



Book Reviews

In 2009, Polity Press published a volume of essays by Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose. The book assembled some of the most influential work that had emerged out of their collaboration. As book review editors we asked eminent Foucault expert Alan McKinlay to review the book with a focus on how the work of Miller and Rose had been utilized — and, maybe more importantly, could be utilized — in organization studies. Alan McKinlay's thoughtful analysis triggered a response by Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose, which is published after the review.

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Organization Studies book review editors

Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose: Governing the Present: Administering Social and Personal Life

2008, Cambridge: Polity ISBN 0745641003 (hbk); ISBN 0745641010 (pbk)

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The work of Michel Foucault looms large over organization studies. But Foucault has been deployed more as a touchstone than as a theoretical resource to be used, extended and superseded. Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose have been dissatisfied with exegesis and determined to make Foucault *productive*. Specifically, Foucault's notion of 'governmentality' provided their point of departure for a wide-ranging series of empirical studies of, for instance, psychiatry, consumption, neo-liberal politics and public health. Although the essays collected in *Governing the Present* were written across the 1990s, they are coherent and remain relevant and important to how we understand contemporary organizations. The point here is not so much to assess the depth and consistency of their fidelity to Foucault, but to register the ways in which they have gone beyond Foucault. In the last two decades the influence of governmentality has spread geographically and across the social sciences and humanities. Nor has this collaboration exhausted their separate and no less important contributions. Nikolas Rose has rewritten our understanding of the ways that social sciences, especially psychology and social statistics, have transformed the ways that we think about ourselves as individuals and 'manage' ourselves in institutions and communities (Rose 1999). Most recently, in *The Politics of Life Itself* (2007), Rose has written about the ways that human genomics are transforming the very notion of what it is to be human. Peter Miller has made several path-breaking contributions to our understanding of accounting, from the construction of the calculable, productive individual during the British industrial revolution to the affinities between scientific management, standard cost accounting and national efficiency in America during the opening decades of the 20th century (Miller and O'Leary 1987; Miller and Napier 1993). One will find very few direct references

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to Foucault in the various governmentalist studies, but his influence is clear enough: in their insistence on the interpenetration of discourse and practice in the making and remaking of institutions and subjectivities; by their challenge to any political theory that remains wedded to the state as the defining institution of contemporary society; and, perhaps above all, on the ubiquity and productiveness of power that is created by — and generates — the diverse administrative processes that define our lives and allow us to be free.

For Miller and Rose, 'governmentality' refers to the way that certain types of conduct are defined as problematic, how these are then defined, categorized and interrogated, particularly when it involves social science. Through this process — sometimes lengthy, always contested — it is not simply that data are compiled and assessed but that policies and practices are necessarily entangled and cannot be easily or productively separated into cause and effect. In the administration of social life, there is no knowledge that is innocent of, or comes *before*, power. Following Foucault, one cannot think of power without knowledge, or knowledge without practices. For the governmentalist, as for Foucault, power is not repressive but productive of different ways of seeing and administering the world, different ways of making us free, and of the categories that define those realms of freedom. One of the most important essays in this collection, 'Political Power beyond the State', argues that 'managing at a distance' through numerical calculation and comparison has penetrated, blurred — perhaps obliterated — the distinction between the state and civil society. The institutions and activities of the state are just as likely to be *numerically* held to account as any private or voluntary body. The mechanisms of governmentality will vary in terms of their scope, durability and sophistication. Some forms of 'management at a distance' are extremely perishable, prone to being dislodged by economic circumstance or changed policy priorities. Others are cumulative and expansive, growing in systemic reach and abstract ambition. However different the form, the function remains unchanged: central monitoring measures the depth and consistency of local and individual self-surveillance. Necessarily, this means that there is no universal truth of governing social life, but innumerable local forms of governmentality all with their own particular histories and their own complex relationships to institutions, power and authority. Again, this is entirely consistent with Foucault's project. Where Marxism looked to class interests — or to the interests of a given group of professionals or managers — to explain not just the motivation but the ways that social relationships were imagined and how they could be managed and so 'individuals', the 'organisation' or 'society' improved, governmentality spoke of a dissatisfaction with a Marxist theory and political practice that was unable to come to terms with the neo-liberal reshaping of the state, enterprise and community. Whatever the brutalities of neo-liberalism, one consistent theme was compelling individuals to be free, to exercise choice and accept responsibility as parents, workers, consumers. The central neo-liberal motif of freedom should not be dismissed, Miller and Rose insist, as so much ideology, but taken seriously, engrained in the routines of all kinds of administrative practices.

'Governmentality' is perhaps best considered as an open-ended approach to historical and empirical research rather than a single, coherent theory. Much of Miller and Rose's work has a programmatic feel to it, a sense that they are providing a new way of thinking about how society and the individual are made

and managed. This gives all of their work a freshness and openness. Inevitably, theoretical and empirical questions remain to be asked. Strangely, 'governmentalism' has had only the most limited impact on organization studies. This is all the more surprising given the long vogue enjoyed by Michel Foucault in the field. Perhaps this is less surprising given the governmentologists' marked and deliberate refusal to engage with other critical studies of management, work and organization. On the one hand, this self-denying ordinance has allowed the 'governmentalists' to develop their own theoretical position and deploy it empirically without the troublesome distraction of debate with other academic communities. On the other hand, this has precluded 'governmentalism' from engaging with, for instance, either the labour process tradition or critical management studies, both of which aim to understand the social and economic roots of work regimes. This is ironic since, as the book's introduction makes clear, the objective of the governmentalist project was to trace the 'little engineers of the human soul, and their mundane knowledges, techniques and procedures', from psychiatrists to factory managers (p. 5). The labour process perspective examines the impact of different ways of managing the workplace in terms of skill and workloads. Critical management studies, by contrast, has been more concerned with how various actors derive meaning and construct identities in organizations saturated with ambiguous languages of freedom and discipline. Where the labour process tradition takes for granted that corporate strategy is driven by economic imperatives and that 'management', however internally divided, remains basically a coherent, if factionalized, project, 'resistance' then becomes a function of management strategy, something which veers analytically between an incipient class consciousness and a reactive, ephemeral instinct. For 'critical management studies', resistance is uninteresting in itself, and is but one of the many ways that individuals make sense of their lives. In an important sense, they constitute two sides of the same coin: both are likely to place an institution, social group or profession at the centre of their analysis; and both share an underlying realism, albeit one that allows for greater or lesser degrees of social construction. Irrespective of the differences between these two critical traditions, both do seek to grapple with our experience of work organizations. There is, therefore, a theoretical, methodological and empirical space for an engagement between 'governmentalism', ethnography and discourse studies about the ways we 'manage' ourselves, how we administer each other and how we cope with, comply with or resist these administrative processes.

Disconcertingly, particularly for historians, governmentologists dismiss the search for the origins of a given form of power or social administration as futile. Rather, governmentologists would have us look for those moments at which previously distinct administrative logics collide and produces some transfer of knowledge and practices: the results can range from the anodyne to the transformative. Governmentalism has paid no attention to the ways that discourses and practices migrate between different fields. Again, this is similar to Foucault, who was content to make sweeping gestures about factories and schools coming to resemble prisons but said little or nothing about how this happened, far less why. There are ways of extending governmentalism theoretically and methodologically that would allow greater dialogue with organization studies.

Theoretically, there are two related sources that could extend the governmentologists capacity to explain diffusion: actor network theory and the sociology of

science, particularly the new ways of understanding markets and financial instruments pioneered by Donald MacKenzie (2008) and Michel Callon (2007). Both are close to the governmentals in their concern to understand the social agency of objects and both pay close attention to the empirics of how, for example, exotic financial mathematics *make* real the objects they purport to describe. The splicing together of these two research traditions would respect their shared concern for long-run empirical analysis and their determination to forsake general theorizing in favour of the particular. And, of course, the recent moves by McKenzie and the new sociology of finance to draw on J. L. Austin's notion of 'performativity' is shared with other post-Foucauldian theorists, notably Judith Butler. 'Performativity' allows us to examine how particular technologies or discourses — empowerment, quality, lean manufacturing — come to produce some material version of what began as an abstract formula or a disparate set of practices. Given this confluence of theoretical and empirical traditions, it seems likely that they will mutually enrich each other and increase their influence still further. Understanding how an 'assemblage' forms and gains authority and, no less important, how that authority is lost, is a process about which governmentalism has remained all but silent. Again, the addition of some relatively simple methodologies would go a long way in answering these questions. For example, Shenhav (1999) has explored the rise of 'systematic' and 'scientific' management between 1870 and 1930 by a content analysis of the key terms used in American engineering journals. He demonstrates how a term such as 'efficiency' was initially linked to a specific task or department but gradually expanded to encompass 'the factory' until, by the Great War, the aspiration, perhaps imperative, was to apply rational engineering principles and practices to society as a whole. Discourses which establish new problems, and develop and deploy new techniques, can be tracked over time in a way that is wholly compatible with governmentalism. Practices, and how they construct, legitimize and extend certain bodies of abstract knowledge, can also be tracked. This complex discursive process was linked to the professionalizing project of the American engineer. A collective biography of the members of the professional bodies, tracing their careers in the emerging managerial bureaucracies of corporate America, would demonstrate how these ideas moved from the professional press to routine practice. To be sure, this involves painstaking work, but it does suggest the major contribution that governmentalism could make to management and organization history. Similarly, the complex, highly political journeys of contemporary management projects can be tracked over time and space. Disparate literatures on multinationals and technology transfer, the brokerage roles of consultancy firms, and logistics systems, would provide the starting-point for understanding the diffusion and impact of new management practices. Without this type of archival and ethnographic work, the danger is that, at best, governmentalist accounts rely on the pronouncements of management gurus rather than the 'little engineers of the human soul'. Or worse, governmentalist studies can be dismissed as a form of charades in which the widely different meanings of elastic terms, such as 'efficiency', are endlessly collapsed one into the other.

What does governmentalism mean in terms of management and organization? First, that managerial strategies cannot be 'read' — or evaluated — from market signals. Second, that the firm — or the organization — is no longer the focal point

of analysis. Third, that ‘governmentalism’ offers a type of cultural economy. So, rather than being dismissed as so many management fads or fashions, ‘governmentalism’ asks us to examine the way that terms such as ‘productivity’, ‘quality’, or ‘excellence’ gained such traction not just in corporate boardrooms but also in state agencies, schools and charities. For this is the paradox at the heart of the governmental project: the ways in which we discipline ourselves are, at the same time, precisely how we make ourselves ‘free’, ‘efficient’ and ‘empowered’.

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Rejoinder to Alan McKinlay

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Interdisciplinarity is all the rage. But partitioning and parochialism remain the norm. Alan McKinlay is keenly aware of the need to overcome this. As he indicates, disciplinary, and sub-disciplinary, boundaries continue to hamper the utilization of particular tools for enquiry, such as ‘governmentality’. This is compounded when some prefer exegesis to exemplification, and debates remain restricted to fidelity claims. As McKinlay hints, this perhaps explains why ‘governmentalism’ has had relatively limited impact on organization studies. This is regrettable, and in this brief rejoinder we can of course not hope to remedy things. Instead, we pick up on just a few of the important issues McKinlay raises in his thoughtful piece.

First, *rediscovering*. Sociologists and organization scholars were remarkably neglectful, for about half a century, of the interlinking of the economy and economic calculation (Miller 2008). This is surprising, given Weber and Sombart’s bold pronouncements concerning the role played by accounting in the development of capitalist social relations. Attention is now being paid to the constitutive capacities of calculative practices, their roles in making and moulding markets and market relations, their ability to make visible and act upon entities and the individuals that inhabit them. It is, however nearly two decades since we argued, in ‘governing economic life’, that modes of calculation have a constitutive role in

the determination of such as costs and profits, as do ideas or discourses of the economy and its component parts. Others argued similarly around the same time, although typically not within sociology or organization studies (Burchell et al. 1980; Thompson 1986; Tomlinson 1994; Tribe 1978). Ironically, it was a set of people working in the shadow of Marxism that first argued, more than thirty years ago, for the constitutive capacity of modes of calculation, including accounting (Cutler et al. 1978, Ch. 8).

The rediscovery of the constitutive role of modes of calculation is now in full swing (at least in some quarters), following Michel Callon's well timed call to arms, although it is now termed 'performativity'. This further emphasis on the constitutive roles played by the material instruments or devices that make and shape the economy and economic relations is most welcome. But performativity is not limited to the instruments, models and metrics that seek to act on economic life. Governing, or intervening, whether it concerns the economy or sexual relations, has a discursive character as well as an instrumental one. And, while the governing of the economy draws, of course, to a large extent on economic concepts, it also goes considerably beyond them. This is why we argued for the importance of attending to the *interrelations* between the instruments or devices for calculating, and the varied ideas, programmes or discourses that set out the objects and objectives of governing. This linking of programmes and technologies, or ideas and instruments, is pivotal if we are to understand the ways in which economic life is constantly being designed and redesigned. This is why we have preferred to speak of assemblages, rather than organizations, institutions or devices. It includes paying attention (contra McKinlay) to the ways in which an assemblage forms and gains at least temporary authority, even if it subsequently re-forms (Miller and O'Leary 1993, 1994). This allows us to examine the interrelations among the diverse and multiple components that make possible the governing of economic life. And it allows us to examine how particular modes of calculation can mean different things in different programmes. Put differently and somewhat bluntly, if instruments or devices are viewed as performative all by themselves, then we have taken a big step backwards in terms of our understanding of what makes economic life tick.

Second, *travelling*. McKinlay chides governmentalism for paying no attention to the ways that discourses and practices migrate between different fields. This is not really accurate. In fact, much of the emphasis in 'political power beyond the state' was precisely on the ways in which 'programmes of government' can move from one space to another, and can link up diverse concerns through what Latour had called 'translation'. We illustrated this by reference to the so-called 'efficiency craze' of the early 20th century in Britain, as well as by reference to the ideals for administering the large corporation in the USA in the interwar period. Our point was to examine the ways in which a translatability was established between a set of relatively abstract political ideals and more 'localized' programmes, for governing domains such as the factory, the school or the newly emerged giant corporations with their professional managers. We argued similarly in 'governing economic life', pointing to the importance of attending to the ways in which shared vocabularies, theories and explanations can allow loose and flexible associations to be established between agents dispersed in time and space, whether departments of state, pressure groups, managers, teachers, academics, employees or parents.

More recently, this issue of 'travelling' has been examined further in a number of studies, although the large number and dispersed nature of academic journals and publications, combined with disciplinary boundaries, means that research about 'travelling' does not always itself travel as well as it should. For instance, Kurunmäki and Miller (2006), drawing on Kurunmäki (2004), focus precisely on this issue of 'travelling', when they consider the hybridizing of expertise and organizational forms that the 'modernizing government' agenda required and inspired. Related issues — concerning healthcare regulation and risk management, respectively — are addressed in Kurunmäki and Miller (2008) and Miller et al. (2008). Mennicken (2008), in a paper titled 'connecting worlds', examines the apparently technical issue of the travelling and translation of international auditing standards into post-Soviet audit practice. And Power's massively influential book on the audit society shows how labile and fungible the idea and practice of audit is (Power 1997). While one might not at first sight label this book a 'governmentality' or Foucault-inspired study, it most certainly is, in its commitment to examine conjointly the programmatic and the instrumental nature of audit. Of course, more could always be done in this respect, and McKinlay is absolutely right to emphasize the importance of examining this phenomenon. But a start has at least been made. Any further work in this direction would, we hope, examine how some things travel better than others. For instance, audit is able to travel 'light', whereas socialist planning is too heavy to travel easily. This is exactly the sort of issue that scholars of organization could and should be examining.

Third, *mediating*. The historian Paul Veyne once described the work of Michel Foucault as a 'philosophy of the relation', rather than a philosophy of 'discourse' or 'structure'. This epithet can be seen as applying both to the relations that individuals have with themselves, and to the relations among the multiple practices that aspire to act on the actions of others. The notion of 'mediating instruments', which we have borrowed loosely from historians of science, such as Norton Wise, Margaret Morrison and Mary Morgan, is helpful here (Miller and O'Leary 2007), for it focuses attention on the ability of an instrument to carry within it a dual set of ideas, whether these pertain to engineering and industry, science and the economy, or medicine and finance. As Ian Hacking might have said, mediating instruments operate as both means of representation and means of intervention, linking up discrete domains while remaining distinct from the object of intervention.

This can, we suggest, assist scholars of organizations, for at least some of the 'governmentality' literature has focused on rather abstract conceptions of modes of governing drawn from political philosophy, rather than the conceptions of those seeking to design individual entities or sets of entities, processes or regulations. A focus on mediating instruments and models can help in the empirical analysis of the varied ways in which a relatively localized set of actors and agents seek to define and inter-define their actions and aspirations in relation to larger political and economic categories. In this regard, we endorse strongly McKinlay's suggestion to engage with the sociology of science. Indeed, as already indicated, we drew considerably on the writings of both Callon and Latour in 'governing economic life' and 'political power beyond the state', in particular the very useful notions of 'centres of calculation', 'inscription devices' and 'action at a distance'. We felt these chimed well with the formulations of both Foucault and Hacking concerning ways of acting (intervening) on (in) the

actions and affairs of others, particularly when distant and when the action is indirect. These remain, we feel, important topics for scholars of organization, particularly when combined with an analysis of the instruments that seek to link domains, actors and entities.

Fourth, *engaging*. McKinlay refers to the ‘marked and deliberate refusal’ by governmentality scholars to engage with other critical studies of management, work and organizations. Again, we have to point out that this is not accurate, even if he is correct in identifying a preference to get on with things rather than get bogged down in fruitless squabbles. One instance, which might be viewed more as ‘critical accounting’ than ‘critical management studies’, is the exchange between Miller and O’Leary (1998) and Froud et al. (1998). While this took place beyond the confines of organization studies narrowly defined, it allowed readers the opportunity to examine an engagement between distinct ways of approaching a common phenomenon. Other examples, which indicate a willingness to engage with some of the more general theoretical issues separating research traditions, are Hoskin (1994) and Grey (1994), and the various contributions summarized in Carter et al. (2002). Again, these might not be viewed, strictly speaking, as falling within the domain of ‘critical management studies’, but they do at least indicate a willingness to engage across theoretical traditions. It is for participants and readers to judge, however, the pay-offs from such engagements. As Ian Hacking remarks in *The Social Construction of What?*, it is our job to analyse not exclude. But, as he also remarks, achieving this without talking past each other is not easy.

To conclude, McKinlay offers a set of thoughtful observations on how organization scholars might engage with ‘governmentality’ research, and vice versa. One thing which is clear, as McKinlay states in conclusion, is that the way forward is no longer to focus on the organization or the firm as the unit of analysis, for this misses the point both empirically and conceptually. Hopefully, this brief note indicates some of the ways in which organization scholars might draw more extensively on, and extend, a tradition of research that seems currently to be flourishing in other disciplines.

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Warren Bennis, Daniel Goleman, James O'Toole with Patricia Ward Biederman: Transparency. How leaders create a culture of candor
2008, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 128 pages ISBN 0470278765 (hbk)

Archon Fung, Mary Graham and David Weil: Full Disclosure: The Perils and Promises of Transparency
2007, New York: Cambridge University Press, 282 pages ISBN 0521876179 (hbk)

Christina Garsten and Monica Lindh de Montoya (eds): Transparency in a New Global Order: Unveiling Organizational Visions
2008, Cheltenham: Edgar Elgar, 297 pages ISBN 1845423254 (hbk)

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Recently, three books crossed my path that are connected by no more or less than carrying the word 'transparency' in their titles. Their authors are from very different social science disciplines. Warren Bennis, Daniel Goleman and James O'Toole are perhaps best known for their pioneering work in, and best-selling