Introduction: reframing political thought

As we enter the twenty-first century, many of the conventional ways of analysing politics and power seem obsolescent. They were forged in the period when the boundaries of the nation state seemed to set the natural frame for political systems, and when geo-politics seemed inevitably to be conducted in terms of alliances and conflicts amongst national states. They took their model of political power from an idea of the state formed in nineteenth-century philosophical and constitutional discourse. This imagined a centralized body within any nation, a collective actor with a monopoly of the legitimate use of force in a demarcated territory. This apparent monopoly of force was presumed to underpin the unique capacity of the state to make general and binding laws and rules across its territory. It also seemed to imply that all other legitimate authority was implicitly or explicitly authorized by the power of the state. Such styles of thinking about political power also embodied particular ideas about the human beings who were the subjects of power. These were structured by the image of the individualized, autonomous and self-possessed political subject of right, will and agency. Political conceptions of human collectivities also tended to see them as singularities with identities which provided the basis for political interests and political actions: classes, races, orders, interest groups. Within such styles of thought, freedom was defined in essentially negative terms. Freedom was imagined as the absence of coercion or domination; it was a condition in which the essential subjective will of an individual, a group or a people could express itself and was not silenced, subordinated or enslaved by an alien power. The central problems of such analyses were: 'Who holds power? In whose interests do they wield it? How is it legitimated? Who does it represent? To what extent does it hold sway across its territory and its population? How can it be secured or contested, or overthrown?' State/civil society; public/private; legal/illegal; market/family; domination/emancipation; coercion/freedom: the horizons of political thought were established by this philosophical and sociological language.

These images and vocabularies of politics and power have been fundamentally challenged by contemporary politics itself. Some had predicted that, following the collapse of state socialism, free-market liberal democratic individualism would shape our political future. But, to the contrary, we are seeing the proliferation of forms of politics and of types of contestation which cannot be calibrated in terms of the dichotomies of traditional political thought. The challenges posed to the idea of the nation state by the themes of globalization and localization are too familiar to require much elaboration: the globalization of flows of money, communications, products, persons, ideas and cultures, and the localization of local economic regions, world cities, regional identities, lifestyle sectors and so forth. These challenges disrupt the images of spatialization and communication that underpinned conventional notions of nation states, their territorial unity and governability: the mechanical image of the steam engine or the internal combustion engine, with their associated roads and railways; the semiotic image of a national language and a national currency, the electrical image of the telegraph with its fixed lines relaying signals between fixed points through a single protocol; the organic image of a single national economy, a system of relations amongst discrete economic actors; the sovereignty image of a single source of law, right and authority in a given domain.

As these images of the nation state fragment, in the face of strange new couplings, flows and alliances that spatialize power along very different dimensions, and that establish connections and relations through very different lines of communication, a range of other challenges to orthodox politics are on the rise. New feminisms are articulating, in different ways, the insight of the women's movements of the 1960s, which disrupted the conventional divisions between the political and the personal and between the public and the private. The politics of recognition – of national, cultural, ethnic, religious, linguistic identity – whether in its Western forms of multi-culturalism or its non-Western forms of fundamentalism, disputes conventional notions of the relations of state and citizen, and the sources of political legitimacy and citizenship. A new ethical politics has taken shape – of the environment, of animal rights, of reproduction, of health, of everyday life itself – which refuses the idea that politics is a matter of state, parliament, election and party programme. Anti-political themes are on the rise in right-wing, left-wing and 'no-wing' varieties, stressing the inefficacy, the limits, the inevitable failings of state provision of welfare, crime control, education and much more, and demanding that individuals, families, communities, employers take back to themselves the powers and

responsibilities that, since the nineteenth century, have been acquired by states, politicians and legislators. In the face of such events, conventional ways of thinking about the contemporary organization of powers in our societies, and their histories, seem troubled and uncertain. In this context, it is relevant to consider the extent to which these images ever adequately captured the strategies, tactics and techniques through which individuals and populations have been governed in 'the West' since the late eighteenth century.

The aim of this book is to suggest some alternative ways of thinking about our contemporary regimes of government and their histories. In doing so, I hope to introduce some new options into our current political imagination, to amplify the possibilities that are open to us in our present. Of course, in our millenarian moment, many novel theories of culture, power and ethics are being proposed. I do not intend to review or evaluate these. I take my starting point from one particular style of analysis. This has grown out of Michel Foucault's brief writings and lectures on governmentality.[1] In these pieces on governmentality, Foucault sketched some pathways for analysing power that were not transfixed by the image of the state or the constitutive oppositions of conventional political philosophy and political sociology. They defined their problem space in terms of government, understood, in the words of Foucault's much-cited maxim, as 'the conduct of conduct'. Government, here, refers to all endeavours to shape, guide, direct the conduct of others, whether these be the crew of a ship, the members of a household, the employees of a boss, the children of a family or the inhabitants of a territory. And it also embraces the ways in which one might be urged and educated to bridle one's own passions, to control one's own instincts, to govern oneself. Foucault thus implied that, rather than framing investigations in terms of state or politics, it might be more productive to investigate the formation and transformation of theories, proposals, strategies and technologies for 'the conduct of conduct'. Such studies of government would address that dimension of our history composed by the invention, contestation, operationalization and transformation of more or less rationalized schemes, programmes, techniques and devices which seek to shape conduct so as to achieve certain ends.[2]

[1] The best introduction to Foucault's own argument is his essay on governmentality, which is the text of a lecture given at the Collège de France in 1978 (Foucault 1979b, now republished as Foucault 1991).

[2] I am drawing directly here upon Miller and Rose 1995b. For further useful introductions, see Peter Miller's account in his analysis of Foucault's conception of power (Miller 1987); Colin Gordon's introduction to *The Foucault*

Such rationalized practices should be distinguished from the controls on conduct that have, no doubt, existed in all human collectivities at all times and places. This distinction hangs on the elements of thought, intention and calculation. Practices of government are deliberate attempts to shape conduct in certain ways in relation to certain objectives. Attempts at governing may be formally rationalized in programmatic statements, policy documents, pamphlets and speeches – for example, Keynesian economic management, Beveridge's strategies of social insurance, the new forms of risk management coming to shape the provision of mental health services across the English-speaking world in the late 1990s, the programmes of scientific pedagogy developed since the nineteenth century or the multitude of interventions on the family and child rearing. But others are less formally articulated, and exist in the form of a variety of practical rationalities within particular types of practice – for example, much social work or police work is of this type. Governing is a genuinely heterogeneous dimension of thought and action – something captured to some extent in the multitude of words available to describe and enact it: education, control, influence, regulation, administration, management, therapy, reformation, guidance. Nevertheless, it is possible to differentiate the exercise of power in the form of government from simple domination.[3] To dominate is to ignore or to attempt to crush the capacity for action of the dominated. But to govern is to recognize that capacity for action and to adjust oneself to it. To govern is to act upon action. This entails trying to understand what mobilizes the domains or entities to be governed: to govern one must act upon these forces, instrumentalize them in order to shape actions, processes and outcomes in desired directions. Hence, when it comes to governing human beings, to govern is to presuppose the freedom of the governed. To govern humans is not to crush their capacity to act, but to acknowledge it and to utilize it for one's own objectives.

I think it is useful to take Foucault's ideas about government as a starting point for these investigations. But I do not think that there is some general theory or history of government, politics or power latent in Foucault's writings, which should be extracted and then applied to other issues. There are those who seek to be Foucault scholars. That is their privilege. I advocate a relation to his work that is looser, more

Effect (C. Gordon 1991); Graham Burchell's essay in *Foucault and Political Reason* (G. Burchell 1996); and the introduction by Mitchell Dean and Barry Hindess to *Governing Australia* (Dean and Hindess 1998).

[3] Peter Miller's book, already cited, provides an excellent analysis of this (Miller 1987).

inventive and more empirical. It is less concerned with being faithful to a source of authority than with working within a certain ethos of enquiry, with fabricating some conceptual tools that can be set to work in relation to the particular questions that trouble contemporary thought and politics.

The investigations of government that interest me here are those which try to gain a purchase on the forces that traverse the multitudes of encounters where conduct is subject to government: prisons, clinics, schoolrooms and bedrooms, factories and offices, airports and military organizations, the marketplace and shopping mall, sexual relations and much more. They try to track force relations at the molecular level, as they flow through a multitude of human technologies, in all the practices, arenas and spaces where programmes for the administration of others intersect with techniques for the administration of ourselves. They focus upon the various incarnations of what one might term 'the will to govern', as it is enacted in a multitude of programmes, strategies, tactics, devices, calculations, negotiations, intrigues, persuasions and seductions aimed at the conduct of the conduct of individuals, groups, populations – and indeed oneself. From this perspective, the question of the state that was so central to earlier investigations of political power is relocated. The state now appears simply as one element – whose functionality is historically specific and contextually variable – in multiple circuits of power, connecting a diversity of authorities and forces, within a whole variety of complex assemblages.

To begin an investigation of power relations at this molecular level, however, is not to counterpose the micro to the macro. This binary opposition seems natural and obvious. But it should be treated with some suspicion. If there are differences between the government of large spaces and processes and the government of small spaces and processes, these are not ontological but technological. As Bruno Latour has often pointed out, the 'macro-actor' is not different in kind from the 'micro-actor', but is merely one who has a longer and more reliable 'chain of command' – that is to say, assembled into longer and more dispersed networks of persons, things and techniques. Indeed, in the analytics of government, we need to pay particular attention to the ways in which, in practice, distinctions and associations are established between practices and apparatuses deemed political and aimed at the management of large-scale characteristics of territories or populations, and micro-technologies for the management of human conduct in specific individuals in particular locales and practices. For example, the social insurance regimes for managing insecurity set in place in most Western nations in the first half of the twentieth century sought simultaneously

to act on the security of the population as a whole, and on the conduct and circumstances of the individual household and its members. The tactics of economic regulation that took shape over the same period sought explicitly to link national prosperity with the self-advancement of individual enterprises and citizens, through tax regimes, accounting practices and the implantation and modulation of particular calculative attitudes in economic actors. The family mechanism has, for at least two centuries, been made up and shaped by legal regulation, moral exhortation, fiscal manipulation and expert intervention in the name of both public good and private well-being. And the regulation of the health of the population, since the middle of the nineteenth century, has established a whole array of linkages between practices aimed at securing the strength and vitality of the nation and its 'manpower', and practices aimed at the maximization of individual and familial health and hygiene. These links between the molar and the molecular have taken a variety of forms, not merely or principally paternalistic attempts at the micro-management of conduct, but more complex and subtle procedures for establishing a delicate and complex web of affiliations between the thousands of habits of which human beings are composed – movements, gestures, combinations, associations, passions, satisfactions, exhaustions, aspirations, contemplations – and the wealth, tranquillity, efficiency, economy, glory of the collective body.

It was these political arts of combination that Michel Foucault tried to capture in his notion of governmentality. 'Governmentality', as the term was used by Foucault, suggested that, from at least the eighteenth century, rulers, statesmen and politicians came to see their tasks *in terms of* government.[4] This 'modern' conception of rule as government differed from earlier forms, such as those exercised by a prince over his territory, a feudal lord over his domain or an emperor over his empire. This is because, drawing on ways of governing conduct that had already been deployed by others, in particular the churches of early modern Europe, authorities came to understand the task of ruling politically as requiring them to act upon the details of the conduct of the individuals and populations who were their subjects, individually and collectively, in order to increase their good order, their security, their tranquillity, their prosperity, health and happiness.[5]

[4] Foucault 1991.

[5] Foucault and his colleagues often suggested that the earliest articulations of this corruption of rule as government were in 'the science of police' and related secular practices of social discipline that took shape in the early modern period (e.g. Pasquino 1991). Ian Hunter has argued that this suggestion seriously underestimates the key role of confessional churches in the

Once political power takes as its object the conduct of its subjects in relation to particular moral or secular standards, and takes the well-being of those subjects as its guiding principle, it is required to rationalize itself in particular ways. To rule properly, it is necessary to rule in a light of a knowledge of the particular and specific characteristics that are taken to be immanent to that over which rule is to be exercised: the characteristics of a land with its peculiar geography, fertility, climate; of a population with its rates of birth, illness, death; of a society with its classes, interests, conflicts; of an economy with its laws of circulation, of supply and demand; of individuals with their passions, interests and propensities to good and evil. In the same process, ruling becomes a 'reflexive' activity: those who would rule must ask themselves who should govern, what is the justification for government, what or who should be governed and how. Hence 'modern' governmental rationalities, modern ways of exercising rule, inescapably entail a certain investment of thought, however attenuated, and a certain form of reason, however much it may be obscured.

A certain kind of reason, then, makes possible both the exercise of government and its critique. Working along these lines, a multitude of rigorous and innovative studies of specific strategies, techniques and practices for the conduct of conduct have been generated.[6] Thus, rigorous empirical studies have been undertaken of emergence of social insurance; education; accounting; the enterprise, economic citizenship and new managerial technologies; crime control; the regulation of unemployment; poverty and insecurity; strategies of development; medicine, psychiatry and the regulation of health; child abuse and sexual offences; and new social strategies of empowerment.[7]

delineation of populations under particular regimes of religious and moral government (Hunter 1998). I return to this issue briefly in chapter 1.

[6] Useful collections of papers introducing these ideas are G. Burchell, Gordon and Miller 1991; Barry, Osborne and Rose 1996; and Dean and Hindess 1988. Barry Hindess has subjected Foucault's arguments to rigorous scrutiny in *Discourses of Power: From Hobbes to Foucault* (Hindess 1996a). See also the work of Mitchell Dean: Dean 1991, 1994, 1999.

[7] See the following: social insurance: Defert 1991, Donzelot 1991, Ewald 1986; education: Hunter 1988, 1994; accounting: Miller 1990, Hopwood and Miller 1994, Power 1993, 1994a, 1994b, 1997; the enterprise, economic citizenship, new managerial technologies: Miller and O'Leary 1992, Miller 1994; crime control: Feeley and Simon 1992, O'Malley 1992, Stenson 1993, Feeley and Simon 1994; the regulation of unemployment: Walters 1994a, Dean 1995; poverty and insecurity: Dean 1991, Procacci 1991, 1993, 1998; medicine, psychiatry, and the regulation of health: Castel 1988, Castel, Castel and Lovell 1986, Miller and Rose 1986, T. Osborne 1993, Greco

These studies have shown, in their different ways, that the activity of government is inextricably bound up with the activity of thought. It is thus both made possible by and constrained by what can be thought and what cannot be thought at any particular moment in our history. To analyse the history of government, then, requires attention to the conditions under which it becomes possible to consider certain things to be true – and hence to say and do certain things – about human beings and their interrelations as they produce, consume, reproduce, act, infract, live, sicken, die.[8] This insistence on the significance of the formation and transformation of truthful thought differentiates studies of government from most varieties of political sociology.[9] Of course, there are many different ways in which thought has rendered itself truthful and in which authority has linked itself to truth. For many centuries, and in many locales, authority grounded itself in spiritual and theological truth, which has its own particular rules for truth gathering and truth certification, and its own criteria for 'being in truth'. More recently, in many territories and practices, authority has grounded itself in consti-

1993, Rose 1994b; child abuse and sexual offences: Bell 1993, Parton 1995, 1996; alcoholism and addiction: Valverde 1997, 1998a; and new social strategies of empowerment: Baistow 1995, Barron 1996, Cruikshank 1994.

[8] I speak of 'truth' rather than 'meaning' deliberately – that is to say, I am not concerned with the questions that have troubled hermeneutic histories and sociologies – how to discover the social meanings that actions and events held for actors in other times and places– but with the ways in which certain languages of description, explanation, calculation and judgement came to acquire the value of truth and the kinds of actions and techniques that were made possible by such truths. Foucault sets out his own point of view on these issues in his preface to *The Order of Things* and in his inaugural lecture 'Orders of discourse' (Foucault 1970, 1972b). The philosophical issues at stake here are usefully discussed in Herbert Dreyfuss and Paul Rabinow's introduction to the work of Michel Foucault (Dreyfuss and Rabinow 1983).

[9] Of course, this emphasis on political thought is not itself novel: it intersects with, and draws upon, a body of investigation into 'the history of political ideas' which has sought to examine the conventions, presuppositions and values which underpin political argument at different historical moments. Notably, of course, this has been explored in the writings of Pocock (e.g. Pocock 1985) and of Quentin Skinner and his associates (for an introduction to Skinner, see Tully 1988). Some similar arguments have been developed in a more 'Foucauldian' spirit by William Connolly and Michael Shapiro (Connolly 1983, Shapiro 1984). In a slightly different sense, this focus on truthful thought draws attention to the particular procedures through which political argument makes itself convincing, and thus has some affinities with analyses of the rhetoric of political argument (Perelman and Obrechts-Tyteca 1971).

tutional and legal styles of truth telling, which have their own procedures for establishing truth and their own rhetorical devices for adjudicating and certifying truth claims. But studies of the mentalities and technologies for the conduct of conduct that have developed in 'the West' since the nineteenth century have paid particular attention to the kinds of truthful thought that ground themselves in 'veridical' discourses about human beings: discourses organized around scientific norms of truth and hence subject to critical correction.[10]

The kind of work undertaken under the sign of governmentality has been splendidly varied: it is neither a homogeneous school or a closed sect. Many researchers who would not place their objects of study under the sign of 'governmentalities' have nonetheless found these concepts and approaches of use, for example, in the fields of political philosophy and social history.[11] And studies of other practices have investigated analogous relations between the knowledges and expertise of the human, social and economic sciences and the exercise of political power.[12] In the various studies that make up this book, I draw upon this wide literature in order to explicate some of the analytical tools and concepts that have been developed and to show how these can be set to work in investigating the strategies that seek to govern us, and the ethics according to which we have come to govern ourselves. I do not wish to wrap a general theory of governmentality, power, modernity or postmodernity around this work. I do not think there is much to be gained by trying to impose some artificial unity upon it. Nor is this a methodology book, an attempt to draw out a set of generalizable propositions that can then merely be 'applied' to other problems or issues. Such methodological formalization would be quite antithetical to the ethos of these studies. For, I shall suggest, concepts are more important for what they do than for what they mean. Their value lies in the way in which they are able to provide a purchase for critical thought upon particular problems in the present.

The particular set of problems in the present that concern me here

[10] The idea of veridicality in thought is developed in the writings of the French philosopher and historian of the life sciences Georges Canguilhem. See the selections collected in Canguilhem 1994, and the series of papers on Canguilhem collected in T. Osborne and Rose 1997.

[11] For political philosophy see Tully 1989, Hindess 1996a and especially the work of Duncan Ivison: 1993, 1995, 1997a and 1997b. For social history, see Joyce 1994.

[12] Notably Ian Hacking's work on the history of statistics (Hacking 1990, 1991) and Theodore Porter's work on statistics, accounting and the invention of objectivity (T. Porter 1986, 1992, 1996).

are questions concerning freedom. I want to consider a number of the ways in which, since the middle of the nineteenth century, and focusing in particular upon the English-speaking world – Britain, the United States, Canada and Australia – the values of freedom have been made real within practices for the government of conduct. I would, therefore, like these studies to be viewed as essays towards a genealogy of freedom. This is not because I want to argue that we should be for freedom or against it. It is not because the freedom we think we have is a sham. Nor is it to assist in the birth of some freer freedom which is to come. It is rather because, in our own times, ideas of freedom have come to define the ground of our ethical systems, our practice of politics and our habits of criticism. Hence it seems relevant to try to analyse the conditions under which these ideas of freedom and these practices in the name of freedom have come into existence, and to try to clarify the lines of power, truth and ethics that are in play within them.

Of course, in choosing the problem of freedom as a pathway into the analysis of the government of our present, I do not contend that coercion, constraint, domination and oppression have ceased to exist or to have significance for us. Nor do I want to deny that certain sectors – certain ethnic groups, inhabitants of particular zones of the inner city, mothers on welfare . . . – are defined, demarcated and delineated such that they can be the legitimate targets of such negative practices of control. But I want to argue that the programmatic and strategic deployment of coercion, whether it be in the name of crime control or the administration of welfare benefits, has been reshaped upon the ground of freedom, so that particular kinds of justification have to be provided for such practices. These might include, for example, the argument that the constraint of the few is a condition for the freedom of the many, that limited coercion is necessary to shape or reform pathological individuals so that they are willing and able to accept the rights and responsibilities of freedom, or that coercion is required to eliminate dependency and enforce the autonomy of the will that is the necessary counterpart of freedom. And I would also suggest that the undoubted persistence and salience of coercive tactics – in the policing of the inner cities and the urban poor, in the surveillance and control of political dissidence, and of course in the various international adventures of advanced liberal nations – must also, today, be justified as the price necessary for the maintenance of freedom. To focus on freedom and its genealogy, then, is not to claim that 'we' – the universal and undifferentiated subjects of the present – have entered the sunny uplands of liberty and human rights. Rather, it is to suggest that certain values and presup-