat unpredictable quantity, which must be managed if it is to be secure. As such, in the management of the aleatory, the rationality of modern government takes its cue from the science of military strategy.

As Reid suggests, Foucault took the entry of formal military strategy into the human sciences as a significant development. This is clear, for example, in his regard for Clausewitz’s teachings on logistics, or the manipulation and arrangement of forces on the battlefield. These principles bear a marked resemblance to the sorts of strategies for the arrangement of populations which soon thereafter came to be promoted by state governments. According to Reid’s Foucault then, the advent of the science of strategy also marks the entry of that science into modern power/knowledge relations as a “model discourse”, or “strategic principle from which all other areas of discourse take their cue”. The argument here then is that ‘War on Terror’ governmentality presupposes a kind of generalized tactics of logisticization and that the ideal of this logistical life also serves as a master imperative in terms of the self-understanding liberalism articulates in legitimizing its own defense. Moreover, liberalism is non-discriminating in terms of just who may be said to be a part of this life.

One can see a similar understanding of the hyperbolic nature of contemporary liberalism in a range of sources. Agamben, for example, suggests that the War on Terror marks a transformation of ‘normal politics’ today into a permanent and universal state of exception. Similarly, Hardt and Negri speak of a permanent state of exception, describing this as an episode in what they call modernity’s ‘civil war’. Global biopolitics, they suggest, is beholden to an “imperial humanitarian” ethic which frames its wars as necessary in “the interests of humanity as a whole”. Dean, too, has noted how the pervasiveness of ontologically nonspecific enemies has ruptured the very logic upon which the European Law of Nations was founded, replacing it with
a world order based on the logic of “international civil war”. In each of these accounts, the domination of the securitizing logic of biopolitics is said to encompass a globe-spanning regime of liberally imagined human life.

**The Marxist Critique**

This reading of the War on Terror as the expression of a kind of a global liberal logisticization or a hyperbolic biopolitics is controversial, however. One very significant response to this argument has issued recently from Marxist IR critics. Jan Selby, for example, has argued that Foucault’s core scholarly purpose was to disrupt liberal progressivism. As such, he was concerned with the “mechanisms and rationalities of governance and self-governance under conditions of formal freedom.”

According to this view then, authentically Foucauldian scholarship intentionally steers clear of contexts where such conditions of ‘formal freedom’ are not present, such as that of the international. More specifically, it steers clear of the domain of international relations, which is defined fundamentally by the prerogatives of state powers. Selby assures us that this is not to advocate a return to the sorts of naive unit-system analyses advocated by more realist approaches but, rather, to insist that we avoid at all costs any overstatement of the “unity, evenness and indivisibility” of the world order. Echoing Stephen Gill then, Selby argues that Foucault can be used to analyze the “how” of power relations, but not the “why.” More specifically, his point is that notions such as governmentality cannot be used to account for the “densely structured webs of social relations” that enshroud the world today, many of which were established under conditions of imperial rule and, as such, can hardly be said to count as relations of ‘formal freedom’. Approaching these phenomena from the question of “why” they exist, it is clear that they are not born of global biopolitics. Rather, asserts Selby, they are attributable to the
“ontological specificity” and “irreducibility” of the international. That is, they remind us that the international is not “coextensive with, or indistinguishable from, the domestic realm.”

While largely in agreement with Selby, Jonathan Joseph adds some useful nuances to the above line of argument. For Joseph, the key issue is rooted in this question of uneven development and the requirements of global capitalism to maintain a different set of governmental priorities in peripheral regions. Joseph accepts that the concept of governmentality is roughly commensurate with the trends towards deregulation and the retreat of state powers that are widely apparent in many social spheres today. Attendant to this, of course, has been the ascendance of neoliberal ideologies of economic government which have effected a remarkable shift in the locus of government away from government in the formal sense and ‘downwards’ towards the population in general. Today, therefore, we find governmentality scholarship dealing with questions of how the subject is increasingly called on to govern itself, and to act responsibly. In neoliberalism, we learn, “people are told to take charge of their own well-being and take rational decisions to avoid social problems like unemployment and poverty.”

These developments clearly have a great deal of energy behind them in the Western world, and serve as an important stage in the development of governmentality. What Joseph protests, however, is that this version of governmentality should be used to describe situations where far more disciplinary modes of power are present. Echoing Selby above, he argues that the point is not to deny that neoliberal capitalism is distinguished by its reliance on an intense and non-corporeal form of power but to suggest that this form of power is not ubiquitous in globalization. The all important question here then concerns the “conditions of possibility” that appropriately contextualize the emergence of such power. And here, just as with Selby, the answer lies in the logic of “geopolitics.”
Joseph’s solution to the methodological dilemma of applying governmentality to globalization is to suggest that Foucault’s understanding of the state actually works in two directions. On the one hand, we have Foucault’s classic understanding of state as a distraction from the essential business of studying power relations. That is, a reading of the state that emphasizes its total contingency. On the other, we have a reading more consistent with the anti-essentialism of some strains of contemporary Marxism. By way of evidence for this argument, Joseph cites from Foucault’s 1977-1978 lectures, *Security, Territory and Politics*:

The state is what must exist at the end of the process of rationalization of the art of government. What the intervention of raison d’État must arrive at is the state’s integrity, its completion, consolidation, and its reestablishment.\(^{24}\)

Given that Foucault made this comment in the context of a discussion of the origins of the logic of raison d’État, defining this as an early albeit internally focused form of governmentality, the merits of this quote as evidence for Joseph’s argument are shaky at best.\(^ {25}\) This point aside however, Joseph’s argument might simply be read as suggesting that an understanding of the state as an ontologically reliable locus of power allows for the construction of a supplementary theory of governmentality, which can then be set to work alongside that used to analyze the governance of subjectivation practiced in advanced western states. This *different* form of governmentality then is distinguished by the fact that it operates not so much through the self-rule of populations but, rather, through the enforcement of regimes over *states*. This move, suggests Joseph, makes for a stark contrast with the sorts of claims made in global biopolitics scholarship of the sort referred to above. For if a relatively free and self-governing civil society is one of the preconditions for the existence of governmentality then Foucauldian IR must surely
acknowledge that even if such society could be proven to exist, it would be “patchy and uneven” at best.26

By way of an example to support his argument, Joseph turns to the structural adjustment policies of the IMF in Africa. Joseph concedes that the “drive” to elicit global entrepreneurialism may be “real.” However, echoing previous contributions concerning the applicability of governmentality to contexts of classical imperialism from Hindess, and Larner and Walters, among others, Joseph sees the need for a methodological distinction between situations where governmentality emerges more through distributed modes of power, and situations where it is driven “from the outside”.27 This distinction is important because it suggests that the drive to governmentality can also encounter sites where conditions are such that its designs will fail. Thus we can identify the limits of the concept of governmentality itself and, as Joseph warns, these limits must surely haunt any effort to study ‘global governmentality’ which does not give proper regard for the uneven distribution of liberal values in societies around the world. The analysis here must thus return to the question of the state which is, at the end of the day, the “main source of governmentality,” and the “main promoter” of its various techniques.28

Joseph’s argument is exemplary insofar as it both offers a cogent overview of governmentality literature and shows how the question of uneven development requires theoretical innovation in governmentality scholarship. And it is indeed clear from his argument that there is a need to identify the institutions of the state both as playing an important role in effecting transnational governmental consensus but also, potentially, as an obstacle or a point of resistance to the same. What might be better clarified, however, is how the state might be thought of as a “source” of governmentality. This question raises the stakes in Joseph’s argument significantly, and not just from a Foucauldian perspective.29 For, as Bruff notes, there is also a
debate within Marxist IR on the extent to which social phenomena can be understood as autonomous or transcendent to society itself. If an institution is defined in wholly autonomous terms, then the society to which it corresponds is necessarily reduced to a mere agent of its power. For Bruff, however, such reductionism is common not just in traditional Marxist approaches, but also in much of the research inspired by Foucault. Claims for the legitimacy of such research are often staked on a purported “epistemological honesty” and the desire to avoid deterministic accounts of state power. Yet, says Bruff, these ontologies are actually quite totalizing for, in Foucault’s thinking, “power relations” are always in the final instance “the singular source of all human practice.” To wit, if power is ‘everywhere’ then it is difficult to pose the question of unevenness, for the particular causes of any such unevenness, such as the obstruction potentially presented by legacy modalities of power, are all smoothed over as ubiquitous power relations.

In this sense, Bruff shares with Selby and Joseph a concern that Foucauldian research in IR asserts an asserting uncompromising framework of the social and tends to elide the particular in human practice. This is not an argument that politics takes place in any number of constitutive contexts but, rather, it is to say that there is a “complexity and richness” in human practice which a generalized ontology of power cannot hope to capture. This complexity is grounded in the fact that, throughout history, human life has had a continuous and intimate relationship with the question of how its basic material needs should be met. As Bruff notes, echoing Gramsci, “human social practice is also conditioned by the values, norms and beliefs that comprise any conception of how to organize production,” including, potentially, a range of “pre-capitalist” sources. Our current capitalist regime is thus inevitably founded on a range of preexisting social structures which must be somehow accommodated or negotiated. In this sense, while
anchoring his account firmly in materialism, Bruff allows for the interplay of ideological traces from a range of historical modalities of production in the constitution of the ‘common sense’ of contemporary power. Understood as orientations or dispositions towards production then, this notion of common sense allows for a diversity of political processes while simultaneously anchoring them in an overall development of global capitalism.

As we shall see, however, Bruff’s description of the “epistemological austerity” of the Foucauldian approach is problematic, based as it is on a highly selective reading of Foucault’s arguments about power which completely ignores Foucault’s focus on the immanence of power to processes of social constitution, and vice-versa. Power, as such, may be “everywhere” but it is never in a position of exteriority, whether this exteriority be grounded in a transhistorical logic of production or otherwise. For our immediate purposes, however, Bruff’s work is useful for its suggestion of the kind of metric of power that Marxist IR requires of Foucauldian analysis.

While Selby and Joseph do not venture so explicitly into this argument, they do underscore the point that governmentality qua ontology of power is overly reductive. Otherwise expressed, they are anxious that governmentality cannot be scaled without reference to particular agencies of power that explain why world order develops unevenly. For his part, Bruff’s work suggests that this anxiety also operates at a more meta-theoretical level. Foucauldian ontology is condemned to overlook the significance of basic material unevenness between societies and the various and particular “lived realities” of those societies because it cannot appraise the human being as anything other than a passive “vehicle for power relations.”

**The Communitarian Critique**

If the critique of Foucauldian IR presented in the last sub-section was premised on the idea that Foucauldian ontology is ignorant of the importance of power differentials in the
reproduction of globalization, and necessarily so because of its tendency to divorce regimes of power/knowledge from the messy contexts of production and resistance which yield them, David Chandler seems a little more forgiving of the idea that we can confidently discuss globalization as a globally emergent regime of norms and values. This said, like the Marxists, he is basically sceptical that this regime would best be referred to as a form of liberalism. For despite the proclivity of Foucauldian IR theorists to obsess over the imperialisms hidden in liberalism’s global cosmopolitan aspirations, we should recognize that efforts to bring these aspirations to fruition have yet to achieve any real success. These efforts fail, suggests Chandler, neither because of the intractability of locally specific manifestations of governmentality nor because of the presence of counter-governmental resistances. Rather, as we shall see, they fail for a reason that is completely undetectable within the methodological parameters of global governmentality theory.

Before we detail Chandler’s assessment of Foucauldian IR, it may be useful briefly to take stock of the reasoning behind his more general scepticism of theories of “global civil society.”

For Chandler, the principle dilemma of the communicative approach to global civil society theorizing is that it imagines a global ‘space’ which encapsulates an emerging and transnationally articulated regime of ‘superterritorial’ values. These values, such as respect for basic human rights and environmental security, are distinguished by the fact that they are not attached to the interests of traditional territorial state sovereignty, thereby transcending the limits of ‘territorial space’. What has enabled this new space? Advocates of the space of global society often cite transformations in media technology. Inspired, we imagine, by the advent of global television networks, the Internet, and 24-hour news media coverage, these theorists explore the plausibility of a transformed global consciousness.
Chandler casts a wide net in identifying a spectrum of thinkers who buy into one or another version of this notion, grouping together cosmopolitan theorists such as Mary Kaldor with more radical critics like William Connolly and the ‘Multitude’-peddling Hardt and Negri. He cites the Critical Geopolitics scholar Gearóid Ó Tuathail, for example, who argues that “global space becomes political space. Being there live is everything. The local is instantly global, the distant immediately closes. Place-specific struggles become global televisual experiences.”

Here, suggests Chandler, we find the idea of a revolution in communications technologies linked explicitly to what is described, significantly, as a “non-governmental space that comprises many hundreds of thousands of more-or-less self-directing ways of life.”

To this general point, Chandler raises no significant objections. There is, to him, nothing new in the observation that social and economic interactions take places between diverse communities outside of the realm of formal government. What does raise his ire, however, is that evangelists of this transnational consciousness suggest that we also find political relations being forged between these diverse communities.

While accepting that its various contributors do not all frame their argument the same way, Chandler nevertheless suggests that global civil society theorists tend to posit in their object of study an essential political commitment to the overcoming of the traditional territorial state model of citizenship in favor of a transnational or “non-exclusivist” model. In this way, global civil society theorists belie their own normative assumption that such a citizenship would necessarily constitute the emergence of a globally oriented ethics and the rejection of ideological dogmatism. The ability of such a citizenry to transcend “instrumentality and competing interests” would be facilitated however not so much by the fact that such citizens would all seek ‘good causes’ but, as Chandler cites Habermas, by the fact that they would pursue a diversity of causes.
in an arena founded on “discursive designs” themselves modelled on an “egalitarian, open form of organization.” In this sense, the thesis of global civil society is an idealized interpretation, based on a “framework of communicative dialogue”, of what ‘actually existing’ global civil society must necessarily be in order for it to exist at all.

To a degree then, Chandler’s argument amounts to a concern that global civil society scholarship idealizes its object of study, immunizing it from the contaminating influence of any sort of power relations. Chandler’s more emphatic critique, however, is that global civil society jumps far too quickly to the analysis of the moral reasoning of this object of study, before having made any real effort to provide evidence to support claims of its actual existence. In short, the thesis “relies on claims about the communicative interaction of global civic actors which have little connection to reality.” Indeed, its advocates appear almost to accept this, noting that there is little actual connectivity between the great majority of these actors. Thus scholars like William Connolly can simultaneously claim that the global civil space is possessed of a “thick political culture” while insisting that it is a completely de-centred phenomena, composed of “diverse constituencies” acting in networks of “multidimensional connections.” For Chandler, this sort of argumentation is just too much, belying a preference for the “fictional” and for “academic verbiage” over the serious work of proving that a culture of global civil society exists at all.

Following this line of critique, Chandler has more recently turned his attention to the “biopolitical approach” in IR. Focused primarily on the sorts of imperial biopolitics arguments outlined earlier, he notes that these arguments tend to engage in a naïve reading of the sorts of cosmopolitan discourses just discussed. Taking seriously the claims of global civil society theorists concerning the enablement of “a new progressive liberal subject” which arises “from below,” the global biopolitics critique is anxious that this argument runs the risk also of
uncritically legitimating “new totalizing mechanisms of intervention and regulation from above.” Thus, despite their well-meaning intentions, the global civil society movement blurs the line between security and development, investing a new global “super-sovereign” imperative to which older territorial sovereignties may become subordinated. Chandler cites scholarship from Reid, discussed above, as an exemplar of this sort of discourse, but he also identifies Duffield, Jabri, and Douzinas.

Chandler’s problem with this line of argumentation is somewhat predictable given our discussion of his earlier work; just as the global cosmopolitan theorists derive their object of study more from their own normative aspirations than from the empirical evidence, so too the global biopolitics approach seems to identify the values of this same non-existent movement as its principle foe. Thus, as he notes, it is one thing to suggest that the “unitary assumptions” of the modern liberal democratic process have been undermined by social processes associated with globalization but it is another entirely to claim that “new post-territorial forms of political community have been constructed in their stead.” Chandler concedes that such a breakdown in narrowly statist values may indeed be underway. He attributes this, however, not so much to an emergent or immanent multitudinal resistance enabled by a post-territorial sphere of communication. Rather, for Chandler, the crisis of political representation has been brought on by an altogether more pernicious development, the “attenuation of political contestation.” In this sense, Chandler does appear to accept one of the basic premises of global civil society and biopolitical research in IR. Namely, that globalization has eroded state power, producing a democratic deficit. Yet he insists that this erosion has only been made possible because of a simultaneous ‘emptying out’ of the political.
Significant numbers of liberal citizens are today refusing to participate in the traditional institutions of politics. This is happening, Chandler suggests, not because we are in a transitional moment in the development of a new global political horizon but, more simply, and more worryingly, because their “political elites” have been unable to “create projects of political meaning, able to cohere their societies or to offer a program of shared values.”

Chandler’s argument here, it should be noted, echoes the despondent tones of Robert Putnam’s well-known critique of the decline of American political life, *Bowling Alone.* Here Putnam argues that contemporary capitalism has produced an intensification of individualism in American society, thereby eroding the willingness of the population to engage effectively in the practices of dutiful citizenship. To effect this argument, Putnam provides extensive data to suggest that Americans are spending less time engaged in a range of areas of social activity: eating fewer dinners together as families, joining fewer clubs and societies, signing fewer petitions, etc. These are the precise sorts of activities that once enthralled Alexis de Tocqueville and represented, to him, the source of common identity that gave a tremendous vibrancy to American democratic life. Today, however, for Putnam, “social capital” is declining in the United States.

Like Putnam, Chandler seems to feel the problem of contemporary politics is that it is afflicted with a certain “hollowing out” of the source of its traditional strength, a population of legitimizing subjects bound together by “cohering values and sentiments.” To ignore this basic nature of ‘the problem’ is to open up the possibility of its tragic reproduction at a more global level:

Without the need to worry about the constitutive relationship between government (sovereign) and citizen, political community becomes entirely abstract. There is no longer any need to formulate or win adherence to a political program and to attempt to challenge or overcome sectional or parochial interests.
Framed this way, it is very easy to sympathize with Chandler’s reading of the biopolitical approach. Far from producing Reid’s effervescent and imperialistic liberalism then, ready to wage a universal war “over ways of life itself,” we find only an epidemic of mass passivity or 'bowling alone'. In this sense, global governmentality theorization is grounded in an empirically incorrect reading of the basic problem of contemporary liberal politics and, consequently, suffers from a hopelessly naive outlook for the possibility of its resolution. Yet, as we shall see in the next section, whereas the Marxists appear to read Foucault’s theory of the subject as a kind of uncompromising structuralism, Chandler offers a reading of global biopolitics which radically plays down just how 'actively' populations participate in their political (and economic) worlds.

For Foucault, political legitimacy is never solely a matter of the expression of an intentional allegiance. Rather, it must also be a matter of the constitutive power of government. To speak of a ‘crisis’ of legitimacy then is not to speak of a kind of syndrome of mass passivity but, rather, a behaviour that has been elicited or produced in a population. This distinction in our analysis is crucial because it points to a fairly different understanding not only of the role of social power in effecting the crisis of the political but also, moreover, what is to be done about it. Whereas for Chandler the solution is to return somehow to traditional state power as the grounds for a legitimate and efficacious community, biopolitical theory finds the avenue of instrumental legitimacy rather narrow and even dangerous.

**Governmentality Revisited**

The critiques of Foucauldian IR outlined above do make for a welcome contribution to ongoing debate concerning the applicability of terms like governmentality and biopolitics to contemporary world politics. By challenging the applicability of these terms, they suggest that
further attention be directed to the ‘actually existing’ sites of globalization to see not simply whether these terms have an empirical fit but also how they might, if necessary, be modified to satisfy the complaints of these critics. Yet while empirical analysis is surely necessary, it is also important to be clear about how Foucault used these terms and, more importantly, why. At its most basic, of course, Foucault’s methods were motivated by a desire to be done with such notions as social structure and atomistic agency. Borrowing from Nietzsche, he advocated a method of “effective history” which would render contingent “everything considered immortal in man.”

Lavin clarifies the spirit of this method, suggesting that it is “predicated upon the idea that subjects are neither the unmediated expression of existing conditions nor atomistic autonomous beings independent from their conditions.” By way of a rebuttal to the critics of global governmentality then, the following remarks constitute a reading of Foucault’s understanding of genealogy with a view to showcasing two overlooked aspects of the global governmentality thesis. On the one hand, I hope to show that despite the claims of Selby, Joseph and Bruff, there is much more to global governmentality than a totalizing discourse of ubiquitous power that elides the particular in globalization. Indeed, as I shall argue, Foucault is very clear in his descriptions of his model of power that nothing is ever finally determined by power. On the other hand, in response to Chandler’s lament that the global governmentality thesis fails squarely on account of its poor empirical grip on the sorry state of liberal politics today, I suggest that neoliberal economic governmentality labours vigorously on the production of subjects of economic responsibility. To wit, while Chandler finds that the major problem of politics today is a refusal of political responsibility, this is not to suggest for a minute that governmentality has no purchase on this phenomena.
If Foucault’s work can be said to have a coherency or unity, he expressed this in his own words as an abiding concern with the problem of the “effects of power and the production of truth.” Less clear, however, are the precise parameters of his understanding of the nature of this relationship between power and truth. Foucault himself eschewed the ideal of a “general theory of what power is.” Moreover, there were breaks and disjunctures in the rhetoric Foucault used to describe power. One such break is said to have occurred in 1977, for example, when Foucault appears to shift away from the register of the model of war to describe power relations towards the register of government. Nevertheless, certain strains of Foucault’s understanding of power remain consistent throughout his works. Above all else, it seems, his theory of power was linked to a critique of the western ontology of the subject which, he felt, immobilized the flexibility of political life. Traditional western models of politics, he complained, tend to treat power as a “commodity” that would wield or be possessed by a “phenomenological” subject. This understanding of the subject’s relation to power introduces a problem, however, insofar as it portrays power as pure instrumentality. That is, it portrays power in terms of “a unique source of sovereignty,” whether this be expressed in terms of ‘powerful individuals’ or the social structures which might be derived as constraining them, thereby possibly ignoring other relevant facets of power.

Crucially, then, Foucault was motivated by a concern that we might overlook the various ways in which power can create regimes of ‘subjectification’, directing the will of the subject in different historical contexts. However, it should be noted, a further crucial aspect of Foucault’s definition of power is that it pertains only to situations where a certain margin of freedom can be identified. Power is exercised, he notes, “only over free subjects”. That is, for power to be exercised, the subject must be presented with a situation “in which several kinds of conduct,
several ways of reacting and modes of behaviour are available.”\textsuperscript{58} Importantly, the threshold for freedom here is quite low. Thus, in the abstract at least, the subject of power is the antonym of the chained-up slave, for example, who has no possibility of mobility or escape. We see then that, for Foucault, power is not a unilateral ‘creation’ of a subject but, rather, a solicitation of the self who then “turns him- or herself into a subject.”\textsuperscript{59}

This last is an especially important point considering the argument outlined by Bruff who, as noted above, claims that Foucault posits ‘power’ as the “singular source of all human practice”. To the contrary, Foucault clearly wants to reserve a sense in which there is something like a ‘self’ that exists prior to the subject. Following Nietzsche, for example, Foucault explicitly identifies the human body as a material level or plane upon which power has to operate.\textsuperscript{60} Indeed, for Kelly, this suggests that Foucault is faithful to an ontology of the subject where “it is the power of our sub-individual forces which are at stake: their prior relations to one another are acted upon from without.”\textsuperscript{61} Thus we might recognize in Foucault what Bruff overlooks. Namely, that Foucault intended this sort of theorization of the relation between the subject and power as a corrective to accounts that end up posing power relations as completely autonomous from human agency. For Foucault, one's 'free' choice is not always really power's choice. As Foucault states, power exists only where there is the potential for a resistance. Thus \textbf{In this sense}, a certain freedom, capacity for resistance, or the potential for doing otherwise than power might intend, “comes first.”\textsuperscript{62}

A major point of consistency of Foucault’s understanding of the subject thus coheres around this idea that subjectivity is elicited by power but is not exclusively dependent upon it. Yet, to the extent that the body is ‘free’ it is also a terrain of power. Indeed, Foucault goes so far as to regard the body as something like a battlefield for clashing forces of truth which struggle
over its domination. Foucault turns to the language of war to explain the dynamic relationship between truth and the body. In a piece that focuses heavily on the role of the body in the creation of subjectivity, Foucault argues that humanity “installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination.” This argument, which Foucault terms “Nietzsche’s hypothesis,” is in fact an inverted articulation of Clausewitz’s famous aphorism that war is the continuation of politics by other means. Politics is not literally the extension of war, however. The point, says Foucault, is that the genealogist should seek to explain power in terms of “the entry of forces.” Indeed, this echoes one of Clausewitz’s major arguments, which was that a battle could never be resolved in a purely dialectical fashion. In a sense, for Clausewitz, there was no such thing as a total victory in a military conflict. The clash of forces necessarily contends with certain limits – political constraints, for example - which prevent a straightforward dialectic between the armies taking place. Certainly in the abstract one could imagine the idea of war as an “act of force” to which there is “no logical limit,” but in the warp and woof of real world events and politics, the ideal of such a ‘pure’ war inevitably fragments.

As no one side ever achieves pure victory in war then, no one force or power ever achieves complete dominion over the body. War then is simply a model or abstract schematic for the operation of power. In this sense, as Kelly has usefully shown, Foucault’s rhetorical commitment to the idea of war as a model of power was weak. The equation of power to war, or games,

was never taken up by Foucault as a formal model at all, but rather only a metaphor Foucault uses tentatively, whereas government actually is an available model for the operation of power which Foucault takes up decisively.
Thus, if the modelling of power on war is simply one formulation of Foucault’s understanding of the abstract relationship between the subject and power, the more concrete formulation of this relationship is the theory of government to which Foucault would devote much attention in the last years of the 1970s. This is consistent, for example, with Colin Gordon’s argument that Foucault construes the term ‘government’ in at least two ways. On the one hand, we have a “narrow sense,” which is the most commonly used understanding of the term, referring to the historical emergence of a type of governmental rationality which displaces the model of sovereign power and law. On the other hand, however, we have a ‘wide’ sense of the term which, in Foucault’s words, refers to “the way in which one conducts the conduct of men” and constitutes “an analytical grid for these relations of power.” Here then, governmentality refers to any relationship of power to conduct. Indeed, Foucault suggests that governmentality thus understood is valid for “the analysis of ways of conducting the conduct of mad people, patients, delinquents, and children.” Moreover, as he goes on, it may also be useful for addressing phenomena such as “economic policy” or “the management of a whole social body.”

The wide definition of governmentality thus suggests, simply, that the intentionality of power is immanent to diverse and reversible sites and scales of social interaction. Does this suggest that we are all ‘free’ in those sites and scales? As we have discussed, this is clearly implied to some extent in Foucault’s early modelling of governmentality on war. Yet even here there is no suggestion that we are all equals in power's regime. As Foucault wrote in 1977, "in so far as power relations are an unequal and relatively stable relation of forces, its clear that this implies an above and a below, a difference in potentials.” Returning to Selby and Joseph’s lament about the applicability of governmentality to global relations then, we see that their argument is only partially accurate. While governmentality as a theory of liberal rationality may
be limited to western societies, as they argue, governmentality as a theory of power surely is not. To wit, Foucault argues that, in terms of scale of application, governmentality is “not confined by definition to a precise domain determined by a sector of the scale, but should be considered simply as a point of view, a method of decipherment which may be valid for the whole scale, whatever its size.”

Certainly there is a temptation, as Legg has noted in an insightful critique of Sassen, among others, for one to resinscribe a certain structuralism in applying ontologies inspired by Foucault to globalization. Yet, as Legg suggests, Foucault was not a particularly structuralist thinker. Foucault used terms like ‘assemblage’ and, more particularly ‘dispositif,’ to evoke specific deterritorializations and reterritorializations of power:

If one argues that territorialisation goes beyond simply establishing borders to dictating legitimate sovereignty within scales attributed to those borders, we can also consider assemblages to simultaneously be engaged in processes of re-, and de-, scaling of space through complex geographical governmentality.

These assemblages are dynamic, shifting and can overlap, allowing us to consider, for example, the governmentality of phenomena such as imperialism, or internationalism, or trafficking. But, more importantly, in distinction to Sassen’s deliberately neutered version of the term, they are assemblages of power. Taking power seriously then, Legg summarizes global governmentality as the study of “historically specific experiences, effects and affects of scale and the different forces of capital through which they are produced.

Interestingly, by invoking the term ‘capital’ here, Legg suggests that we might press a little further with the idea that governmentality in the narrow sense is also somehow ‘global’. This is particularly apposite in relation to Chandler’s critique of the contemporary state of liberalism. To be sure, Chandler identifies a definite point of vulnerability in the global
governmentality thesis vis-a-vis governmental rationality per se. To cite Neumann & Sending, for example:

liberalism is a particular logic of governing – a form of power that is characteristic of modern society, which operates indirectly by shaping and fostering autonomous and responsible individuals.\(^7\)

Yet the important question here is what possible basis there can be for the assertion of an autonomous and responsible individual of liberalism when, as Chandler suggests, the evidence seems to point, if anything, to liberalism’s ‘hollowing out’? For a possible answer this question, we might well turn our attention back to the realm of biopolitics and, more explicitly, to Foucault’s linkage of biopolitics to the economic anthropology of capitalism. Foucault’s limited commentary on the significance of economic rationality has not received very much attention in IR. Some, like Jessop, have noted however that Foucault cultivated an active curiosity about how the discrete mechanisms and practices of modern social life became subject to a “strategic codification” and “consolidation” under the banner of a globalized political economy.\(^7\) This in fact is clearly Foucault’s position in the 1978-1979 lectures wherein he discusses the eventual displacement of the logic of raison d’État, with its unlimited breadth of internal objectives vis-à-vis the population, by what he refers to as “a new type of global calculation.”\(^7\) That is, a certain displacement of the logic of the state augured by the advent of political economy, or the discovery of the market as a site of ‘veridiction’ of the nature of man.\(^8\)

While much might be gleaned from these remarks on the globalizing tendencies of neoliberal economic discourse, what is perhaps more relevant in relation to Chandler's argument is the way in which Foucault also alludes in these comments to the emergence of an ideal subject of economic government. Liberal government, he advises us, is not a directly determined
“consequence” of the emergence of the idea of the market. Yet early liberalism is to a significant degree an effect of the notion of the market, insofar as it is through the concept of the market and its intrinsically economic subject, *homo oeconomicus*, that a certain domain of activity is first identified wherein the state would seek to avoid intervention if its goal of achieving “the internal rule of maximum economy” is to be achieved. It is thought that the market has a capacity to regulate itself, in freedom, and in a manner far more complementary to man's nature as an economic creature. In this sense, the rationality of early liberal government is grounded in the idea that while the state must be economically powerful, its ability to access this power is necessarily conditional upon a certain respect for this capacity of the market. Thus Foucault argues that the concept of the market comes to serve as a central “principle and method of the rationalization of the exercise of government.”

Yet, if early Liberalism emerges in a recognition of the internal limits of formal government, this is not to say that what liberalism desires is an overall diminishment of government. To the contrary, liberal government is subsequently taken up as a question of individual responsibility. As Foucault notes, by the middle of the nineteenth century the question of governmental regulation had been reframed somewhat, from the pure laissez-faire of the original Classical Liberals to a more interventionist stance. Citing from the German ‘Ordo-liberal’ political economist Röpke, writing in 1950, for example, we learn that economic liberalism has become a question of “shifting the centre of gravity of governmental action downwards.” The Ordoliberals were broadly opposed to state interventionism and strongly in favor of letting the price mechanism direct the economy. That said, they rejected the laissez-faire naturalism of the Classical Liberals. To the Ordoliberals, man was not, therefore, as imagined in the eighteenth-century, a natural *homo oeconomicus* best left to his own devices, but a form of
life that must be incited, through social policy, to recognize a certain responsibility to engage in risk-taking and entrepreneurialism.

One might consider here, too, the subject posed in the more American brand of neoliberalism, associated with Milton Freedman and the Chicago School. Where the Ordoliberalists posited a separation between the realms of social and economic activity, which could be bridged through the inculcation of an entrepreneurial spirit, the American neoliberals rejected this separation, narrating the social as an economic sphere in the first instance. From this point of view, every form of human activity becomes readable as an essentially economic pursuit. Or, that is, any activity carried out in the pursuit of some expected future income. Central here is the theory of human capital, or the idea that all labour, including wage-labour, can be understood as a voluntary investment or entrepreneurial activity carried out in the individual pursuit of surplus value. Yet if in the American approach the players in the market are all understood to have a certain tendency to self-govern, this is not to say government has nothing to do. Even here, government must attend to the "rules of the game." The purpose of the 'law' is to make sure the game is distributed throughout society and played, allowing everyone in the society to behave as rationally as possible. Government acts on the market, or "market milieu," to make this happen. This is important for, as Foucault tells us, it is not just "any behaviour whatsoever" which counts as economic behaviour. Rather, the definition of homo oeconomicus here is limited to aspects of human behaviour which might be subject to these environmental interventions. Or, that is, subject to government.

To be clear then, Foucault is arguing that the responsibility of the neoliberal subject - whether in the German or the American formulation - is to bring itself to labour in a self-enterprising fashion. As he notes, however, homo oeconomicus in neoliberalism is an ideal type
which must be produced in actuality. On the one hand, he is someone who "accepts reality". Yet, on the other, homo oeconomicus designates “the abstract, ideal purely economic point that inhabits the dense, full, and complex reality of civil society.” How does actually existing capitalism work to produce this subject? How might this ideal type relate to the actual practices of capitalism? Foucault does not tell us much. Certainly we can see in Foucault an understanding of why ‘biopower’ is important for capitalism:

This bio-power was without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism: the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes.

Here Foucault clearly indicates capitalism’s desire to develop an ideal subject. Yet what is perhaps not clear here are the biopolitical techniques themselves, [which is why F is not an identity theorist].

As Jason Read has recently suggested, Foucault’s Birth of Biopolitics only hints at neoliberalism’s dominance as a mode of subjection, or a “technology of the self.” Even the well-known exponents of the more laissez-faire American anarcholiberalism, for example, insist that there must be a certain effort or labour on the part of policymakers to ensure that the market is instilling not only the habits of “practice” of the ideally calculative subject but also a certain sense of “responsibility” towards these ends. Consider this recent observation by Becker in relation to the recent US subprime mortgage market meltdown:

An important foundation of the philosophy behind the arguments for private enterprise, free economies, and free societies more generally, is that these societies rely on and require individual decision-making and responsibility.
If, as Foucault suggests, American neoliberalism has a tendency to think in terms of manipulation of environmental conditions (enticements, disincentives, etc.), one can clearly see in Becker an appreciation of the salutary effect such manipulations might have on the subject over time. The subject he desires does not exist naturally but, rather, is one who must repetitively be brought back to the “various mental and physical capacities” demanded of him by the market.92

Importantly then, by moving the question of governmentality in this direction, Foucault is calling our attention to forces of subjectivation which, while rarely discussed in IR, are commonly addressed in what Lavin has termed “postliberal economics.”93 Asking the question “who responds to global capital?” Lavin borrows from Hardt and Negri to suggest that “the dispersed mode of production corresponding to an increasingly deterritorialized network of finance capital and immaterial commodities informs a subjectivity that is dispersed and lacking in traditional sovereignty.”94 For Read, such thinking bespeaks a “turn to production” in our theorization of capitalism. By this, Read intends to suggest a broader interpretation than Marx’s strictly economistic production. This is, in fact, “an expansive ontology of production” which is both biopolitical, insofar as it looks at the historical transformation of capitalist production to encompass language, subjectivity, affects, and desire, all of which are imaginably vital to the sorts of discipline that Becker would see instilled in the subject, and ontological, insofar as the transformation in production has the potential in turn to transform not just things but relations and subjects.95

In terms of this biopolitical dimension then, the important move made by Hardt and Negri is that they identify a “historical transformation” in the place of life in sustaining capitalism. They use such terms as the ‘social factory’ to suggest the difficulty today in
distinguish between the sphere of production as classically understood, based on the simple buying and selling of labour and commodities, and the reproduction of society broadly speaking. Labour today is not limited to the factory or the specific place of work (the ‘job’) but extends out into any area of society that can be recruited into the production of value. In short, it describes any form of activity that arranges social life. For Negri then, “production and society have become one and the same thing.” Or, in a more recent framing,

Life is no longer produced in the cycles of reproduction that are subordinated to the working day; on the contrary, life is what infuses and dominates all production. In fact, the value of labour and production is determined deep in the viscer of life.

Thus ‘late’ or ‘postmodern’ capitalism, as it is sometimes referred, seems to have made all aspects of life fair game for commodification. As such, given that all life is now ‘in capitalism,’ so to speak, it is no longer reasonable to talk about merely passive or ‘docilized’ bodies – we have to talk about continuously self-governing bodies. Thus the significance of grounding our account of contemporary power in the realm of ‘affect’, or desire, is clear:

The excess of value is determined today in the affects, in the bodies crisscrossed by knowledge, in the intelligence of the mind, and in the sheer power to act.

Affect is thus the main stake of the game, insofar as the market relies on a metric of responsibility in judging the individual both on the extent to which he may wish to become an entrepreneur and the extent to which he can successfully lead others to desire the consumption of certain goods and services. More critically, however, we see how the normalization of this metric may serve to elide the inequality and exploitative relations of power which capitalism actually presents. To wit, one’s failure to desire becomes the basis of the accusation of irresponsibility.
Against Chandler’s dismissive reading of global governmentality then, we see discussed in Foucault’s writings on the ascent of neoliberal economic mentality a rationality of self-government in which it is very hard to recognize anything like a hyperbolic cosmopolitanism. Rather, we see a concern with an emerging form of economic rationality, and a way of imagining human life, all as a “point of departure” for an understanding of “the general framework of biopolitics.” In this sense, it appears that Foucault intended his account of liberalism as an important nuance to the question of biopolitics, or the politics pertaining to the fact of the ‘biological existence of the population’. To modify Reid’s argument somewhat, if biopolitics concerns the legitimization of politics through a definition of what human life is and what it is for, it seems for Foucault that liberalism’s answer to these questions is rooted firmly in economic thinking.

Chandler, of course, might reject this reading of liberalism as having very little in common with what passes as biopolitical research in IR theory or the field of Security Studies, but it is much harder to engineer from this the broader claim that Foucault would have little or nothing to say about the ‘crisis’ of contemporary liberalism. A principle foundation of Foucault’s approach to power is that it only ‘holds good’ to the extent that it “induces pleasure.” The contribution of Birth of Biopolitics is that it demonstrates how discourses of neoliberal economics imagine the market as a technology of power which does just that! In this sense, Foucault opens the door to the kind of ‘post-liberal’ economic analysis advocated by Lavin, above. In drawing our attention to neoliberalism’s generalized metric of entrepreneurial responsibility, Foucault brings into relief the possibility that the ‘post-political’ crisis that so upsets critics like Chandler and Putnam might plausibly be explained by the emergence of relations of biopolitical capitalism, and not merely norms of passive individualism and selfish
consumerism. Certainly it may be fair to talk about a ‘crisis’, as indeed Foucault does, but this is a crisis which governmentality already understands quite well. For the risk-seeking life of the entrepreneur generates costs which are inextricably linked to neoliberalism’s “consciousness of crisis.”¹⁰¹ Such costs are something to be managed, to be sure, for governmentality understands all too well how, left unmanaged, the obsessions of entrepreneurial life, or the need to “live dangerously,” will occasionally spill over into problems.¹⁰² But to the extent they are acknowledged, such problems have little to do with a passive subject. To the contrary, they are simply externalities which must, when necessary, be managed on the margins as costs of “manufacturing freedom.”¹⁰³

Conclusion

In governmentality, the dualisms of more structuralist approaches tend to blur into each other; there is no clean distinction between knowledge and power, between politics and economics, the sovereign and non-sovereign, or the domestic and the international. The ‘governing’ agents of power are caught up in the same relations of truth as the subjects. Rejecting the categories both of the self-contained liberal subject and the passive victim of repression, Foucault posed a subject that was at once both situated within power and responsible for its reproduction. Critics of global biopolitics seem to ignore this centrally important aspect of the spirit of Foucault’s work.

Marxists, on the one hand, claim that Foucault was only interested in studying a context of domestic freedom and that therefore he cannot be ‘scaled’ to address the vicissitudes of international relations. In doing so, however, they miss a core political thrust of Foucault’s method. That is, rather than posing a subject that was always and everywhere somehow an
automaton of power, he understood that subjectification was a process of warlike complexity that would vary according to prevailing conditions. Chandler, on the other hand, posits a passive and politically irresponsible individual as a foil for the critique of global governmentality without seriously engaging with the ontological foundations of that critique. As such, Chandler misses a plausible alternative diagnosis of the modern malaise. Foucault only hints at this in Birth of Biopolitics, but he clearly wants to suggest within neoliberal governmentality’s rhetoric of laissez-faire we can see the legitimation of a series of market-based technologies for the production of a very active subject indeed. A subject, that is, whose first responsibility is to the reproduction of itself as the rational, capital-bearing subject of homo oeconomicus. Otherwise expressed, a subject who accepts that the “rules of the game” oblige him to commit forcefully to the improvement of his own human capital and position in the market.

In sum then, we have a theory of power which accepts the particularity of context and a theory of the subject whose active self-government guarantees the reproduction of power. These two key facets of the global governmentality thesis attest to the fact that the biopolitical approach does not hope for a delimited or universal truth about the globalization of government. Global neoliberal governmentality obviously does not, and cannot, work on a truly global population. Yet, as Lemke observes:

Governmentality construes neoliberalism not just as ideological rhetoric, as a political-economic reality, or as a practical antihumanism, but above all as a political project that endeavors to create a social reality that it suggests already exists.¹⁰⁴

Importantly then, governmentality is a method of inquiry in which allows us on the one hand to understand the narrow, strategic vision of a governmental rationality along with the wider set of practices and intimate mechanisms of power that conspire in effecting this strategy.
Like Neumann and Sending then, we may acknowledge that the idea of a global governmentality “cannot be taken uncritically from Foucault’s writings.” Yet while it might be argued, with Selby, that we ought not simply ‘port’ Foucault over to the study of “the international,” this is not to say that his model of discursive power has no relevance to the study of the actually existing scales and assemblages of power in today’s world politics. Governmentality, suggest Neumann and Sending, augured a “new mode of objectification” which emerged as a necessary “politico-epistemic” response to the power of the discourse of political economy. In the context of a thickening set of global relations, however, it may now be possible to speak of:

a global system of indirect forms of power that operates to guide, shape and foster specific types of not only states, but also other polities, as well as individuals. It sets up standards of behaviour for individuals and models of institutions to be implemented and followed by all good members of the international community.

Thus, notwithstanding the important and helpful critiques of global governmentality addressed in this paper, it remains difficult to read our time either in terms of an overarching struggle between imperial oppressor and its subject or in terms of a simple ‘hollowing’ of the will of the responsible subject of politics. As the submissions by Rosenow and Monokha elsewhere in this issue attest, evidence of the embeddedness of governmentality in a thickening set transnational social relations can be observed in a diversity of issue areas. But the power of governmentality is perhaps nowhere more explicitly visible than in contemporary capitalism’s strategy of producing crisis subjectivity.

This is perhaps the most cautionary point for the Marxists and for Chandler. The emergence of a set of de facto obligations for populations to perform as homo oeconomicus bespeaks the pre-eminence of a radically self-governing subjectivity in contemporary capitalism.
Can we say this subject is a ubiquitous or globally-scaled phenomenon? As Neumann and Sending remind us, conceptions such as ‘global’ and ‘international’ are only useful to the extent that we keep in mind their nature as virtual potentials; they are “ideal-typical” and “forged out of stuff which is particular to a specific time and a specific space.” However, by drawing our attention to the entrepreneurial genealogy of neoliberal government, Foucauldian IR suggests how institutions of power might both idealize a global population as homo oeconomicus and develop strategies to recruit that population in its own self-governance. What are the technologies of the self that might labour today to bring the subject of this project into existence? And what obstacles might this project encounter? By asking these questions, the critique of capitalism as biopolitics aims to explore just how mutually interdependent world order and capitalist imagination are today.

Endnotes

1 A very early attempt at the argument of this paper was first presented at a panel entitled *The Uses of Global Governmentality*, at the 33rd Annual Conference of the British International Studies Association, University of Exeter, December 13-17, 2008. My thanks to David Chandler for organizing that panel and inviting the helpful debate that took place that day.
6 For example, considerations of economic ideology make little if any appearance in such commonly cited works as Julian Reid, *The Biopolitics of the War on Terror; Life Struggles, Liberal Modernity, and the Defence of Logistical Societies* (Manchester: Manchester University


9 Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in Power, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000), p. 343. For discussion of the distinction between subjectification (also known, more simply, as subjection) and the more active, self-governing subjectivation see Mark Kelly, The Political Philosophy of Michel Foucault (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 87-89.


13 Reid, The Biopolitics of the War on Terror; Life Struggles, Liberal Modernity, and the Defence of Logistical Societies.


23 Ibid.: p. 8.


25 Indeed, it is worth recalling that Foucault had little or no time for the state as an analytic category, going so far as to claim “I must do without a theory of the state, as one can and must forgo an indigestible meal.” See Michel Foucault, The Birth of Biopolitics; Lectures at the Collège De France, 1978-79 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 76-77. For further discussion, see Nicholas J. Kiersey, "World State or Global Governmentality? Constitutive


29 See note 23, above.


31 Ibid.: p. 341.


33 Ibid.: p. 343-47.

34 David Chandler, "Deriving Norms from 'Global Space': The Limits of Communicative Approaches to Global Civil Society Theorizing," *Globalizations* 4, no. 2 (2007).


38 Ibid.: p. 293.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.: pp. 293-94.

41 Chandler, "Critiquing Liberal Cosmopolitanism? The Limits of the Biopolitical Approach."

42 Ibid.: p. 56.

43 Ibid.: p. 57.


46 Ibid.: p. 56.


50 Ibid.: p. 66.


Ibid., p. 327.

———, "Nietzsche, Genealogy and History," pp. 82-83.


Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy and History," p. 85.

———, *Society Must Be Defended*, pp. 15-16.

———, "Nietzsche, Genealogy and History," p. 86.


Kelly, *The Political Philosophy of Michel Foucault*, p. 60.


Ibid.


———, *Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 186.


Sassen offers the perplexing disclaimer that she wants to use the term 'assemblage' only in the 'dictionary' sense of the term. See Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages*, p. 5.

Legg, "Of Scales, Networks and Assemblages," p. 239.

Neumann and Sending, "the International as Governmentality," p. 694.


Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, pp. 31-32.

Ibid., p. 320.

Ibid., p. 318.

Röpke, cited in Ibid., p. 148.

Ibid., p. 224.

Ibid., p. 260.
86 Ibid., p. 259.
87 Ibid., p. 269.
88 Ibid., p. 296.
90 Jason Read, "A Genealogy of Homo-Economicus: Neoliberalism and the Production of
blog.com/archives/2008/03/the_erosion_of.html.
92 Ibid.
94 Ibid., p. 73.
96 Antonio Negri and Félix Guatarri, *Communists Like Us; New Spaces of Liberty, New Lines of
97 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press,
98 Ibid., pp. 365-66.
99 Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 22
100 ——-, "Truth and Power," p. 120.
101 ——-, *Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 68.
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103 Ibid., p. 65.
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106 Ibid.: p. 693.