



The Management of Populations

Nick Butler

review of:

Michel Foucault (2007) *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78*, trans. G. Burchell. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan. (HB: pp.417, £19.99, ISBN 1 4039 8652 5)

The ongoing publication of the entire set of lecture courses which Foucault gave between 1971 and 1984 at the Collège de France have so far proved to be essential companions to his better known works. *Security, Territory, Population* – the fifth installment in a total series of thirteen, covering the period from January to April 1978 – is no exception. It provides a compelling glimpse into Foucault's research at a time when his intellectual interests were shifting in dramatic ways. One of the most significant changes to his work concerns the long-planned *History of Sexuality* project, which was put on indefinite hold after the publication of the first volume (*The Will to Knowledge*) in 1976. The project underwent successive revisions before volume two (*The Use of Pleasure*) and volume three (*The Care of the Self*) eventually emerged together in 1984. These adjustments to the direction of Foucault's research are very much apparent in the present lecture series, and for this reason *Security, Territory, Population* – as a work-in-progress – sheds a great deal of light on the development of his thought during this period.

Foucault spends much of the first three lectures in the series describing the 'apparatuses' (*dispositifs*) of security and, in particular, how they contrast to the apparatuses of law and discipline. Where law is understood as a *negative* power (it prevents, it forbids, it prohibits, etc.), and where discipline is understood as a *positive* power (it obliges, it prescribes, it incites, etc.), security is understood as neither a negative nor a positive power. Instead, Foucault argues, security 'lets things happen' and then reacts to this reality in a certain way in order to limit or even neutralize its more random, aleatory effects (p. 46-47). By way of example, Foucault discusses the kinds of techniques which are used to deal with various diseases in different periods. The juridical-legal response to leprosy in the fourteenth and fifteenth century and the disciplinary response to the plague in the sixteenth and seventeenth century are covered by Foucault in more detail in *History of Madness* and *Discipline and Punish* (see

Foucault, 2006: 3-8; 1991: 195-200). In *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault shows how security deals with the disease of smallpox from the eighteenth century onwards. Rather than deploying techniques of exclusion or quarantine, as for leprosy and the plague, the focus for medical intervention now rests on determining probabilities and establishing averages through the use of statistics. Foucault explains that the fundamental problem for security in its management of the disease involves

knowing how many people are infected with smallpox, at what age, with what effects, with what mortality rate, lesions or after-effects, the risks of inoculation, the probability of an individual dying or being infected by smallpox despite inoculation, and the statistical effects on the population in general. In short, it will no longer be the problem of exclusion, as with leprosy, or of quarantine, as with the plague, but...the medical campaigns that try to halt epidemic or endemic phenomena. (p. 10)

The point now for medical intervention, in other words, is neither to prevent contact between the sick and the healthy nor to treat the disease in all patients but to establish the 'normal distribution' of smallpox in an entire population, which includes both the sick and the healthy. It is on the basis of this distributional curve that medicine can identify and attempt to reduce the most extreme deviations from the statistical norm (p. 62).

Like the techniques which were previously developed to deal with leprosy and the plague, security is not limited to medicine. From the eighteenth century onwards, it begins to extend into other domains. For example, security comes to organize urban space: it does not attempt to plan everything in advance to the last detail but rather estimates the amount of people and goods which will in all likelihood circulate through the city and then constructs houses, streets and districts on the basis of these possible events (p. 18-20). Or again, security comes to deal with food scarcity: it does not attempt to prevent scarcity in advance but instead forecasts its possible effects before they occur and then deals with them as and when they arise (p. 36-37). In short, security allows things to 'take their course' and then manages the result of this natural process, whose random or aleatory effects will have been restricted or cancelled out entirely by the calculus of probabilities (and therefore can no longer really be said to be 'random' or 'aleatory' at all). In contrast to legal prohibition and disciplinary regulation, then, security is concerned with the management of inevitable processes (neither good nor bad in themselves) which take place on the largest possible scale, which is to say, at the level of the population.

The first three lectures are highly suggestive in their examination of security, which extends and modifies the analysis of 'biopolitics' which Foucault began elsewhere earlier in the 1970s (see e.g. Foucault, 1998: 135-45; 2001: 90-110; 134-56; 2003: 239-63). From the fourth lecture, however, Foucault realigns the focus of the entire lecture course. Whereas in the opening lecture Foucault says that he wishes to undertake a "history of technologies of security" (p. 11), now he admits that he is more interested in charting the "history of governmentality" (p. 108). This history involves an examination of the way in which the modern administrative state is gradually carved out from various modes of governing men and a description of the particular rationalities which are attached to these practices. This shift in emphasis does not mean that the concept of security is abandoned. On the contrary, Foucault makes it clear that governmentality

takes security as “its essential technical instrument” (p. 108) in order to intervene at the level of the population from the eighteenth century onwards. But by focusing on the history of governmentality, Foucault is now able to widen both the thematic and the chronological scope of the lecture series.

It becomes clear at this point what is at stake for Foucault in outlining this history of governmentality. Elsewhere, Foucault warns against using a concept of power which takes the state as its basic model. On this view, power is said to be held exclusively by a monolithic institution which imposes its sovereign will on all of its subjects. Foucault rejects this concept of power and instead encourages attention to be paid to the multiple points at which power is exercised ‘from below’ (see e.g. Foucault, 1980: 122; 188; 1998: 85-102). The history of governmentality therefore allows him to take up the problem of the state without foregoing an analysis of the ‘microphysics of power’. Foucault signals his intention in *Security, Territory, Population* to deal with the state as an object of knowledge within a set of concerted practices rather than as one enormous abstract entity:

What if the state were nothing more than a way of governing? What if the state were nothing more than a type of governmentality? What if all these relations of power that gradually take shape on the basis of multiple and very diverse processes which gradually coagulate and form an effect, what if these practices of government were precisely the basis on which the state was constituted? (p. 248)

Or, put slightly differently:

Can we talk of something like a ‘governmentality’ that would be to the state what techniques of segregation were to psychiatry, what techniques of discipline were to the penal system, and what biopolitics was to medical institutions? (p. 120)

The state is to be treated in the same way as the prison, the barracks, the hospital or the asylum in Foucault’s earlier works: the aim is not to conduct an institutional study, but to examine the economy of power in which the institution is situated and the forms of knowledge to which it gives rise. If the state is conceptualized as a specific set of techniques, then the common idea of the state as a ‘cold monster’ which looms menacingly over civil society and controls its fine details from above is no longer applicable (p. 109, 248). The focus on the history of governmentality means that what is at stake is less the vast coordinated machinations of the state than “the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics” (p. 108). It is on the basis of this ensemble that the state is able to function at all. The important point is that Foucault does not presuppose the state as a starting-point for his research, but takes governmentality as the broader political framework in which the state – as a specific form of governmental reason – is able to develop.

Foucault spends several lectures describing the Christian pastorate from the third century onwards, which he views as the historical background to political forms of governmentality. These lectures are particularly interesting in that they provide an elaboration of some of the themes Foucault was planning to develop in the proposed second volume of his original abandoned six-part *History of Sexuality* project, which was to be entitled *The Flesh and The Body* (Foucault, 1998: 21[n4]; see also Elden, 2005). The pastorate involves a relationship between a ‘shepherd’ and his ‘flock’, which

is to say, the Church and the totality of Christians. It is characterized, moreover, by a permanent intervention in the direction or conduct of Christian souls in everyday life. Foucault considers the pastorate to have given rise

to an art of conducting, directing, leading, guiding, taking in hand, and manipulating men, an art of monitoring them and urging them on step by step, an art with the function of taking charge of men collectively and individually throughout their life and at every moment of their existence. (p. 165)

Foucault emphasizes that the Christian pastorate does not disappear at the end of the sixteenth century – indeed, some of its characteristics become intensified – but it does mutate in important ways. Most significantly, its techniques of conduct move beyond a purely ecclesiastical context and begin to enter into types of political rationality. Put simply, there is a shift at the threshold of the classical age (roughly between 1580 and 1660) from a religious ‘economy of souls’ to a political ‘management of populations’ (p. 227). This new form of governmentality is characterized by the deployment of two distinct apparatuses whose common aim is the preservation of a dynamic set of forces. On the one hand, the diplomatic-military apparatus seeks to stabilize the set of forces *external* to the state, which is to say, the relations between European states in terms of territorial frontiers, commercial trading, military power, etc. The objective here, as Foucault tells us, is “the balance of Europe” (p. 296-306). On the other hand, the apparatus of police seeks to stabilize the set of forces *internal* to the state, which is to say, the maintenance of ‘good order’ within a state in terms of the productivity, health and growth of its population (p. 323-326). The objective in this case is the detailed regulation of a mass of individual bodies, or “the world of discipline” (p. 340).

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, Foucault argues that both the diplomatic-military apparatus and the apparatus of police no longer serve the same function in relation to the preservation of a dynamic set of forces which are external and internal to the state. A series of modifications are introduced into governmental reason at the cusp of modernity. What form does governmentality now take? The objective is still the maintenance of the state’s internal and external forces in equilibrium, but this is achieved through a different set of political techniques. These techniques take as their primary target the population – no longer understood as a mass of individual bodies which must be minutely regulated, but as a natural phenomenon which is subject to its own laws of movement, expansion and decline. Governmental reason in the nineteenth century allows these natural processes to occur and takes them into account instead of seeking to prohibit them from occurring (p. 349-354). Put simply, governmentality now takes the form of security. Somewhat circuitously, then, Foucault returns in his conclusion to the theme with which he began, although not without resituating the analysis of security within a broader history of governmentality.

The lecture series will be of great interest to many working within the field of management and organization studies and beyond. A great deal of attention has been paid to the concept of ‘governmentality’ over the last couple of decades in various academic fields. This is in part due to the publication of the highly influential edited collection *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* in 1991, in which the fourth lecture from the *Security, Territory, Population* course originally appeared in English translation (see Burchell, Gordon and Miller, 1991). While this area of research has proved to be incredibly fruitful, the complete set of lectures in which the concept of

'governmentality' was first elaborated by Foucault has hitherto been unavailable. *Security, Territory, Population* therefore provides an indispensable resource for those who are already working on the history of governmentality as well as a useful point of reference for those who are familiar with Foucault's work but wish to gain additional insight into some of his most productive lines of historical inquiry.

One final comment. Michel Senellart provides an excellent overview of *Security, Territory, Population* which serves as an afterword to the present lecture series. This kind of synopsis is a common feature of all of the Collège de France courses published so far. What marks this particular postscript out, however, are its closing lines. Senellart writes that there has recently been an "application of the concept of governmentality to domains as distant from Foucault's central interests as human resource management, or organization theory" (Senellart, 2007: 391).¹ This fact, he goes on to say, "testifies to the malleability of [Foucault's] analytical scheme and its capacity to circulate in the most varied spaces" (*ibid.*). Perhaps this is true, although one is certainly left wondering whether his analytical scheme really is so pliable or whether management and organization studies has at times been happy to twist, contort and bend Foucault's concepts out of all recognizable shape to suit its own ends. It is hoped that the publication of *Security, Territory, Population*, finally, will make it far less likely for concepts such as 'governmentality', 'biopolitics' and 'disciplinary power' to be used within the field of management and organization studies with quite the same ease and seeming carelessness to which many of us have unfortunately become accustomed.

references

- Barratt, E. (2003) 'Foucault, HRM and the Ethos of the Critical Management Scholar', *Journal of Management Studies*, 40(5): 1069-1087.
- Burchell, G., C. Gordon and P. Miller (eds.) (1991) *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Elden, S. (2005) 'The Problem of Confession: The Productive Failure of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*', *Journal for Cultural Research*, 9(1): 23-41.
- Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, trans. C. Gordon, et al. New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, M. (1991) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan. London: Penguin.
- Foucault, M. (1998) *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, trans. R. Hurley. London: Penguin.
- Foucault, M. (2001) *Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume 3*, trans. R. Hurley, et al. London: Penguin.
- Foucault, M. (2003) *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, trans. D. Macey. New York: Picador.
- Foucault, M. (2006) *History of Madness*, trans. J. Murphy and J. Khalfa. London and New York: Routledge.
- McKinlay, A. and K. Starkey (eds.) (1998) *Foucault, Management and Organization Theory: From Panopticon to Technologies of Self*. London: Sage.

1 Senellart specifically cites Townley (1994), Barratt (2003) and McKinlay and Starkey (1998) (Senellart, 2007: 401[n149; n150]).

Senellart, M. (2007) 'Course Context', in M. Foucault *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78*, trans. G. Burchell. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.369-401.

Townley, B. (1994) *Reframing Human Resource Management: Power, Ethics and the Subject at Work*. London: Sage.

the author

Nick Butler is a doctoral student at the School of Management, University of Leicester. His research seeks to address the question 'what is management consultancy?'
E-mail: nb115@le.ac.uk