

Foucault and Neo-Liberalism: Biopower and Busno-Power

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The notions of busno-power and busnocratic rationality developed elsewhere¹ will be more fully developed in this paper. Busno-power is developed but distinguished from Foucault's notion of bio-power,² and busnocratic rationality from the well known notion of technocratic or instrumental rationality. These notions are important for understanding recent international "reforms" in education, particularly as they impinge upon notions of the subject.

The notion of the free autonomous chooser underlies reform literature. But just as the Enlightenment notion of personal autonomy did not provide freedom, according to Foucault, nor also will neo-liberal autonomous choosers be free either: busnocratic rationality and busno-power will shape them as particular kinds of subjects so that they will choose in certain general ways.

TECHNOCRATIC RATIONALITY

By the notion of technocratic rationality, Max Weber meant rationality in its most narrow sense of purposive rationality, that is, the march towards the most efficient means for attaining or realizing goals which were predefined and outside of, or external to, a coherent, systematic and rationally ordered schema or system of means. In this narrow sense rationality is tied to an increase in "coherence, systematic order, calculability, control and systematic planning"³ in which universal laws as exemplified in the natural sciences come to play an increasing role. For Weber the social sciences would play an increasing role in this march towards rationality and there was for him something of a paradox or tension in his writings between the notions of *understanding* and *explanation*. However, he did see that social theory and social action under this empirico-scientific paradigm might not lead to liberation but, rather, to a form of indifference as instrumental concerns, either in the context of bureaucratic or market relationships, came to dominate both inquiry and practice, turning the Enlightenment ideal of the pursuit of personal autonomy into at best an anachronism and at worst a meaningless category. Weber characterized this indifference and dehumanization as being a cage which would imprison us:

No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or if neither, mechanised petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance. For of the last stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: "Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart"; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilisation never before achieved.⁴

But it is not technocratic rationality which is to be seen as underpinning education reform literature but, rather, what I call busnocratic rationality. However, Weber's general chilling and sobering warning about such forms of rationality hangs over us.

BIO-POWER

The term "bio-power" was coined by Foucault.⁵ This form of power is exercised on the body and it carries a specifically anatomical and biological aspect. It is exercised over members of a population so that their sexuality and individuality are constituted in certain ways that are connected with issues

of national policy, including the machinery of production. In this way populations can be adjusted in accordance with economic processes.

Foucault discusses in considerable detail how the requisite techniques and technologies for the exercise of bio-power were developed.⁶ These can be classified under two headings. First, technologies of domination act essentially on the body, and classify and objectify individuals. They were developed in disciplinary blocks such as the prison, the hospital, and the school. In so far as these objective classifications are adopted and accepted by individuals so their selves are also constituted. Second, in technologies of the self there is the belief, now common in western culture, that it is possible to reveal the truth about one's self. By telling the truth about one's sexuality, where the "deepest" truth is embedded in the discourse and discursive practices of sexuality, individuals become objects of knowledge both to themselves and to others. But telling the truth is both therapeutic and also controlling. Eventually, according to Foucault,⁷ we learn how to do these things to ourselves. He refers to the conjoint effects of these two technologies as governmentality.

Foucault also develops the notion of governmentality as the art of government or, as it is sometimes referred to, the "reason of state." This notion "refers to the state, to its nature and to its own rationality." He sees the technologies of domination and the self as being the techniques used "to make of the individual a significant element for the state."⁸ By "government" Foucault should be understood as meaning something close to "the conduct of conduct."⁹ This is a form of activity which attempts or aims at the conduct of persons; it is the attempt to shape, to guide, or to affect not only the conduct of people but, also, the attempt to constitute people in such ways that they can be governed. In Foucault's work this activity of governance could cover the relations of self to self, self to others, relations between institutions and social communities, and the exercise of political sovereignty.

Governmentality is obtained not by a totalizing deterministic or oppressive form of power, but by bio-power directed in a totalizing manner at whole populations and, at one and the same time, at individuals so that they are both individualized and normalized. Here one locates the human sciences and their "truths," and the institutions or disciplinary blocks (including education) in which these truths have been developed, played, and continue to play, a crucially important role.

BUSNO-POWER AND BUSNOCRATIC RATIONALITY

Underlying many of the recent educational "reforms," their literature and the new practices and processes, are notions of freedom and choice. Students, parents, etc. are presumed to be capable of deliberating upon alternatives and choosing between alternative educational programs according to individual needs, interests, and the qualities of programs. Here it seems to be presumed that it is part of the very nature of being human to want to make *continuous* consumer-style choices. But the normal notions of autonomy needed to make choices, and the notions of needs and interests, presuppose that such choices are the student's (or chooser's) *own*, that *as choosers* they are *independent*, and that needs and interests have not been manipulated or imposed in some way upon them.

There is also a conjoint claim that the quality of an education constituted by the choices made by a consumer *as* consumer is superior to that offered to a consumer by the choices and educational decisions made by providers of education. Consumers know better than providers about the quality of education! In talk of co-operative partnership there is the notion also that the quality of the community, and relations with learning institutions, are enhanced by the consumer driven activities of autonomous choosers.

Governmentality carries with it notions of leadership and husbandry, and policy from successive governments in New Zealand has carried strong overtones of both. But in providing leadership and husbandry in education, successive governments in New Zealand have, at the same time, claimed,

by targeting individuals, to be providing a better form of security for those in need of health care and those for whom access to educational services has been difficult. They have not abandoned security but reassessed it in terms of individualism and the autonomous chooser in particular. In so doing they are exercising a form of power which impinges both on individuals as individual living human beings, and also as subjects of a population.

This is not the bio-power of Foucault introduced above. Bio-power was directed at and through the body at the health and sexuality of the individual and through that at populations. This new form of power, which I call *busno-power*, is directed at the subjectivity of the person, not through the body but through the mind, through forms of educational practice and pedagogy which, through choices in education, shape the subjectivities of autonomous choosers. Education, embedded in the frameworks of busno-power and busnocratic rationality, is the first step in the individualizing and totalizing functions of busno-power (See Illich's arguments that schools are the first step in the schooling mentality¹⁰).

In producing and reproducing the form of human nature -- autonomous choosers -- this busno-power also impinges upon the population as a whole, as individual consumer activity "improves" both society and the economy. Busno-power is directed not only at individuals in order to turn them into autonomous choosers and consumers, but also at the population as a whole by a total immersion in the enterprise culture of the social, the economy, and the new rationality of state. In the exercise of busno-power there is a merger of the economic, the social and the activity of government.

The influence of governmentality in the attempt to change culture in the general way outlined in the preceding paragraphs can be seen in attempts in education to break the distinctions between education and training, research and learning by discovery, knowledge and skills, knowledge and information, and in definitions of quality in education.

For example in New Zealand, David Hood, the Chief Executive of the (new) New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), has said: "The big challenge is to change entrenched attitudes and establish an education and training culture."¹¹ As Hood and NZQA continually deny the distinction between education and training, and urge us also to do so, this comment should be taken as an explicit exhortation to change the education culture. The change is in fact well under way. It is not, however, merely an educational change, but a pre-requisite or precursor to a *total* change in culture. It involves a penetration into the very basis of human nature, a reformulation of the relations between individual and society, and involves and promotes new forms of governmentality or rationality of state. This new rationality of state requires what I call *busnocratic rationality*.

Busnocratic rationality is closer to technocratic rationality than busno-power is to bio-power. Central to busnocratic rationality are these emphases: the concepts and stances taken in promoting skills, as opposed to knowledge; information and information retrieval, as opposed to knowledge and understanding; and the view that it is the consumers (especially industry), as opposed to the providers, that define and determine *quality* in education. It is the particular ways in which business values concerning skills, important "knowledge," and quality, are intertwined into this form of rationality which distinguish it from technocratic rationality.

There is not space here to discuss the reform literatures in detail.¹² But when we see the behaviorist assumptions underlying both skills and knowledge mandated by the new National Curriculum Framework, for example, the emphasis on learning *outcomes* which are to be determined from principles, the separation of assessment from curriculum in the Ministry of Education's structures (for example, the splitting off of NZQA and the Education Review Office as separate structures) and the fragmentation of learning and teaching into discrete "units" called principles, essential learning areas, skills and assessment, it is clear that we are faced with something like *technocratic rationality*.

I use the term "busnocratic rationality" to describe this particular situation, because built *into* and permeating the curriculum framework are canons from the world of work, often themselves in need of rationalization; built into the structures for implementation of these busnocratic principles are structures from the world of business; built into notions of effective teaching are notions of efficiency; and so on. In the past the positivist program claimed, at least in research, to be value free, and positivist researchers claimed not to have ideological preferences. If these assumptions were hidden, or some researchers were still blind to their values, the fact remains that politics and value positions were eschewed formally. In busnocratic rationality they are not.

Furthermore, the young are required to conform to vocational imperatives, the rationalization of which may be unclear. Teachers are required to have a vocational element in courses, which may be difficult for the teachers of classics. Quality is to be assessed by consumer satisfaction. Such "principles" do not seem to be part of technocratic or instrumental rationality where the emphasis is on means/ends and where values are separated out from the means. Here busnocratic values seem to totally permeate the means. Furthermore, in technocratic rationality where the ends are usually clearly separated, there is at least an external space to contest the values. This was the case in liberal education so construed. But in busnocratic rationality the values permeate at a microscopic level, are difficult to identify, and thus difficult to debate and contest.

THE AUTONOMOUS CHOOSER

Central to busno-power is the notion of the autonomous chooser. However the notion of autonomy, to which appeal is made in the reform literature where there are calls for freedom and choice in accordance with the needs and interests of the chooser, trades on the traditional liberal notion of personal autonomy. But the normal notions of personal autonomy needed to make sense of choices, and the notions of needs and interests presuppose that such choices are the student's (or chooser's) *own*, that they are *independent*, and that needs and interests have not been manipulated or imposed in some way upon the chooser. It is not this normal notion of personal autonomy that underlies the literature but that of another which is covertly masked -- the autonomous chooser.

It is said in the New Zealand literature that people should be free to choose the school that provides the best quality education in accordance with their needs and interests.¹³ Students (parents, guardians, etc.) are presumed to be persons not merely capable of deliberating upon alternatives, and choosing between alternative educational programs according to individual needs, interests, and the qualities of programs, but it is assumed that it is part of the very nature of being human to both make, and want to make, *continuous* consumer style choices.

Just as Foucault saw the emergence of liberal doctrines as an attack upon policing, so also can these neo-liberal doctrines be seen as an attack upon welfarism and the welfare state. Critiques of the welfare state, in general, and education, in particular, are of course well known in western liberal democracies.¹⁴ But the remedy in New Zealand has been apparently simple and straightforward in terms of economic philosophy: a return to the principles of a so-called free-market economy; a revival of the classical articles of faith of economic liberalism; and a re-privatization of the public sphere aimed at capital accumulation. (Foucault also attacked social security but argued that this needed to be rethought in line with increasing demands for autonomy, and not that social security was unnecessary).

There is little doubt that in the twentieth century we have a more humane approach to schooling than was once the case, that we have changed our attitudes towards children away from the Dickensian type schools of Creakle and Squeers. Liberal views on the importance of the individual, psychological theories of development or growth, demands to respect the needs and interests of children, and more enlightened social and political views have, to a certain extent, penetrated the modern school. Personal autonomy and not social control is now seen as a fundamental aim, if not *the* aim, of modern education.

Against a utilitarian, authoritarian and teacher directed pedagogy in the traditional school, progressives urged that education should start from the child, from the child's needs and interests, and from the child's nature and growth patterns.¹⁵ Dearden is a good example of a liberal philosopher of education who saw something important in the child centered movement's notions of needs, interests and growth. He argued that, properly construed, these notions are important for the development of personal autonomy based upon reason.¹⁶ By this he meant that we need: first, an independence from authorities; second, a disposition to test the truth of things for oneself, whether by experience or by a critical estimate of the testimony of others; and third, an ability to deliberate, form intentions and choose in accordance with a scale of values which is self formulated. Both understanding and choice, or thought and action, are therefore to be independent of authority and based instead upon reason. From this broad philosophical position, personal autonomy is construed as an ideal to be aimed at by educators. This general approach *respects* the child as an individual person, as having a distinctive point of view and distinctive purposes to pursue. This, Dearden himself concluded, is the only moral way for pedagogy to proceed.

The autonomous chooser of neo-liberal theory might seem to be a logical outcome of Dearden's position. But this is not so. Traditional liberal philosophy of education is well aware that talk of such things as needs and interests is ambiguous between what the child sees as its needs and interests and what adults and educators see as the "real" needs and interests of the child. Needs and interests beyond such fundamental notions as food and warmth, can be seen to reflect value positions, and while there is a sense in which we cannot avoid introducing our children to value positions in just living our everyday lives, these value positions are not unproblematic.¹⁷ But the busnocratic notion of the autonomous chooser collapses such a distinction and what the chooser chooses is the "real." It might be the case that teachers will continue to impose what they perceive as of educational value upon the child's perceived needs and interests, whether good or bad. But this may not be so. What is perceived as being worthwhile in education, and what is perceived as quality education, are being imposed in New Zealand from outside the traditional educational institutions. So the range of choices will be determined from outside by external definitions of quality, and the providers of education will become technicians, and technicians will themselves be imbued with these values, providing these "quality" offerings from which the autonomous chooser will choose.

Also the needs and interests of autonomous choosers are being shaped through ideologies and multi-media forms of presentation from governmental agencies which emphasize the need for skills, the continual need during a working lifetime to be reskilled, and the economic motives for both getting educated and purchasing quality education. Underlying these reforms is a certain form of human nature encapsulated in the notion of the autonomous chooser. It is not the homo economicus of traditional liberal economic theory but "an individual" that does not merely act *as* an autonomous chooser, but acts *because* of its very nature. Busnocratic rationality legitimates, and busno-power actively encourages and promotes this form of human being.

There is almost a postulation of a fundamental human *faculty* of choice, which is both part of human nature and which humans need to exercise to be "proper" human beings. This is different from an autonomy which, in traditional liberal theory, could or could-not be exercised. Now, it seems, choice cannot be resisted. It is not just that human beings are autonomous, or that their autonomy can be developed, or that it is a duty to exercise autonomy, but instead there seems to be a constituent *faculty* of choice which is necessarily exercised continuously on commodities, and which sweeps aside or over-rides the traditional categories and frameworks of the human sciences on human nature.

Furthermore, these new economic theories, developed out of behaviorist doctrine, see an autonomous chooser as perpetually responsive to the environment. In which case the autonomous chooser is capable of infinite manipulation by the structuring of the environment. If so, then the environment can structure the choices of the individual. Hence, economic intervention in the social can manipulate the individual, thereby transgressing the fundamental rights of the individual, as well

as the individual's self formulated purposes and projects which, in earlier liberal thought, were encapsulated in the liberal view of personal autonomy as an aim of education.

The logical implication is that one's life becomes an enterprise -- the enterprise of the autonomous chooser. But it is not the self of classical liberal theory where the right to formulate one's own purposes and projects was seen as inviolate. It is not just that the insertion of the economic into the social *structures* the choices of the individual, but that, in a behavioristic fashion, it manipulates the individual by penetrating the very notion of the self, structuring the individual's choices, and thereby, in so far as one's life is just the individual economic enterprise, the lives of individuals.

Needs, interests and growth then become contaminated as both needs and interests become constituted by the insertion of the economic into the social. One's autonomy is penetrated by these economic individualistic needs and interests, setting growth patterns towards, for example, freedom *from* and choice. If the older liberal version of autonomy had some historical justifications, it is clear that these "new" autonomous choosers have different needs and interests and that their autonomy is problematic.

Security for the state and the economic enterprise can be monitored in a variety of ways, but in education the production and reproduction of choosers goes hand in hand with autonomous chooser modularization. Thereby the whole person is ignored and will flounder. Where is the holistic skill of balance, and wise judgment in knowing when to exercise these "little" skills?

CONCLUSION

These general points on autonomy were grasped by Jean François Lyotard, but in a slightly earlier and different context.¹⁸ Writing in the heady times of the 1960s, in the times of de Gaulle's technocratic reforms of education, and as a member and supporter of the movement of 22 May in the 1968 student (and workers') revolution in France, Lyotard saw the autonomy offered by the Fouchet educational reforms as a sham. What this autonomy offered was a false independence. This was merely an independence from the other, and one which permitted the individual to be picked off and allotted to a slot in the technocratic structures of the capitalist state. By structuring interests and choices, allotting to slots was masked in the French educational reforms as autonomous choice of career.

But Lyotard went further with this notion of autonomy. The autonomous chooser gained independence, but at a tremendous price for the community. He argued that independence in this sense was gained at the expense of discarding social obligation for the other members of the community. The faculty of choice, deeply imbedded in human nature in the busnocratic theory of the autonomous chooser, has no theoretical need for the other, for the needs of self and the other, and social justice, are "met" by the individual choices of the autonomous chooser. Hence, there is no need for obligation to the others of the community. If there is no need to consider the other, to converse and to consult, and to enter into dialogue, then the independent autonomous chooser is further cut off from a shared community form of life and more liable to be "picked off" by the information systems, consumer products and media, through which individual choices increasingly come to be policed.

This notion of personal autonomy, which was meant to lead to emancipation, was a bitter fraud according to Lyotard:

This "emancipation" is the story of a Faust who didn't need to sell his soul because one had not been denoted to him, so he was under no obligation to return it to the donor, nor did he have the power to steal it from its donor.¹⁹

Even if Lyotard is but partly right, then so much for the quoted claim in the reform literature that a community will prosper through the consumer activities of autonomous choosers.

Individualism has become a necessary feature of many western states and, as in the case of Eastern Europeans, is almost a condition for their very security. However the form of individualism offered by the autonomous chooser is not the free person offered by Enlightenment thought and liberal education. The autonomous chooser will be a product of both busnocratic rationality and busno-power. Needs, interests and choices can themselves be manipulated because the autonomous chooser is highly manipulable and easy to pick off. This is not the sort of person that I would wish to be.

Liberals and the liberal left in New Zealand education have had no real response to these changes, either intellectually or in practice, except to provide critique and/or to repeat the principles and policies of the past. If Foucault is correct, what is needed in response to neo-liberalism is an increased vigilance, and an increased imagination and inventiveness, for there is a complex problem space brought into play by such neo-liberal reforms.²⁰ What is required is a neo-social democratic approach to these crises of the welfare state and the increasing demands for autonomy.

This is of course but another critique and it may just be to reiterate the dark side of the "progress" of the human sciences to which Foucault drew our attention. But there may well be spaces and antinomies for a resistance to a demeaning form of education and its associated demeaning notion of human being.

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