Self as Enterprise
Dilemmas of Control and Resistance in Foucault’s *The Birth of Biopolitics*

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**Abstract**
This article considers Foucault’s analysis of ordoliberal and neoliberal governmental reason and its reorganization of social relations around a notion of enterprise. I focus on the particular idea that the generalization of the enterprise form to social relations was conceptualized in such exhaustive terms that it encompassed subjectivity itself. Self as enterprise highlights, *inter alia*, dynamics of control in neoliberal regimes which operate through the organized proliferation of individual difference in an economized matrix. It also throws into question conceptions of individual autonomy that underpin much political thought and upon which ideas about political resistance are based. Self as enterprise also problematizes the viability of Foucault’s later work on ethics of the self as a practice of resistance. I go on to argue that Foucault’s discussion of an unresolved clash in civil society between monarchical and governmental power, between law and norm, offers an elliptical but more promising account of opposition to normalizing bio-power.

**Key words**
enterprise ■ neoliberalism ■ ordoliberalism ■ resistance ■ rights discourse ■ self-realization

IN THE late 1970s Foucault gave a series of lectures at the Collège de France addressing the themes of the rise of a peculiarly modern notion of governmental reason and its implications for the bio-political management of populations. The immediate significance of many of the lectures, for example, ‘*Society Must Be Defended*’ (1975–6; Foucault, 1997) and *Security, Territory, Population* (1977–8; Foucault, 2008a), is that they add
greater depth and nuance to Foucault’s already familiar study of governmentality through the ideas of war, police and the pastorate. There is one series of lectures, however, published under the title *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008b), that takes Foucault’s analysis onto new ground in that it explores the consolidation of governmental reason in a certain tradition of 20th-century liberal and neoliberal thought. Foucault remarked frequently in interviews that neoliberalism is an exemplar of the indirect style of social control, the *conduct of conduct*, that typifies governmental reason. *The Birth of Biopolitics* develops these remarks in much greater detail by tracing the origins of central neoliberal tenets back to the thought of a group of German thinkers in the 1930s and 1940s known as the ordoliberals. Foucault’s study of neoliberalism is fascinating for many reasons, not least its contemporary focus, which is relatively unusual for his work and represents, *inter alia*, an interesting counterpoint to the preoccupation with normative contract theory that dominates so much current liberal political thought. 

But perhaps the most remarkable feature of these lectures is their historical prescience. Although they were delivered several years before the hegemonic consolidation of the New Right political agenda in the early 1980s, Foucault seems to predict crucial aspects of the marketization of social relations that has become such a widespread feature in the thought and practices of Western democracies in the last 30 years or so.

It is impossible here to do justice to the originality and range of topics raised in *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008b) and it will undoubtedly engender many interesting new lines of Foucauldian scholarship in the years to come. Here, I focus on just one idea, namely, that the central principle of the style of governmental control envisaged by the ordo- and neoliberals was the re-organization of social relations around a notion of enterprise. In particular, I consider some implications of the idea that the generalization of the enterprise form to social relations was conceptualized in such exhaustive terms that it encompassed subjectivity itself. Individuals would be encouraged to view their lives and identities as a type of enterprise, understood as a relation to the self based ultimately on a notion of incontestable economic interest. Foucault’s discussion of self as enterprise highlights, *inter alia*, dynamics of control in neoliberal regimes which operate not through the imposition of social conformity but through the organized proliferation of individual difference in an economized matrix. There are many social pathologies that can be seen to ensue from the reconfiguration of self as enterprise but one troubling political consequence is that it throws into question conceptions of individual autonomy that commonly underpin much political thought on freedom, resistance and political opposition. If individual autonomy is not the opposite of or limit to neoliberal governance, but rather lies at the heart of disciplinary control through responsible self-management, what are the possible grounds upon which political resistance can be based? In the light of this dilemma, it is somewhat surprising that Foucault went on, in his later work, to identify the primary locus of contestation of the government of individualization in
the idea of an ethics of the self. I argue that the experimental process of self-formation that this idea revolves around is uncomfortably close in structure to governance through individualization, and it is therefore not clear how such an atomized practice can pose any serious challenge to neoliberal social control. I go on to argue, however, that Foucault’s discussion, in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, of an unresolved clash in civil society between monarchical and governmental power, between law and norm, offers an elliptical but potentially fruitful account of political opposition to normalizing bio-power. In the light of the intrinsic connection between individual freedom and disciplinary power, it is in the collective and explicitly political dimensions of this model — exemplified in the discourse of rights — that the promise of a more effective form of oppositional agency to neoliberal governance resides.

**From Ordoliberalism to Neoliberalism**

It is well known that Foucault uses the term ‘governmentality’ to denote a peculiarly modern form of political rule, the legitimacy of which is derived not from the wisdom, might or religious sanction of the sovereign but from the ‘rational’ ordering of men and social affairs. Governmental reason represents an approach to social control that operates not through direct state sanction but through the indirect shaping of ‘free’ social practices on two levels: *regulatory* or *massification techniques* that focus on the large-scale management of populations (for example, controlling mortality levels and birth rates, planning of urban environments or investing in ‘human capital’) and *individualizing, disciplinary mechanisms* that shape the behaviours and identity of the individual through the imposition of certain normalizing technologies or practices of the self. Both regulatory and disciplinary techniques operate at the level of the body but ‘one is a technology in which the body is individualized as an organism endowed with capacities, while the other is a technology in which bodies are replaced by general biological processes’ (Foucault, 1997: 249). Much of Foucault’s *oeuvre* is given over to tracing how the lineaments of this new understanding of governmental reason slowly cohere in thought and practice from the 16th century onwards, reaching its fullest expression in the neoliberal regimes of the late 20th century onwards.

Neoliberalism is, in Foucault’s view, the paradigm of governmental reason; it is a way of understanding political rule and the regulation of the general conduct of individuals in a manner ‘whereby everything would be controlled to the point of self-sustenance, without the need for intervention’ (Foucault, 1984a: 241). Despite these suggestive comments, it seems that Foucault never took this analysis of neoliberalism very far until now, with the publication of the lectures delivered in 1978–9, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, where he traces the gradual emergence of some of its central tenets from a tradition running from Hobbes, Hume and Adam Smith to Milton Friedman, Friedrich Hayek and Gary Becker.

The fear that drives neoliberal thought is one of excessive state intervention. This anxiety that ‘if one governs too much one does not govern at
all’ precisely encapsulates the indirect style of social control that typifies go
germental reason (Foucault, 1984a: 242). In *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008b), Foucault identifies a catalysing moment in the formation of this notion of governance from a distance in the ‘state phobia’ of the ‘Freiberg School’, a group of German economists working in the 1930s and 1940s also known as the ordoliberals. As part of their intellectual response to the authoritarian Nazi state, on the one hand, and the strong interventionism of the New Deal and Beveridge’s welfarism, on the other, the ordoliberals sought to rethink the relation between state, economy and society, and in doing so initiated a number of important breaks with traditional liberal conceptions of *raison d’état*. A conventional liberal understanding of the role of the state is principally one of intervention to mitigate social inequalities and injustices thrown up by the operation of the market economy. In their desire to reduce such overweening intervention, the ordoliberals rejected the idea that social rationality can be used to correct market dysfunctions, arguing instead that economic rationality should be used to correct social dysfunctions. They thus proposed the use of the market economy to decipher social institutions and non-market relationships, and to reorganize them around the foundational notion of economic agency (Foucault, 2008b: 191). Market dynamics were regarded as artificial and inherently fragile constructs and, therefore, social institutions had to be configured in such a way as to bolster their weak competitive mechanisms, enabling them to operate to their fullest extent. As Jacques Donzelot puts it: ‘They [the ordoliberals] were not seeking a social rationality to correct economic irrationality, but rather an economic rationality capable of nullifying the social irrationality of capitalism’ (2008b: 123). Society was to be organized around a number of objectives: the avoidance of centralization, the encouragement and support of medium-sized and any non-proletarian enterprises, the increase of property ownership, the replacement of the social insurance of risk with individual insurance and the general individ-
ualization of the social environment. The central principle that governed this social reorganization or *Gesellschaftspolitik* was the notion of ‘enterprise’ and it was to govern behaviour at all levels of the social organism. For example, given that market competition has no ‘assured duration’ and that state intervention is not an option, it falls to the individual entrepreneur to actively sustain competitive relations through a vigilant and responsible self-management: ‘The homo oeconomicus-entrepreneur . . . as entrepreneur of himself, has only competitors. Even consumption becomes an activity of enterprise by which consumers undertake to produce their satisfaction’ (Donzelot, 2008: 129–30). The ultimate aim of this pervasive entrepreneurship is to preserve the fragile dynamic of competition in what Foucault terms a ‘formal game between inequalities’ (2008b: 120). This ‘equality of inequality’ is what stimulates market competition and society must be reconfigured in such a way as to maximize the creation of inequalities, the only limit upon which must be that no-one is permanently excluded from the game of entrepreneurship (Donzelot, 2008: 130).
If ordoliberal thinkers broke with traditional liberal conceptions of *raison d’état*, they were still far from representing a fully neoliberal conception in that markets were not understood as quasi-natural entities whose intrinsic and inexorable dynamics should be allowed to play themselves out in social relations with the minimum of state interference. The ordoliberal notion of enterprise is distinct, for instance, from a neoliberal principle of pure competition in that it is both ‘for and against the market’. In arguing for the economization of the social field, the ordoliberals were not unaware of the potentially corrosive effects of market principles upon collective social bonds and values. The more social relations were refracted and multiplied through the enterprise form, the more there was a risk of proliferating sites of conflict. The reconfiguration of society around ‘the grain of enterprises’ does not entail, therefore, a complete bypassing of state institutions; rather, it retains a defined role for some, above all, the judiciary, in the arbitration of disagreement and conflict (Foucault, 2008b: 149). Although the law is omnipresent in mediating social relations, its role is not one of judicial imposition but rather one of restitution, which facilitates the uniform working through of the enterprise dynamic in all social relations: ‘An enterprise society and a judicial society, a society orientated towards the enterprise and a society framed by a multiplicity of judicial institutions, are two faces of a single phenomena’ (2008b: 149–50). The ‘return to enterprise’ was therefore not just about the economization of social relations but was also seen as a way of revivifying social solidarity. It was envisaged as a kind of ‘Vitalpolitik with the function of compensating for what is cold, impassioned, calculating, rational, and mechanical in the strictly economic game of competition’ (2008b: 242). In sum, the central significance of the ordoliberal project, in Foucault’s view, is that it overturns a traditional liberal conception of state action as a compensatory mechanism designed to offset or nullify the destructive effects of economic freedom on societal relations. It is replaced with the idea of a multifaceted social intervention that must ensure that institutions operate to reinforce and maximize fragile market operations and, above all, that eradicates anti-competitive social tendencies and practices: ‘if there is a permanent and multiform interventionism, it is not directed against the market economy.... On the contrary, this interventionism is pursued as the historical and social condition of possibility for a market economy’ (2008b: 160).

Any ambiguity in ordoliberal thought about the compatibility of market principles with solidaristic social relations and collective values is subsequently lost in neoliberalism, which represents a more ‘complete and exhaustive’ generalization of the market form throughout society. For Foucault, the radical essence of the neoliberal agenda is evident in its wide-ranging application of the idea of human capital to decipher all kinds of social relations, from education, genetics, social mobility and migration to the most intimate of interactions. On this model, the relation between husbands and wives can be understood as an economy made at the level of transaction costs and regulated through the marriage contract. Even the
mother–child relation can be understood in human capital terms as an ‘investment’ that can be measured in time (Foucault, 2008b: 229–30, 244–5). Not only do neoliberals use economic terms to decipher traditionally non-economic behaviours, but they also deploy an economic grid as a test of governmental action in order to gauge its validity and ‘to object to activities of the public authorities on the grounds of their abuses, excesses, futility, and wasteful expenditure’ (2008b: 246). Neoliberalism embodies a type of economic positivism that results in an exhaustive and permanent critique of government and state action, and leads to an alternative concept of political rule as a form of ‘environmental intervention rather than internal subjugation’ (2008b: 259). This indirect government, or what Miller and Rose (2008) have termed ‘government at a distance’, controls individuals not through explicit forms of domination, but through rationalized techniques and devices which orient action to certain socially useful ends – the ‘conduct of conduct’.

Self as Enterprise

One of the most striking aspects of Foucault’s lectures is their foresight in identifying the central and pervasive role that neoliberal ideas about economizing social relations were to play in political thinking during the following decades. These lectures were delivered prior to the election of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher in 1979, in other words, some time before the consolidation of the neoliberal political agenda during the early 1980s. Yet Foucault perceptively predicts some of the fundamental social and political transformations that were to be initiated by the New Right’s break with the post-war consensus: its rolling back of the frontiers of the state, its promotion of marketized social institutions and its inculcation of a vigorous materialist individualism. He recognizes the nascent hegemonic potential of what was, at the time, an emerging and relatively disparate body of ideas which many on the left dismissed as yet another version of a bankrupt ruling-class ideology. His prescience is perhaps even more remarkable in the context of the widespread indifference and even hostility among French intellectuals to liberal thought which, from their Republican perspective, was viewed as ‘a suspect doctrine, perforce tolerated, but alien to our way of thinking’ (Donzelot, 2008: 116). This indifference meant that they failed to perceive the catalysing force implicit in neoliberal ideas of governance and, consequently, how its extension of market forms to non-economic realms would unleash profound processes of social restructuring. In short, what Foucault identifies, far in advance of many of his contemporaries, is the emergence of a distinctive body of thought on governance which operates outside of the conventional liberal and Marxist distinctions between state and society, public and private, government constraint and individual freedom, and which would come to embody perhaps the most definitive historical instantiation of disciplinary social control.

One of the most interesting aspects of Foucault’s discussion of ordo- and neoliberalism is that the generalization of the enterprise form is
conceived as so exhaustive that it was not confined to social institutions but intended to encompass individual being itself; the self was to be remade into ‘a sort of permanent and multiple enterprise’ (Foucault, 2008b: 241). The individual’s life was to be lodged not within the framework of the state but within a multiplicity of interrelated, small-scale organizations or networks which:

... are in some way ready to hand for the individual, sufficiently limited in their scale for the individual’s actions, decisions, and choices to have meaningful and perceptible effects, and numerous enough for him not to be dependent on one alone. (2008b: 241)

The autonomous citizen is s/he who manages these diverse networks – work, household, pension, insurance, private property – in the most responsible and prudent fashion vis-a-vis the avoidance of risk and the maximization of their own happiness. In other words, neoliberal governance involves the shaping of individual lives in a way that does not violate their ‘formally autonomous’ character (Miller and Rose, 2008: 39). It operates not through the delimitation of individual freedoms but through their multiplication in the context of a notion of responsible self-management. Key to this reconfiguration of the self as enterprise is an ontology that absolutizes a certain notion of economic interest or choice. An individualized notion of economic interest is fetishized as a ‘non-substitutable and irreducible’ social element to such a degree that it marginalizes other competing conceptions of the citizen-subject (Foucault, 2008b: 291). This radically new conception of homo oeconomicus as the author of irreducible, atomistic and non-transferable choices first emerges in English empiricist philosophy, in thinkers such as Hume and Smith, and eventually takes it most radical form in the ordoliberal notion of the self as enterprise. The subject of economic interest differs from other competing conceptions of the individual by virtue of its indivisible internal structure which appears as a ‘form of both immediately and absolutely subjective will’ (2008b: 273). It is distinct, for example, from the subject of right, who lies at the heart of the social contract and who is constituted through an internal division in so far as certain natural liberties are renounced in order to acquire positive freedoms. In contrast, homo oeconomicus does not undergo such internal diirement; it has an egoistic, undivided internal structure, because it is never called upon to renounce its interests, indeed, they must be pursued and intensified for society to flourish: ‘with the subject of interest, as the economists make him function, there is ... a directly multiplying mechanism without any transcendence in which the will of each harmonizes spontaneously and as it were involuntarily with the will and interest of others’ (2008b: 275–6). The incontestable and unpredictable status attributed to this idea of interest, when it is multiplied to include the actions of other economic actors, yields a view of a realm of activity that is, in some sense, opaque, non-totalizable and uncontrollable – in Foucault’s terms, an ‘indefinite field of immanence’
(2008b: 277). *Homo oeconomicus* represents therefore a fundamental incapacity at the heart of political power. There is an intrinsic connection between political power and the juridical subject in that law and prohibition emerge from the latter’s internal dialectic of ‘negativity, renunciation, and limitation’ (2008b: 275). The subject of right represents an internal limit to sovereign power that puts certain constraints on its scope. In its indivisibility, however, the subject of interest has a radically different, external relation to political power, its absolutized will revealing ‘an essential, fundamental and major incapacity of the sovereign’ (2008b: 292). Not only should government not interfere with the subject of interest, but it is also not possible for it to have a comprehensive grasp on the elusive economic totality of interests in order to direct it: ‘it is impossible for the sovereign to have a point of view on the economic mechanism which totalizes every element and enables them to be combined artificially or voluntarily’ (2008b: 280).

Foucault’s remarks about the self as enterprise, although not detailed, are very suggestive because they anticipate, to some extent, a certain reconfiguration of identity and subjectivity taking place under globalized capitalism and which, *inter alia*, has troubling entailments for political accounts of counter-hegemonic agency. Perhaps the most significant of these is that the remodelling of the subjective experience of the self around an economized notion of enterprise subtly alters and depoliticizes conventional conceptions of individual autonomy. Individual autonomy becomes not the opposite of, or limit to, neoliberal governance, rather it lies at the heart of its disciplinary control. This inevitably challenges conceptions of resistance, freedom and political opposition, which often invoke a notion of individual autonomy as an absolute block or challenge to the workings of power. It is not of course that, under capitalism, there have not always been multifarious and uneven connections between material relations of production and the production of identities. Arguably, however, under globalized capital, the interpenetration of modes of capital accumulation and everyday practices has become intensified, creating new kinds of flexible regimes that sustain themselves in part through the reconfiguration of identity and subjectivity (e.g. Freeman, 2000; Hennessey, 2000; Ong, 1997). An aspect of what Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) term this ‘new spirit’ of capitalism is that individual experience is increasingly channelled through an intense but apparently ‘flexible’ consumerist matrix, and it is in this respect that Foucault’s idea of self as enterprise seems to resemble the Frankfurt School’s excoriating critique of the commodification of social experience in post-war democracies. Despite these apparent affinities, however, the idea of self as enterprise takes the critique in a different direction, in that it understands the commodification of subjective experience not so much through ideas of passive consumerism, standardization and heteronomy, as through ideas of active differentiation, regulated self-responsibility and depoliticized autonomy. For the cultural Marxists, the organization of subjectivity around the commodity fetish is predicated primarily on a logic of homogenization and social conformity. The extension of the commodity
form into social life diminishes freedom through the construction of a standardized, illusory freedom of ‘pseudo-individuality’: ‘now any person signifies only those attributes by which he can replace everyone else: he is interchangeable, a copy’ (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944: 145). For Foucault, however, the self as enterprise operates primarily via a differentiating not a homogenizing logic; social differences are not limited but multiplied. Through the proliferation of individual differences neoliberal regimes acquire an apparent flexibility, in that they can seemingly tolerate a wide array of practices and values as long as they are compatible with a consumerized notion of self-responsibility:

The art of government programmed by the Ordliberals around the 1930s, and which has now become the program of most governments in capitalist countries . . . involves . . . obtaining a society that is not orientated towards the commodity and the uniformity of the commodity, but towards the multiplicity and differentiation of enterprises. (Foucault, 2008b: 149)

A second distinctive feature of the self as enterprise is that it operates according to a principle of active self-regulation rather than, on the Frankfurt School's account, one of passive submission that eliminates the capacity for autonomous thought and critique. Governance through enterprise construes the individual as an entrepreneur of his own life, who relates to others as competitors and his own being as a form of human capital. In this organized self-relation, individual autonomy is not an obstacle or limit to social control but one of its central technologies. Discipline and freedom are not opposites, therefore, but intrinsically connected in that biopower indirectly organizes individuals in such a way that their apparent autonomy is not violated:

. . . we see . . . the image, idea or theme-program of a society in which there is an optimization of systems of difference, in which the field is left open to fluctuating processes, in which minority individuals and practices are tolerated, in which action is brought to bear on the rules of the game rather than on the players, and finally in which there is an environmental type of intervention instead of the internal subjugation of individuals. (2008: 259–60)

In sum, under neoliberalism autonomy is reshaped so that it is compatible with governance rather than, on a classical liberal account, its absolute limit or the point at which governance falters. This mode of government uses individual freedom as a form of power, as a capacity for liberty that is drawn out of individuals through the indirect regulation of social practices:

. . . the regulation of conduct becomes a matter of each individual's desire to govern their own conduct freely in the service of the maximization of a version of their happiness and fulfilment that they take to be their own, but such lifestyle maximization entails a relation to authority in the very moment that it pronounces itself the outcome of free choice. (Miller and Rose, 2008: 215)
What are the possible negative social effects of this new style of governance which construes autonomy as enterprise? On the face of it, a form of government that maximizes the possibilities for individual freedom, albeit through a consumerist matrix, appears to be less objectionable than more obviously repressive regimes of power. If neoliberal regimes can tolerate an apparent diversity of practices, is the worst aspect of its management of autonomy simply the ‘indignity of incorporation’? In the lectures, Foucault does not explicitly focus on the negative effects of the neoliberal construal of self as enterprise, and this has led some commentators to suggest that he is less opposed to this style of governance than is commonly supposed (e.g. Donzelot, 2008). It is reasonable to infer, however, that in so far as it is an instance of the government of individualization, what Foucault would primarily find objectionable about the self as enterprise is that, under the guise of promoting individual autonomy, it is profoundly normalizing: ‘This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual . . . attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and others must have to recognize in him’ (Foucault, 1982: 212). In the absence of any explicit statement on Foucault’s part, it is possible to indicate only a few of the ways in which the normalizing effects of the enterprise form distort social existence. At the most fundamental level, neoliberal governance of the self erodes conceptions of the public domain which, in the words of Zygmunt Bauman, is being ‘stealthily but steadily colonised by private concerns, trimmed, peeled and cleaned of their public connections and ready for (private) consumption but hardly for the production of (social) bonds’ (2001: 190). The orchestration of individual existence as enterprise atomizes our understanding of social relations, eroding collective values and intersubjective bonds of duty and care at all levels of society (e.g. Lynch et al., 2009; McDermont, 2009). On a political level, issues of social injustice such as poverty and deprivation are separated from determining structural factors and construed as a problem of irresponsible self-management; the poor are stigmatized as the ‘other’ of the responsible, autonomous citizen. The idea of responsible self-management also ultimately weakens notions of the state’s obligations to its citizens in general, not just the more vulnerable members of society. Jacques Donzelot (2008), for example, shows how ideas of social justice are considerably diminished when the primary role of the state is no longer seen as effecting some measure of social equality but rather as only preventing limit cases of exclusion which prevent individuals participating in a society of ‘structured inequalities’. On a global scale, the pluralization of individual differences through a consumerist matrix obscures the way in which ‘responsible’ self-management connects to the worldwide maldistribution of resources and the disastrous depletion of the world’s natural resources. On a social level, there is a striking resemblance between Foucault’s examination of the self as enterprise and Martin Hartmann and Axel Honneth’s (2006) work on organized self-realization, which is the governing principle of the neoliberal restructuring of capitalism in a new ‘flexible’ or disorganized
Individuals are no longer treated as workers who are compelled to participate in capitalist production but are treated more like entrepreneurs or ‘entreployees’, which requires from them a ‘readiness to self-responsibly bring one’s own abilities and emotional resources to bear in the service of the individualized projects’ (Hartmann and Honneth, 2006: 45). Any apparent increase in individual autonomy in fact represents an intensification of a certain disciplinary power, an effect of which is a blurring of the boundaries between the public and private realms. The overall effect of these transformations is to instil in the individual a seemingly paradoxical ‘compulsion to responsibility’. The normative and emancipatory force that originally inhered in the idea of personal responsibility is eroded as individuals are forced to assume responsibility for states of affairs for which they are not responsible. The wider consequences of organized self-realization are a fragmentation of social values and a process of ‘social desolidarization’ expressed in elevated levels of depression and mental illness, and the emptying out of any meaning to the achievement principle other than maximization of profit (Hartmann and Honneth, 2006: 52). In sum, the organization of society around a multiplicity of individual enterprises profoundly depoliticizes social and political relations by fragmenting collective values of care, duty and obligation, and displacing them back on to the managed autonomy of the individual.

Resistance and Ethics of the Self

Lying beneath these myriad social pathologies is a fundamental political question. If, under neoliberalism, individual autonomy is not a limit to social control but one of its central supports, what form can effective political opposition take? Much political thought on freedom, not just classical liberalism, invokes an ontologized notion of autonomy where the political subject inherently wills her own emancipation and represents, therefore, an absolute limit to power: ‘the desire for freedom and liberation is a historically situated desire whose motivational force cannot be assumed a priori’ (Mahmood, 2001: 222). This underlying ontology is thrown into question by Foucault’s analysis, which sees autonomy and discipline not as extrinsic forms but as intrinsically connected. The possibilities for challenging neoliberal governance of the self seem inevitably to be diminished by a power that elicits a capacity for responsible self-management in the context of a proliferation of social practices. Indeed, by problematizing the connection between individual autonomy and political opposition, Foucault’s analysis pre-empts the scepticism about identity politics that has become prevalent in contemporary political thought. Post-identity thinkers have long been suspicious of identity politics because they rest on essentialist or normalizing notions of recognition and authenticity, and often result in a balkanization of political action. However, in an era of organized self-realization, their contestatory force is further thrown into question in so far as they are perceived as reinforcing, rather than challenging, a commodifying logic that operates through differentiation of the social realm. One of the characteristics of the
new spirit of capitalism is, as Boltanski and Chiapello (2005: 27–33) have observed, the capacity to absorb and thereby disarm critique. In other words, governance through enterprise has profoundly depoliticizing effects upon identity politics. Even the most oppositional of identity movements may be neutralized by being transformed into a form of responsible self-management and commodified as a lifestyle choice:

... open, fluid, ambivalent ... identities ... are quite compatible with the mobility, adaptability, and ambivalence required of service workers today and with the new more fluid forms of the commodity. While they may disrupt norms and challenge state practices that are indeed oppressive, they do not necessarily challenge neoliberalism or disrupt capitalism. (Hennessey, 2000: 108–9)

By failing to interrogate these neoliberal strategies of co-optation and its own complicity with them, the politics of recognition remains caught in a self-cancelling dynamic that dissipates its potential radical content. An underlying conceptual problem is that the theory and politics of identity often operate around a conceptually empty domination–resistance model of power which, in the light of Foucault’s claims about the regulation of individuals, misses how neoliberal governance works. The domination–resistance couplet too often invokes the very notion of individual autonomy as an external block to power that Foucault’s idea of self as enterprise problematizes. Even when resistance is understood as contingent upon power itself, it still relies on some latent notion of the subject’s inherent will to freedom, although it is often far from clear what is being ‘resisted’ and what, if any, are the ‘political’ effects of certain so-called resistant practices. Ideas of resistance, in Wendy Brown’s view, form part of a wider postmodern sensibility that is wary of the authority of any type of normative critique, and takes refuge instead in the ‘local viewpoint and tendency toward positioning without mapping’ (1995: 49). This deliberately constrained perspectivalism renders notions of resistance ineffectual as coherent political responses to many types of social injustice: ‘resistance goes nowhere in particular, has no inherent attachments, and hails no particular vision ... resistance is an effect of and reaction to power, not an arrogation of it’ (1995: 49). It is also to reduce the logic of agency to a conceptually limited dualism or ‘flat narrative’ of conformity and subversion, domination and resistance (Mahmood, 2001: 222). The idea of the self as an enterprise challenges us to think political agency beyond a simplifying and often individualized domination–resistance model of political agency. It enjoins us to think about political opposition by using a differentiated understanding of power which attempts to trace out the discontinuous and indirect ways in which identities and selves are co-opted into normalizing social dynamics. It challenges us, in short, to rethink ideas of oppositional agency and politics beyond the formula that regimes of power necessarily falsify or distort human subjectivity.
In the light of the challenges thrown down by his analysis of the self as enterprise, it is somewhat surprising that, in his subsequent work, Foucault outlines a notion of oppositional agency that seems to draw upon a limited domination–resistance account of power. The idea of ethics of the self is Foucault's well-known formulation of oppositional agency in an era of the government of individualization. At its heart lies an attitude that draws on Kant's understanding of modernity as a critical awareness of the present grounded in the ‘mature use of reason’, as the moment when ‘humanity is going to put its own reason to use, without subjecting itself to any authority’ (Foucault, 1984b: 38). Detaching this from the Kantian transcendental imperative, Foucault argues that ethics of the self encapsulates a critical ethos that is primarily a historical and practical form of reasoning used to interrogate the limits of identity. The freedom of the individual from the government of individualization is not grounded in meta-narratives of justice or morality but must take the form of a principle of permanent self-critique and experimentation (1984b: 44). This relation to self is in no sense a recovery of authentic experience or an assertion of genuine identity, rather it is a liminal process which seeks to explore ways of being beyond the already known. It is an anti-experiential and an anti-subjectivist creation; an experimentation with the possibility of going beyond what seems natural or inevitable in the self: “the critique of what we are is at one and the same time an historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them” (1984b: 50).

A possible objection is that it would be incorrect to interpret Foucault's idea of an ethics of the self as offering an account of oppositional political agency. Certainly, Foucault repeatedly states that the idea is not intended to provide a blueprint for political action. It merely outlines a set of ethical predispositions that provide a crucial precondition for democratic practices but have no particular entailments for an account of political action. Such a strict demarcation of the ethical from the political seems untenable, however, in the light of the connections Foucault establishes between a critical ontology of the self and emancipation. On any reading of Foucault’s descriptions of an ethics of the self, it is clear that he did not envisage it as a solipsistic exercise but rather as a multifaceted form of ‘practical critique’ whose subversive effects are felt in many domains of social practice: ‘the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is . . . to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state’ (Foucault, 1982: 216). He frequently describes the idea of an ethics of the self in the politicized terms of a ‘liberation’, a ‘struggle’, a ‘refusal’ and, on several occasions, explicitly compares its methods and aims with political movements such as feminism (Foucault, 1984b: 46–7). Given this, it is difficult to see how a critical social ontology oriented to the ‘intransigence of freedom’ can be anything other than a fully political project. On this politicized reading of ethics of the self, it becomes reasonable to ask to what extent it represents a plausible basis for an oppositional political agency, especially in the light of Foucault’s powerful analysis of the
disciplinary restructuring of self as enterprise. If the later work is read through the problematic of the earlier lectures, there seems to be a fundamental mismatch between the analytics of biopower and the idea of ethical self-formation. To put it bluntly, how can an individualized process of ethical self-formation have sufficient resources to present a serious challenge to, or refusal of, a form of power that operates precisely through the proliferation of difference and the management of individual autonomy? Foucault’s desire to locate political opposition at the level of an individual practice stems, famously, from his well-documented antipathy to Marxist and other collective plans for political action. But 25 years on, with the fragmenting effects of neoliberal governance deeply entrenched within the fabric of many Western democracies, it is questionable whether an ethics of self can withstand co-optation into the flexible, depoliticizing spirit of capitalism. As Myers puts it: ‘although Foucault labels the activity of self-constitution a “practice of freedom” . . . techniques of self-care are inadequate instruments for confronting the specifically depoliticizing effects of discipline and biopower, which concern the configuration of plurality’ (2008: 135). As a model of political action, an individual ethics of the self appears to be relatively ineffective because its radical energies seem too vulnerable to reprivatization by the assimilating force of the self as enterprise. Against this, it is possible to argue that ethics of the self is not only intended to be an individualized self-relation but may also denote a widespread ethos of openness to alterity intended to ground collective democratic practices. Even on this reading, however, the same explanatory gaps remain as to how a generalized structure of feeling has sufficient force to amount to a ‘refusal’ of a pervasive and depoliticizing form of social organization. Missing is any indication of how a relatively loose and indeterminate ethos located in everyday life can be mediated into more durable and directed practices so as to constitute part of a concerted ‘struggle’ against neoliberal governance. Indeed, against the claim that it is too demanding to interpret ethics of the self as an account of political agency, it is possible to counter that Foucault problematically collapses politics back to ethics in so far as the contestatory force attributed to practices of self-formation is asserted rather than justified. In short, there is a troubling political quietism in the idea of ethics of the self which considerably weakens its counter-hegemonic potential vis-à-vis the disruption of neoliberal governance of the self.

Law and Norm
Despite this apparent mismatch between the theories of government and ethics, there is a more suggestive, albeit elliptical model of political action which emerges in sporadic remarks that Foucault makes about the tension between governmental power and juridical power. Juridical power is an instance of monarchical or sovereign power, which operates through the explicit sanctions of constraint, prohibition and law and which is, as Foucault (2008b: 43–4) famously argues, the form of rule that is gradually displaced by the indirect, normalizing power of government. Although it is
displaced, monarchical power continues to operate as a smokescreen for discipline, distracting us from the more insidious normalizing sources of our subjection:

... this theory [of sovereignty], and the organization of a juridical code centred upon it, made it possible to superimpose on the mechanism of discipline a system of right that concealed its mechanisms and erased the element of domination... involved in discipline. (Foucault, 1997: 37)

This reinforcing co-extensiveness of ‘sovereignty’ and ‘utility’, however, can be seen to be one of the sources of the monolithic notion of power that often emerges in Foucault’s work and which, despite his comments on its intrinsic fragility and reversibility, borders on a unidirectional theory of domination. This tendency towards a top-heavy account of power is evident in The Birth of Biopolitics (2008b) in so far as Foucault does not distinguish sufficiently between neoliberalism as a theory which is intellectually hegemonic and as a practice of governance which is never assured or complete. Elsewhere, however, Foucault suggests that there are limits to the extent to which normalizing power saturates the social realm, and that these can arise partly from the clash and tensions that occur between governmental normalization, on the one side, and monarchical or juridical power and its discourse of rights, on the other: ‘normalizing society is... not... a sort of generalized disciplinary society whose disciplinary institutions have swarmed and finally taken over everything’ (1997: 253). In other words, sovereignty and utility, law and norm are not always co-extensive and do not seamlessly reinforce each other. Foucault does not draw out the theoretical implications of these potential discontinuities but addresses them obliquely in his discussion of the displacement of the subject of right by the subject of economic interest, which occurs with the move from classical contract theories of social order to new theories of civil society which, ultimately, lay the ground for the modern conception of governmental reason. In contrast to the monarchical paradigm of power in the contract where social unity is achieved through the delegation of natural rights, social unity in civil society is achieved through a principle of the ‘spontaneous synthesis’ of individuals. In this new unity, economic interests are paramount and are conceived as a dynamic constitutive force, a principle of historical transformation and, hence, civil society comes to be viewed as the motor of history. This grounding of civil society in an ontology of economic interest renders the subject of right of secondary importance in an account of social order. Civil society represents a de facto economic bond between men, a kind of uniting primordial power which exists prior to any juridical or political power structure: it represents a ‘permanent matrix of a spontaneously formed political power’ (Foucault, 2008b: 303–5). Political rule is no longer explained primarily in terms of the wisdom of the sovereign, but rather in terms of utility that operates in accord with the rationality of those who are governed as economic subjects (2008b: 312). However, the supremacy of the economic
subject over the juridical subject is never fully assured because the
dynamism of economic interests has potentially destructive effects upon
civil society, continually threatening to disrupt social unity through the
random interplay of different egotistical interests which breaks established
bonds and rends the social fabric (2008b: 300–6). Thus a residual role
remains for juridical power in that rights and duties are seen as a way of
containing the fragmenting effects of unregulated economic activity. The
question that preoccupies political thinkers, therefore, from the late 18th
century onwards, is what can the role of the state be in relation to this
volatile and contradictory domain, how can economic interests be ‘juridi-
cally pegged’ by governmental reason? Even with the refinement and
encroachment of disciplinary techniques in contemporary societies, this
tension between law and norm is never erased. Civil society is not just a
laboratory for enhancing normalizing modes of control, it is also the domain
of a ‘perpetual confrontation’ between the ‘mechanics of discipline’ and the
‘principle of right’, where the latter often provides the only effective check
against the subjugation effects of the former: ‘the only existing and appar-
etly solid recourse we have against the usurpations of disciplinary mech-
anisms . . . is precisely a recourse or a return to a right that is organized
around sovereignty’ (Foucault, 1997: 39).

Foucault is ambivalent about the political entailments of this
confrontation between law and norm. On the one hand, he adopts a histori-
cist, sceptical view, claiming that the more frequently the discourse of law
and right is mobilized to counter the subjugations of normalizing biopower,
the more it is weakened as a form of opposition. Disciplinary power invades
or co-opts right discourse itself with the consequence that it too becomes
normalizing. It is imperative, therefore, on this view, to seek alternative
modes of political opposition although, interestingly, Foucault still frames
it in terms of a language of right:

... if we are to struggle against disciplines, or rather against disciplinary
power, in our search for a nondisciplinary power, we should not be turning to
the old right of sovereignty; we should be looking for a new right that is both
antidisciplinary and emancipated from a discourse of sovereignty. (1997:
39–40)

This view that rights are normalizing – often seen as the paradigmatic
Foucauldian position – emanates from an understanding of rights as essen-
tially discursive constructions which inevitably invoke fixed notions of
identity and selfhood in the making of political claims (e.g. Brown, 2000).
It certainly has much force but it can result in an overstated critique of
rights as a priori normalizing where social effects are seen primarily as a
discursive imposition from above (e.g. Lever, 2000). By focusing on social
control, the critique separates the discourse of rights from specific political
struggles and thus reifies it as an abstract category. As a consequence, it
tends to underplay how rights discourse might acquire different meaning
and import, depending on the context in which it is deployed and the ends towards which it is directed. On the other hand, Foucault seems to hold a positive view of the role that can be played by rights discourse in emancipatory struggles against the encroachments of disciplinary power. As Paul Patton points out, despite his suspicion of the essentialist views of human nature that it often entails, Foucault makes frequent use of the language of rights, defining critique, for example, as ‘the right to question truth’ (Patton, 2005: 269). In his 1984 lecture on human rights, Foucault invokes what seems to be quite a conventional understanding of rights as inalienable and indefeasible when he refers to an ‘absolute right’ of the suffering and oppressed to ‘stand up and speak to those who hold power’ (1994a: 475). In the same lecture, he alludes to the force of rights discourse in creating political solidarity around the premise that citizens are ethically bound together through shared duties to one another:

There exists an international citizenship that has its rights and its duties, and that obliges one to speak out against every abuse of power, whoever its author, whoever its victims. After all, we are all members of the community of the governed, and thereby obliged to show mutual solidarity. (1994a: 474)

On this view, Foucault attributes a limited political efficaciousness to rights, which stands in opposition to the conventional liberal fetishization of rights as the *sine qua non* of social justice. Rights discourse has a transient strategic utility, which might assist in the mitigation of injustice in a piecemeal way but is certainly far from being an effective or comprehensive approach to overcoming systemic oppression. It can constitute a crucial ‘episode’ in a longer struggle, whose end is the creation of new ‘cultural forms’ (Foucault, 1994b: 157). In his discussion of the gay movement, for example, Foucault recognizes that rights are important, not so much because they accord legal status to certain groups and practices, but more because they serve as a catalyst for bestowing a certain de facto legitimacy upon marginal identities and practices. In order to create new lifestyles, it is ultimately necessary, however, to break from the limitations of the individualistic conception of human rights and move towards a ‘relational right’, which permits the establishment of a multiplicity of different relations for all individuals regardless of their sexuality:

Rather than arguing that rights are fundamental and natural to the individual, we should try to imagine and create a new relational right that permits all possible types of relations to exist and not be prevented, blocked, or annulled by impoverished relational institutions. (Foucault, 1994b: 158)

In sum, rights have a temporary, pragmatic utility for political struggle but, ultimately, must be discarded in favour of more radical political methods because of their inevitably normalizing consequences.

The significance of Foucault’s view on rights is that they implicitly contain an account of oppositional agency which perhaps offers a more
compelling alternative to the one he outlines in ethics of the self. Whereas, in the latter, opposition to the government of individualization resides in a process of experimental ethical self-formation, in the former, it operates through collective political action and through the strategic appropriation of determinate political forms such as rights discourse. It is this collective, or what Myers terms ‘associative’, model of political action that seems more promising as a form of opposition than that set out in an individualized ethics of the self, which has an uncomfortable structural proximity to the neoliberal governance of individuals through organized self-realization. On the face of it, types of collective action would seem to be a more effective form of refusal of a disciplinary mode of governance that operates through the multiplication of individual differences as enterprise. It refuses the individualizing logic whereby the state displaces its primary responsibilities for social welfare and justice by construing them as questions of responsible self-management. It would seem more likely to be successful in having a sustained disruptive effective on oppressive hegemonic norms than atomized individual practices: ‘solidarity, when expressed in collective initiatives . . . is able to produce effects that would not be possible for individuals acting independently of one another’ (Myers, 2008: 140). Rights discourse may be effective not just in generating political solidarity and collective action, but also in giving visibility to inchoate, sporadic activities. Although it is important to be alert to the containing or potentially de-radicalizing effects of institutionalized rights, there is also sometimes a political imperative to move beyond social experimentation to political entrenchment, and rights discourse can play an important sedimenting role in this respect. There are occasions when political action is more likely to be effective when it is allied to recognizable political conventions such as rights discourse: ‘the reiteration of a dominant term in non-hegemonic ways . . . may . . . have a greater impact than when carried out by a lone subject in conditions of solitude’ (Lloyd, 2007: 138). It is unclear how much political visibility can be acquired for an ethics of the self that explicitly eschews conventional political forms. In recognizing the utility of rights discourse in consolidating marginal practices and creating solidarity, Foucault alludes to this power of collective action and thereby offers a glimpse of a more compelling view of opposition to neoliberal governance of individuals than the solipsistic ethics of the self.

Beyond their role as a catalyst in collective action, there is another, possibly more radical aspect of the oppositional potential of rights discourse, which Foucault does not recognize and which pertains to their specificity as political discourse. Implicit in the language of rights is a radical symbolic force, which stands in excess of rights as conventional, legal forms, and which is related to the way in which it translates marginalized and ignored forms of social suffering into universal political claims about justice. This irreducibly political dimension to rights discourse has been brought to the fore in the work of Arendtian thinkers, including, most notably, Jacques Rancière. For Rancière, there is a kind of epistemological break between
the social and the political realms, rendering the latter irreducible to the former. The social realm (including institutionalized politics) is one of hierarchy and domination, inequality and injustice (*la police*), whereas the political realm (*la politique*) is founded on the radical democratic assumption of universal equality. Political struggle (*la politique*) involves the confrontation of these two opposing principles of hierarchy and equality, where specific social oppressions are transfigured by being framed as speech acts which contest the prevailing social order (division of the sensible) and disrupt hegemonic definitions of equality in the name of a more radical equality (Rancière, 2003: 225). In so far as the universalizing logic of the political transforms ignored and inaudible social oppressions into legitimate and audible forms of speech about justice, the fight for emancipation can never be reduced to the fight for identity. Indeed, struggles which are commonly viewed as political but limit themselves to the assertion of a particular social identity are, in fact, anti-political. Only struggles which may emanate from a particular social injustice but are presented as claims about universal equality are fully political. Rights discourse is a key mechanism whereby ignored, marginalized forms of social suffering are made visible as a valid form of political speech about justice, disrupting dominant conceptions of the legitimacy of the status quo.

Rancière shares with Foucault the recognition that, in so far as rights are institutionalized, they can become part of a normalizing social apparatus (*la police*) that denies their political value. However, unlike Foucault he sees rights discourse as irreducible to its instantiation in social institutions, because its radical political dimension, qua claims about universal equality, can always be reactivated by new struggles. Foucault is unable to discern this transfiguring, political force of rights discourse because the Nietzschean view he adopts means he sees rights only as historical configurations with specific social effects. In other words, he reduces the political to the social. On this historicist view, rights discourse only ever has a limited efficaciousness in galvanizing collective action, and this is offset by its more insidious effects where it covertly secures the grip of normalizing power upon social relations. This conflation of the political dimension of rights as a discourse about equality with the social dimensions of rights as institutionalized norms is consistent with Foucault’s more general depiction of modernity, which ignores the role that law and politics may play in checking the erosion of freedoms by governmental techniques (e.g. Habermas, 1987: 286–93). This social reduction or dedifferentiation, where the differences between types of power are collapsed, prevents Foucault from seeing a more radical potential in rights discourse as an instance of a political claim about equality. It may also lead him to underestimate the extent to which the discourse of rights may in fact be utilized to present a more radical challenge to the encroachments of neoliberal governance. This radical potential is not just an abstract possibility. In response to critiques of rights discourse as essentially protecting property interests, Correa et al. (2008: 162) point out, for example, that it has been overwhelmingly used historically to bring
to light and overcome the injustices visited upon women, workers and other marginalized groups. The recent rise of ‘sexual rights’ as a prominent part of the human rights agenda illustrates how ‘without the radical structure of human rights . . . such translation of bodily claims into social action would be unthinkable’ (2008: 155). In this light, worries about normalization are partially allayed because rights are understood as performative tools which create a political identity rather than express a pre-given social identity: ‘it is the production, within a determined, sensible world, of a given that is heterogeneous to it’ (Rancière, 2003: 226). As the basis of a political claim, group identity is not a fixed essence but created in the very act of articulating and demanding enforcement of rights, and is always, by implication, in the process of ‘becoming and transforming’ (Correa et al., 2008: 154).

This does not mean that Foucault’s wariness about rights discourse is entirely misplaced, but it does imply that the social and political functions of rights discourse should not be too quickly elided. The a priori dismissal of the category as normalizing forecloses a potentially more radical view of rights, not just as tools whose meaning is relative to the political context in which they are engaged, but also as implicitly containing a profound political contestation of the inegalitarian social order. In other words, power is not a zero sum game and to use rights does not necessarily mean an inevitable co-optation into a normalizing liberal discourse. To argue this is to fail to recognize both the symbolic political force of rights and also that power in neoliberal regimes operates in more complex ways than conformity and non-conformity, normalization and resistance, state domination and individual autonomy. The logical entailment of this is that political opposition, too, must be thought outside these pervasive dualisms. Foucault’s analysis of neoliberal government sets up this problem with prescience and urgency, but his later response of an ethics of the self seems to fall back into these dualisms and thus fails to convincingly answer the problem. The continuing challenge of his work for thinkers today is to tease out some other possible responses to these social and political dilemmas, following, perhaps, his suggestive but elusive comments on the confrontation of law and norm.

Notes

1. The novelty of these lectures is brought out by Jacques Donzelot:

   I must say that I undertook the reading of the transcripts of two years of my old teacher’s lectures without any particular expectation, with that strange curiosity that one may feel for a voice which was once familiar and stimulating before becoming irritating and somewhat foreign. However, rather than a musty odour of the past, what quickly struck me was the astonishing topicality of this analysis of liberalism more than a quarter of a century after it was formulated. (2008: 116)

2. Although these remarks are quite allusive, they have stimulated a large corpus of work by other thinkers on neoliberal governmentality (e.g. Barry et al., 1996; Burchell et al., 1991; Miller and Rose, 2003; Rose, 1999, 2007).
3. For the ordoliberals, the economic realm is not some substrate, with its own inherent laws and tendencies (rational or irrational) that can be separated out from social forms through formalizing abstractions. Capitalist society represents, at any one moment, a singular ‘economic-institutional’ ensemble which requires a different model of power and government than that of offsetting or controlling the effects of economy upon society.

4. I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers of this article for making this point.

5. On the one hand, the economy is subject to a process of ‘informalization’, where interpersonal communicative and emotional skills are increasingly required in utility-based work processes. This erodes the distinction between instrumental and non-instrumental types of intersubjectivity, creating instead ‘unclear intermediate’ and therefore less sincere forms of relationship (Hartmann and Honneth, 2006: 50). On the other hand, there is an ‘economization of the informal’, where civil and private areas of social life are increasingly permeated and undermined by principles of individual achievement and exchange (Honneth, 2004).

6. Furthermore, many thinkers find in the idea of ethics of the self the inspiration for a renewed account of democratic practice (e.g. Connolly, 1993; Simons, 1994).

7. The ultimate difficulty for this reading, of course, is Foucault’s underlying Nietzschean ontology, where relations with the other are not significant. On this see Butler (2005).

8. On this view, then, contra many democratic theorists (e.g. Habermas), civil society is not a quasi-natural space or spontaneous entity where citizens freely associate. Rather, like madness and sexuality, Foucault regards it as a discursive construct or ‘transactional reality’ which represents a pivotal moment in the emergence of increasingly sophisticated governmental technology that must be juridically pegged to an economy. Civil society is the mechanism in which the reconciliation between the subject of right and the subject of interest is effected and new techniques of governmental control refined. ‘An omnipresent government, a government which nothing escapes, a government which conforms to the rules of right, and a government which nevertheless respects the specificity of the economy, will be a government that manages civil society’ (Foucault, 2008b: 296).

9. ‘Equality is a presupposition, an initial axiom – or it is nothing. And this egalitarian axiom subtends in the last instance the inegalitarian order itself’ (Rancière, 2003: 223).

10. ‘... those historical inscriptions of equality within inequality can become ossified and lose their emancipatory inspiration, but they can also be reclaimed at any time by new struggles as references or principles’ (Deranty, 2003: 153).

11. In this respect, Rancière shows us how rights discourse might be wrested from its colonization by liberal thought and redefined by a more radical political tradition which has conventionally eschewed it.

References


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