

Governmentality Studies in Education

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31. “THE ART OF NOT BEING GOVERNED LIKE THAT AND AT THAT COST”

Comments on Self-Study in the Studies of Governmentality

“Work in philosophy – like work
in architecture in many respects –
is really more work on oneself”
Ludwig Wittgenstein

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter can be formulated simply as follows: to re-introduce, or at least to draw attention to, an ‘ethos of enlightenment’ or ‘critical attitude’ within the line of research that is commonly referred to as ‘studies of governmentality’. The point of departure for our study indeed is that what is often missing or lost out of sight in ‘studies of governmentality’ is a critical concern with the present, related to what according to Foucault is “the art of not being governed like that and at that cost” (Foucault, 2007/1978: 45). Thus, we will try to clarify that studying processes of governmentalisation could be motivated by an attitude of ‘de-governmentalisation’ (Gros, 2001, 520–523).¹ The attitude of de-governmentalisation can be described in a very classical way as an ‘attitude of enlightenment’, that is, bringing to light mechanisms of power or speaking truth to power.

Speaking broadly (and, thus somewhat inaccurately), governmentality studies seem to fall apart into two registers. On the one hand, there are studies that are merely descriptive and incorporated within the broader domain of sociological and political analysis. In this register, an ongoing debate seems to be whether and/or how studies of governmentality can rely more on ‘empirical methods’ in order to be able to grasp the ‘reality’ of governmentalities (and not merely what they refer to as ‘the programmes’). On the other hand, studies of governmentality seem to be integrated within broader critical programmes that want to resist political, cultural and social hegemony (and ultimately the consequences of different sorts of capital accumulation). In this register, ongoing debates include (1) the issue of how agency (and the possibility of resistance towards forms of hegemony) can be thought of in the context of an analysis of governmentality, and (2) the explanation (instead of description) of processes of governmentalisation by drawing upon materialist or idealist social and political theories (see also Reichert, 2001; Osborne, 2001).

In our view, giving shelter to studies of governmentality in these disciplinary registers becomes tempting precisely when the particular critical heart is removed from these studies, or when that critical heart remains unnoticed. The two registers, then, are welcomed as providing an intellectual and methodological context, an explicit normative foundation or just the common and safe ground of classical scholarly work. Additionally, because the critical attitude underlying these studies is a 'practical' and even 'existential' attitude and not a more common theoretical or normative one, as we will elaborate further on, the tendency to integrate studies of governmentality within one of the two registers (or even to assimilate these studies) is somehow understandable. It is understandable indeed that, from the perspective of classic normative and critical (social, political, educational) theory, studies relying upon a 'practical' and 'existential' critical attitude are often disqualified for being relativist or crypto-normative (e.g. Fraser, 1981; Habermas, 1985). Although we recognize and understand this temptation, this kind of integrationist and assimilating attitude towards studies of governmentality is not necessary, at least as long as one acknowledges that the critical attitude, being a kind of virtue (Butler, 2004; Simons et al., 2005), lies at the very heart of studies of governmentality. Without this critical attitude these studies run the risk of becoming empty or blind, and probably hence the attempts to bring them under in one of common disciplinary registers.

Apart from our focus on the 'attitude of de-governmentalisation' that could underlie studies of governmentality, the chapter has also another objective. We want to argue that exactly the attitude of de-governmentalisation (and, therefore, conducting research in view of de-governmentalisation) is itself to be seen as a form of education or 'self-study'. In other words, we want to develop the thesis that 'studies of governmentality' include a particular 'self-study' (for the one doing the study, and probably also for the people invited to read the study). In view of this thesis, the chapter will focus on governmentality and education, yet not on governmentality in education nor on education from the viewpoint of governmentality, but on the educational dimension (that is, the critical practice of self-study) that could be part of studies of governmentality.

FOUCAULT, STUDIES OF GOVERNMENTALITY, CONDUCT

During the courses at the *Collège de France* in the late seventies (*Sécurité, Territoire et Population* (1977-1978) and *Naissance de la biopolitique* (1978-1979)), Michel Foucault elaborated his analysis of power-relations (Foucault 2004a, 2004b; cf. 1978, 1981). While previously he analysed disciplinarian forms of power (giving shape to modern institutions such as schools, hospitals and the prison), later his interest shifted to broader governmental issues, such as to addressing the exercise and development of power relations throughout the modern state. His point of departure however was not to analyse the power of the state or the growing 'etatisation of society', and his aim was not to discuss the legitimacy of the state's power. Instead, and broadly speaking, Foucault's main interest was the analysis of the exercise of power by focusing on the development of governmental rationalities, on related governmental technologies and on how the objects and subjects of

government are being shaped. For this domain of analysis he introduced the term 'governmentality', and opened up the perspective to analyse processes of governmentalisation.²

In order to analyse processes of governmentalisation it is important to stress that there is no single and universal mode of governing. As Foucault (2004a; 2004b) has elaborated in detail, the governmental state and its rationalities and mentalities have continually transformed throughout history: a governmentalisation in the name of 'reason of state' in the early modern period, in the name of 'individual freedom and security' (finding its intellectual rationalization in the reflections on political economy) in the modern era and in the name of 'the social' in the twentieth century. Foucault (2004b) noticed a new phase in the governmentalisation of the state in the second part of the twentieth century and meanwhile many scholars (Gordon, 1991; Rose, 1999; Dean, 1999; Lemke, 1997; Bröckling et al., 2000) have elaborated Foucault's indications.

In current processes of governmentalisation the role of the state is for instance no longer rationalised as a central agency of government that should 'intervene' in society in the name of 'the social' and in order to align individual freedom and social welfare (Rose, 1996). Instead, the state today is increasingly regarded as a 'managerial' agency that should 'enable' an 'entrepreneurial' type of freedom (at the individual level, and at the level of organisations, communities...) through for example 'marketisation', 'investment in human capital' and in collaboration with other agencies (both local and global, public and private) of 'governance' (Olssen et al., 2004). Thus in the current context, the state does not disappear, but its task is rationalised in a new way (towards global and local agencies), new technologies are being used and those being governed are required to 'conduct' themselves in new ways. This 'advanced liberal' (Rose, 1996) forms of governmentalisation can help to understand the current phase in the governmentalisation of the state. Additionally, it is important to focus on processes of governmentalisation in other domains and at other scales as well: global processes of governmentalisation, processes related to 'Europeanisation' and forms of governmentalisation at more local levels (Perry & Maurer, 2003; Masschelein & Simons, 2003, 2005; Larner & Walters, 2004; Simons, 2007). In view of the scope of the chapter, it is important to focus in more detail on the conception of government underlying the studies of governmentality.

Foucault describes government as "*conduire des conduites*" or "the conduct of conduct" (Foucault, 1982, p. 237). This formula expresses clearly that the object of government is not a passive pole (outside), but that government acts upon people who are governing themselves (or 'conducting', behaving) in a specific way. Government thus is acting upon the self-government or 'conduct' of people. This self-government however is not something that is given (as a kind of natural resource that government has at its disposal), but it is being shaped historically. Hunter has clearly and convincingly indicated how the school (and its spiritual discipline) played a major role in 'producing' people with the 'ability' to govern themselves, and (relatively new in history) people who came to see themselves in terms of rational and moral autonomy (Hunter, 1994). In this Hunter was profoundly inspired by Foucault's studies of the 1980s explicitly focusing on (the

history of ethical) technologies of the self which allow human beings to relate in a particular way to themselves and to constitute themselves as self-governing subjects (cf. Foucault, 1984a, b; 2001).

In line with these ideas on government and governmentality different topics have been studied; by Foucault himself, by his close collaborators (such as Burchell, Donzelot, Procacci, Ewald) and from the 1990s by scholars like Rose, Miller, Dean up into the 21st century (where studies of governmentality—at least as part of the self-understanding of a group of researchers—took shape) (Simons & Masschelein, 2006a). Additionally, several scholars started to focus on processes of governmentalisation in education particularly in relation to educational policy and to restructurings in the wake of so-called neoliberal and neo-conservative governance (e.g. Marshall, 1995; Popkewitz, 1998; Popkewitz & Brennen, 1998; Peters, 2000; Edwards, 2002; Olssen et al., 2004). Also our own research can be situated here, and we want to discuss this research briefly in order to be able to start focusing on the critical attitude.

In our studies, the focus on processes of governmentalisation (related to quality assurance and performance management in education, managerialism, feedback mechanism, lifelong learning and learning society policies) helps to describe what was and is happening *to us*. It helped us to focus on how our educational present (that is, the present that we refer to in terms of –‘the learning society’, or ‘quality education’ or ‘lifelong learning’) is related to particular governmental rationalities, governmental technologies and forms of self-government (Simons, 2002, 2006; Masschelein & Simons, 2002; 2003; Masschelein et al., 2006). The perspective of governmentality thus allowed to look at educational ideas and programmes as being part of the history of the ways in which we, as human beings, conduct and govern oneself and others. It is possible to describe the intrinsic relation between the intellectual and practical educational technologies on the one hand and the way in which political power is wielded in our societies as well as the way in which we govern ourselves on the other side. In this way, studies of governmentality can indicate how educational practice, educational theory (and science) and current policies actually ask us to behave or conduct ourselves in a particular way; how for instance we are asked to understand ourselves as (lifelong) learners (and for instance no longer as social citizens), to look at schools as productive sites to be judged in terms of added value (instead of institutions for instance), to look at learning as an ongoing capitalization of life, to regard students as customers in need of quality education, etc.

Rather than elaborating on these studies at the level of their results and conclusions, it is our aim to elucidate the particular critical attitude of de-governmentalisation that motivates these studies—at least Foucault’s work, the works of some others working in line of this, and also what we, in all modesty, tried to do in our own work (and motivated by questions such as: how not to be governed as a lifelong learner? and, what is the cost of being governed in the name of permanent quality control?). In order to clarify this attitude, Foucault’s description of his own work will be used as a point of departure.

EXPERIENCE, DE-SUBJECTIVATION, THE PRESENT

Being asked what writing and doing research meant for him, Foucault states his studies and books work as experiences, and that throughout his studies and writings he is transforming himself: “What I think is never quite the same. (...) for me my books are experiences (...). And experience is something that one comes out of transformed.” (Foucault, 2000, 239). The term experience is important here, and is related more specifically to ‘putting something to the test’, that is, putting oneself and one’s thinking to the test. Because ‘experience’ is his main focus, he is very clear about the way he understands himself: “(...) I am an experimenter and not a theorist. I call a theorist someone who constructs a general system, either deductive or analytical, and applies it to different fields in a uniform way. That isn’t my case. I’m an experimenter in the sense that I write in order to change myself and in order not to think the same thing as before.” (Ibid., p. 240) Hence, for Foucault a theorist is not someone who writes in order to change him/herself, and hence, the theorist is someone who does not put his/her own thinking and his/her own mode of being at the test. One could say that the theorist puts instead reality to the test in the carefully constructed theoretical system. Further in the interview, Foucault tells that theorists deliver us ‘books of truth’ or ‘books of demonstration’, while he regards his books as ‘books of experience’. This distinction is important to explore in view of the critical attitude motivating his studies (of governmentality) (cf. Masschelein 2006, Simons 2004).

For Foucault, the term experience should be understood in a strong sense, that is, it refers to rather particular, challenging events in one’s life. Experience for him, does not refer to what someone has (‘I have an experience’ and ‘this experience enriches me’), but precisely to what actually destroys the ‘I’ and ‘me’. Experience does not lead to a kind of enrichment or development of the ‘I’ or ‘the subject’. This way of understanding experience is captured very well in the following: “For Nietzsche, Bataille, Blanchot (...) experience is trying to reach a certain point in life that is as close as possible to the ‘unlivable,’ to that which can’t be lived through. (...) experience has the function of wrenching the subject from itself, of seeing to it that the subject is no longer itself. (...) This is a project of desubjectivation. (...) The idea of a limit-experience that wrenches the subject from itself.” (Ibid., p. 241–242) The experience Foucault has in mind is a process of de-subjectivation, and throughout his studies and through writing his books he becomes someone else. This means that he takes his own understanding of the world, and for instance the common understanding of ‘madness’ and the current practices to deal with ‘madness’, as a point of departure (in *Madness and Civilization*). His study meant that he was no longer able to relate in the same way to ‘madness’; the ‘I’ that took the current way of dealing with ‘madness’ as evident or necessary, disappeared during his studies and throughout his writing. What is at stake is “to construct myself and to invite others to share an experience of what we are, not only our past but also our present, an experience of our modernity in such a way that we might come out of it transformed”, and this means, he goes on, “that at the end of the book we would establish new relationships with the subject at issue; the I who wrote the book and those who have read it would have a different relationship

with madness, with its contemporary status, and its history in the modern world." (Ibid., p. 244) Thus, although Foucault wrote very much historical work, the point of departure is clearly the present, and in particular, the way he and his contemporaries understand the present (and how he and his contemporaries look at the past of their present). In that sense, he stresses that his work is "inspired by direct personal experience", and experience here (and in a weaker sense) referring to a taken for granted perception and understanding of the world. However, his work is not about these kind of personal experiences (such as stories about one's personal experience with madness), but inspired by them and directed to finding a point at which one no longer is able to relate in the same way to one's opinions and perceptions.

Being an experimenter and not a theorist, Foucault regards his book as books of experience and not as truth books or books of demonstration. The latter want to pass true knowledge to the readers by way of demonstration; these theoretical books are focused on argumentation and proof. Hence, the theorist regards the readers as being in a state of ignorance about a particular subject, or as an audience that has to be convinced (based on a careful demonstration of the truth). The theorist, by using his/her truth books, thus is in a particular way a teacher; someone who claims a position of authority based on access to the truth and transferring knowledge to others in order that they have access to the truth too, and know how to think about a particular subject. In describing his own position and books, Foucault makes the following remark: "I don't accept the word 'teaching' (...), my books don't exactly have that value [method, demonstration, lessons]. They are more like invitations or public gestures." (Ibid.,) The experimenter invites people to read a book of experience in order to transform oneself, that is, one's relation to oneself and to the topic under investigation. It is not a 'lesson' based on 'authority', but an 'experience' based on 'invitation'; not a kind of 'intellectual service' but a 'public gesture'. In view of such an invitation and gesture, readers are not addressed (as subjects of knowledge and in needs of true knowledge about a particular thing), but invited to have an experience. This experience, of course, does not tell the readers how they should think about a particular thing, but is a process of de-subjectivation due to which one is no longer able to relate in the same way to oneself and the world.

It is really important to stress that books of experience should not be regarded as popular collections of narratives about one's experiences on a particular topic, neither as (auto)biographical stories to reveal the truth about the world taking one's on experience as a point of departure. Such kind of 'personal experience' books are actually 'truth books' because based on 'personal experiences' they want to 'demonstrate' or 'proof' something to the reader. Instead, the term experience in 'books of experience' refers to the books' transformative or 'de-subjectifying' force in at least two directions. Firstly, they are an experience for the writer and researcher herself as explained earlier. However, secondly they can function as experiences for the readers: "to read it as an experience that prevented them from always being the same or from having the same relation with things, with others, that they had before reading it." (Ibid., 243) In short, Foucault doesn't want to prove something, does not want to teach his readers a lesson, but wants to invite

people to have an experience in relation to specific topics under investigation, an experience that puts not just the common knowledge of himself and his readers, but actually their subjectivity to the test.

This short preliminary depiction of Foucault's understanding of his own work brings several important aspects to the foreground. We will mention them briefly in order to set the scene to discuss the critical attitude that might inspire studies of governmentality.

Firstly, Foucault's work and hence also his elaboration of governmentality is guided by a concern for the present. In relation to governmentality, it means clearly that the concern is the way in which he and his contemporaries have been and are being governed: should we take the freedom in which we are governed for granted?, should we see it as an evident task for governments to 'take care of our lives' from the cradle to the grave?, what are the effects of governments acting in the name of security and social and mental hygiene that we actually support today? Hence, questions like these, and starting from what is taken for granted (or at least not being questioned explicitly) today by himself and his contemporaries, are the point of departure for these studies. Again the aim is not to reveal the truth about what is going on (and to demonstrate what is right or wrong), but to question instead the truths we live by and take for granted.

Secondly, this concern for the present is what Foucault described elsewhere as a (historical, critical) 'ontology of the present' or an 'ontology of ourselves' (Foucault, 2007/1983/1984, 95/113). This kind of ontology, as we will explain in more detail below, starts from the things that 'we' (at a particular moment in time and in a particular context) take for granted (or regard as "fundamental" or as 'ontological'), and how 'we' came to see those things as fundamental; which 'we' or which 'subject' came to see these things (e.g. the prison, the hospital, sexuality) as evident or fundamental. The 'ontology of the present' thus is related to the notion of experience, since showing that what we regard today as given or being self-evident (part of our 'ontology') leads to a kind of de-subjectivation. It destroys the subject, or the 'we', that takes for instance a particular way of dealing with sexuality or madness for granted. In view of this, the thesis we want to develop is that the originality and strength of 'studies of governmentality' is their reliance on such an 'ontology of ourselves' and the possibility to result in 'books of experience'.

Thirdly, the 'ontology of the present' and de-subjectifying work of experience clearly refer to a particular conception of critique on the one hand and education on the other hand. Critique here is first of all an attitude (and even "akin to virtue") and more specifically a task one is taking up (Foucault, 2007/1978, p. 43; Butler, 2004; Masschelein, 2004). The critical task, according to Foucault, "requires work on our limits, that is, a patient labour giving form to our impatience for liberty." (Foucault, 2007/1984, p. 119). Works on our limits means studying what we regard as evident or as part of our ontology today and hence what functions as a limit. We mentioned earlier indeed that de-subjectivation is a 'limit-experience'; not a (personal) experience of limits, but an experience that exposes someone to one's foundations (and to who one is, and to how one relates to things) and consequently opens up a space to relate in a different way to oneself (and to things). This clarifies there is indeed a clear educational dimension at stake here. Education

however is not about the transfer of knowledge (and it is not an education based on truth books or 'school books'). Instead of education being the accumulation of knowledge (and strengthening the subject), education here is about the transformation of the subject (and destroying one's knowledge basis). Importantly, this education is at stake for both the researcher (conducting an ontology of the present) and the readers (reading an experience book). Therefore, we want to pay attention to the 'self-study' that is part of 'studies of governmentality'.

Finally, the above distinction between books of experience and truth book may give the impression that Foucault, and studies of governmentality in line with his work, are not concerned about truth. This is certainly not the case. It is precisely by taking the angle of truth that we want to elaborate the 'critical attitude' underlying books of experience and studies of governmentality (Simons & Masschelein, 2007). We will elaborate that studies of governmentality consist in 'speaking truth to power', although it is important to be very clear about the term truth and truth-telling (and not to mix it up with 'truth books').

ACCESS TO THE TRUTH, SELF-TRANSFORMATION, KNOWLEDGE

In studies of governmentality (at least in their form as books (or articles) of experience) it is the researcher herself who is at stake, that is, the relation to herself and to things in her present. Studies of governmentality thus include a kind of self-study, and a transformation of the researcher herself. Exactly this transformation of the researcher involving a particular kind of experience and truth telling is however hard to think within an academic context that values 'objectivity', 'method' and 'knowledge' (and as mentioned earlier, this explains probably why studies of governmentality are often being integrated in other disciplinary registers). We will elaborate this alternative way of truth telling by drawing on the research of the later Foucault and particularly on his 1981–1982 courses at the *Collège de France* under the title *The hermeneutics of the subject* (Foucault, 2001). As is well known, Foucault worked in his later work and contrary to his earlier work on topics he sympathised with such as *parrhesia* and care of the self (although not aiming at transposing these ideas to the present). One leading question in the series of courses where he studied carefully Greek and Roman antiquity is: how can people have access to the truth? how can people become truth-tellers?, or what is the price of having access to the truth? Foucault distinguishes two traditions that each answers this question in its own particular way. Let us focus in more detail on these traditions in view of clarifying the truth telling at stake in the ontology of the present (and studies of governmentality).

The first tradition, that emerged in Greek antiquity and is dominant today, claims that it is 'knowledge' that offers access to the truth and that in order to have 'true knowledge' specific (internal and external) conditions related to the act of knowing and the position of the knower have to be taken into account. It probably needs no more clarification that this tradition culminated in modern scientific research and academic inquiry that relies for the 'production' of true knowledge on (scientific) method and on a disinterested and objective research ethos. This tradition has been institutionalised at the modern 'research university', and is

playing a major role in the production 'truth book' or 'books of demonstration'. Perhaps due to the familiarity with this tradition, we lose out of sight that it is but one, very particular way of having access to the truth.

A less common tradition claims that access to the truth requires a transformation of the self. While the first knowledge-based and knowledge-oriented tradition assumes in principle everyone has access to truth on the basis of being a human being (at least if conditions at the level of knowledge are taken into account), the second tradition, which could be called the 'existential-ethical', 'spiritual' or 'ascetic' tradition, assumes that the transformation of the 'mode of being of the subject' is required.³ From this viewpoint (and unlike the first one) there is no access to the truth without transforming oneself. Truth telling based on self-transformation however does not lead to the production of 'truth books' (in view of the distribution of knowledge) but to books of experience (having their own truth value, as we will elaborate below). Thus in both traditions people have to meet certain conditions or have 'to pay a price' in order to have access to the truth, but the conditions and price differ: either a transformation of the self, either conditions related to knowledge. It will come as no surprise that we want to look at the ontology of the present and studies of governmentality in line with the existential-ethical tradition, and consequently, to regard indeed the particular transformation of the self as the ('educational') price that the researcher has to pay in order to have access to the truth or to become a truth-teller.

We want to stress again that today *the* existential-ethical tradition does not exist, or at least not in an institutionalised form. Thus in referring to the existential-ethical tradition, to which the ontology of the present belongs, we do not have a tradition at hand that has developed in a similar way as, at the same level of and alongside the dominant knowledge-oriented/based tradition (institutionalised at the academia). It is a tradition that lives instead in its shadows and margins – not necessary outside the university but certainly not having a central position. As far as the knowledge-based/oriented studies of power, governance and education have a dominant position, as long as the dominant academic tradition reconfirms its exclusive position by telling stories about its own great origins, the existential-ethical tradition not just remains marginal but keeps on being disqualified for being 'not scientific', 'not academic' and for producing knowledge and understanding that is not according to the 'internal and external conditions of true knowledge production'. In short, the existential-ethical tradition we want to focus on seems permanently to run the risk of being disqualified for having missed (or ignored) "Enlightenment" and "humanity's passage to its adult status" led by true reason and scientific method and rigidity. At this point and in line with Foucault, it is important to refuse the "blackmail of Enlightenment" – "you either accept the Enlightenment and remain within the tradition of its rationalism (...); or else you criticize the Enlightenment and then try to escape from its principles of rationality" – and thus to resist any marginalizing of other forms of truth telling in the name of "rationality" (Foucault, 2007/1984, 110). Instead, what we want to indicate is that also the existential-ethical tradition is related to 'enlightenment' on the one hand and to a 'critical attitude' on the other hand, and also this tradition has a clear

political relevance in terms of speaking truth to power; however not precisely what the knowledge-oriented/based tradition has in mind.

SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER, ENLIGHTENMENT, CRITIQUE

Let us, first, elaborate a bit more on the term 'enlightenment'. At stake is not the relation between knowledge and truth (or enlightenment based on true knowledge) but the relation between ethics and truth. In other words: in the knowledge-based/oriented tradition the subject is regarded as someone who is *a priori* capable of having access to the truth and only *additionally* an ethical subject who can and should know what to do (Gros, 2001, 504). The basic assumption is that everyone (in principle) can obtain knowledge, and based on this knowledge that everyone is in a position to know what to do (be it technically, politically or ethically). It is indeed in accordance with the dominant modern way of understanding enlightenment (and probably 'The Enlightenment'); the transition from a state of dependency or heteronomy ('dark ages' or 'oppressive dogmatism' and 'enslaving tradition') to a state of independency or autonomy guided by the principles of (universal) reason that is incarnated in true knowledge (on ourselves, others and the world). This is the enlightenment of the theoretician, of the truth books and its ultimate version 'The handbook of reason'; it is the enlightenment related with the political project of emancipation where everyone submits oneself to the 'law within', that is, the law of reason.

In the second tradition, ethical work of the self on the self and a transformation of oneself is the main condition to have access to the truth. In order to grasp the kind of enlightenment at stake here, it is important to say more about the particular meaning of ethics (as well as truth) in this tradition. The term ethics has to be distinguished from the terms morals (and morality) (Foucault, 1984a). The latter are about the set of rules, norms and values of just behaviour (and in view of their morality). The term ethics instead refers to the relation of the self to the self and how this relation is modified or transformed by the self in order to become an ethical subject, that is, a subject of action (and not merely a knowing subject). In line with Foucault (and his genealogy of ethics in Ancient Greece) the domain of ethics understood in this way can be referred to as field of practices related to 'care of the self' and 'self-mastery' (Foucault, 1984a/b, 2001).⁴ The relation of the self to the self, as we will indicate further on, is a relation of care and not a relation of knowing; one has to look at the self not as an object of knowledge but as a matter of concern and care; and the point of departure is not oneself as a knowing subject but as an ethical subject of action.

The aim of care or work upon the self is to bring into alignment what one thinks and what one does, one's actions and one's thoughts. What is at stake is: "The test of one self as a thinking subject, who acts and thinks accordingly, who has as his goal a certain transformation of the subject such there is a self-constitution as an ethical subject of truth." (Foucault, 2001, 442; cf. Rabinow, 2003, 9) In Ancient Greece, this 'test of one self' is assumed to be an ongoing concern, and is focused on 'self-mastery' or living a 'true life'; the notion true means that one's thinking (and relation to oneself and to the world, including one's understanding of that

world) is in accordance with what one is doing, and that one lives an 'enlightened' life. The figure of Socrates is described in Foucault's studies as someone living a life of self-care and self-mastery in view of living a 'true' and 'enlightened' life'. Enlightened refers not to 'based on true knowledge or according to the principles of reason', but to the process of self-transformation in view of the incorporation of knowledge in self-mastery. Self-mastery therefore is a state in which one has access to the truth and in which this truth has a function of 'enlightenment'; it transforms the subject in its way of being or it saves the subject. As a consequence, someone who masters the self is someone whose life is a true life or a life inspired by truth; it is someone who actualises truth in her life and during her whole life; someone whose life is animated by truth. Truth is thus a 'reason for living', the *logos* that is actualised in existence and that animates, intensifies and proves life; it is what 'verifies life' (Gros, 2001, p. 510). As we will explain later, this care for the self is required to have access to the truth and to become a truth-teller, but the authority of this truth-telling is based on self-mastery (and not on the strength of the demonstration or proof).⁵

Secondly, in the ethical-existential tradition being 'critical' and 'speaking the truth to power' is first of all a task or even a matter of virtue, and not merely the consequence of generating true knowledge. It is helpful to recall here another practice in Greek antiquity: the practice of *parrhesia* or free speech. This practice involves the duty to speak openly and frankly, on issues that are of public relevance and even if one's own life is at risk, the latter being precisely an indication that one is 'truly' critical (Foucault, 2001, p. 388; cf. Foucault, 2004c; cf. Peters, 2003). Without discussing the historical and contextual details, self-mastery and care of the self could be regarded as the condition for *parrhesia*; the *parrhesiast* is someone who lives and acts as truth wants her to act and therefore her truth-telling implies a correspondence between the 'subject of speech' and the 'subject of action'. This engaged speech, or this speech in which the subject who speaks commits herself to the truth, articulates courage and a kind of freedom or independency. The attitude of independency and critique is what the master articulates when she says: "this truth that I say to you, well, you see it in myself" (Foucault, 2001, 391). The master is someone who in a specific way has everything to lose (and puts herself at stake) and nevertheless feels a duty to speak truth (to power). She is not saying: 'this truth that I say to you, well, the method and my disinterested research attitude proof it to be based on true/valid knowledge.' Hence, truth telling for the *parrhesiast* relies on existential-ethical conditions, and is a mode of speaking truth to power.

Although Foucault retraces the roots of the critical attitude back to the practice of *parrhesia*, he is particularly interested in the practice of critique emerging during modernity and in correlation with the processes of governmentalisation (including the birth of the modern 'governmental' state) (Foucault, 2007/1978, 44-47). According to Foucault, the question 'how to govern people?' became a real concern in early modern times and was related to the development of particular 'arts of government', that is, rationalities and technologies of government that seek to modify the conduct of people (children, workers, populations, households, etc). Modern critique, at least as a task and practice, correlates exactly with these processes of governmentalisation. Instead of being led by the question 'how to

govern people?' the leading question of the critical attitude however was "how not to be governed like that, by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them." (Ibid., 44) This question articulates for Foucault the birth of the critical attitude as "art of not being governed like that and at that cost." (Ibid., 45) A main element of this art is clearly the art to speak truth to power by questioning at the same time 'the truths' (and technologies) in the name of which people are governed.

This historical elucidation of the terms enlightenment and critique, as well as the practice of speaking truth to power, is helpful for us today because it opens up a space and offers tools to re-think the specific attitude of critique and enlightenment in relation to the 'ontology of the present' and 'studies of governmentality'. It is the attitude that is perhaps best captured in the terms 'ethics of de-governmentalisation' (Gros, 2001, 520). Ethics here referring to the existential-ethical work on the self or the 'test of oneself' in view of resisting the type of subject one is asked to be and at the same time speaking truth to these processes of governmentalisation. Foucault formulates it this way: "(...) If governmentalization is indeed this movement through which individuals are subjugated in the reality of a social practice through mechanisms of power that adhere to a truth, well, then! I will say that critique is the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth." (Ibid., 47) And he goes on by defining critique as "the art of voluntary insubordination", the art of "reflected intractability" or as that what would "insure the desubjugation of the subject in the context of what we could call, in a word, the politics of truth." (Ibid., 47) The art of voluntary insubordination or the ethics of de-governmentalisation is in fact the resistance towards 'power' by resisting the kind of subjectivity or conduct that is imposed on us. Understanding resistance in this way – that is resisting who one is and what one takes for granted as well as the governmental relation relying on that self-understanding – means it is a kind of limit-experience that works as a process of de-subjection. In other words, the ethics of de-governmentalisation is at the same time an 'ethics of de-subjection'.

Based on the elements brought together thus far, the next sections outline briefly a few 'essential features' of the critical attitude motivating studies of governmentality whereas the final section explores the political and public dimension of the ethics of de-governmentalization.

CURIOSITY, LIMIT ATTITUDE, EXPERIMENTAL ATTITUDE

Studies of governmentality require an existential-ethical transformation of the researcher. This is to say that the form of reflexivity of the researcher is not to be determined by (intellectual) method and that the researcher is not guided primarily by conditions and criteria of knowledge production and knowledge about fixed norms. Additionally, the critical dimension of studies of governmentality is not about a *judgmental attitude* (based on criteria of validity), and hence, should not be judged (by other disciplines) in view of lacking such an attitude. The researcher's reflexivity instead takes the form of 'an exercise of thought' in view of exposing

one's thoughts (and what one's is taking for granted), and this supposes an *attentive attitude* to the present of which the researcher herself is part. Studies of governmentality thus are concerned with the present. It is important however to stress what is meant with 'concern' and 'the present'. The present is neither what appears as such and before us (the present here is not an object of knowledge), nor that what appears from a longitudinal or temporal approach (the present is not the moment between a past/tradition and a future). The present instead is what appears in a kind of 'sagittal relationship', and what is experienced when we are attentive or when we are 'present in the present' (Foucault, 2007/1983, 86). The present hence refers to what is 'actual' for us today.

In view of this relation to the present, the type of question leading studies of governmentality could have the following form: who are we today, including me as a researcher, and what is distinctive and singular in our current understanding of who we are? It is a question about 'our ontology', or about what we 'are' in the sense of what we take for granted about our being today. Such a question however is always very specific. It is a question that should articulate the distinctiveness of our present. An example from the field of education of what articulates the singularity of who we are in the present, is the issue of 'quality education' or the evident concern with 'quality' in education. Teachers, researchers as well as policy makers use the notion 'quality' constantly to position themselves and to talk about what they are doing in and with regard to education. Even if the definition of the term quality is most of the time unclear, fact is that this term has become indispensable today to speak about education, and thus it seems to be part of our 'ontological make-up' (cf. Simons, 2002; Simons & Masschelein, 2006b). A question therefore could be: who are we, we for whom quality is important, for who educational quality is what is permanently at stake, we who discuss continuously about the adequate indicators of educational quality? Another exemplary question could be related to the issue of 'learning': who are we, we for whom (as researchers, policy-makers, parents, teachers, citizens...) learning is an indispensable notion to position and reposition ourselves today and to talk meaningful about what we are, what we do and what we want to become? In short, the terms 'quality' and 'learning' seem to become referring to something that is fundamental 'for us' (including oneself as a researcher) and it is the 'for us' that will be studied.

To be able to ask such a question (and to put something that is evident, including one's own subjectivity, at stake) implies a particular 'care of the self' or 'work upon the self' from the part of the researcher, and focusing on how 'the self' is part of the present (and the current way of acting and thinking). Although these questions aim at finding knowledge (who are we?), the underlying attitude is an attitude of attention or care and not an attitude of knowing or judging. It is the notion 'curiosity' that captures very well this attitude of care towards the present (cf. Rajchman, 1991, 141). Curiosity, as Foucault explains, is not to be situated at the level of knowledge and the ongoing assimilation of what is proper to know: "To me it suggests something altogether different: it evokes "concern"; it evokes the care one takes for what exists and could exist; a readiness to find strange and singular what surrounds us; a certain relentlessness to break up our familiarities and to regard otherwise the same things; a fervor to grasp what is happening and

what passes; a casualness in regard to the traditional hierarchies of the important and the essential.” (Foucault, 1997, 325) The term curiosity thus refers to care; care is derived from the Latin word *cura* that is still part of ‘curiosity’ and the French word *curiosité* (Foucault, 1980, 108). An attitude of care or curiosity encloses a concentrated, accentuated gaze on what is happening today in education, what is happening with us in the world and a willingness to become a stranger in the familiar present, to regard who we are and what we do, and what we regard as our foundations, as no longer evident. As such curiosity combines both distance (towards oneself in the present) and vigilance or attention (cf. Gros, 2001, 512).

Driven by this curiosity for the present, studies of governmentality could be regarded as embodying “an attitude, an ethos, and a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.” (Foucault, 2007/1984, 118) Hence, and referring clearly to the ideas on experience and de-subjectivation discussed earlier, the attitude at stake combines a ‘limit-attitude’ and an ‘experimental attitude’. The limit-attitude refers to becoming sensitive for what presents itself as a necessity nowadays in order to explore a possible transgression of these limits. Critical work, then, refers to the work that is done at the limits of ourselves and our present: “(...) It will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think. (...) it is seeking to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom.” (Foucault, 2007/1984, 114) But this limit-attitude should at once be combined with an ‘experimental attitude’ or an attitude that seeks to transform or modify one’s mode of being and how one lives the present. As such the studies of governmentality involve as well an experimental work of the self on the self, and this work done at the limits of ourselves must (...) put itself to the test of reality, of contemporary reality, both to grasp the points where change is possible and desirable, and to determine the precise form this change should take.” (Foucault, 2007/1984, 114).

In order to illustrate the particular kind of critical attitude at stake we can reconsider a question such as ‘who are we, we for whom quality is important?’ The question itself is both an expression of limits and an experiment of the self with the self, and as such at the heart of an ethics of de-governmentalisation. However, the common critical attitude towards for instance the impact of quality control on education, reformulates this radical question immediately in terms of knowledge-oriented/based questions of validity: how to make legitimate use of the notion educational quality?, what are the valid indicators of educational quality?, are the ruling conceptions and existing opinions on education quality in accordance with what education or schooling essentially is about? This reformulation in fact transforms the critical limit-attitude and experimental attitude into a ‘limiting attitude towards one’s current experience’; critique here becomes determining (in an almost Kantian sense) what legitimately can be known (and be done) with regard to educational quality. Reformulated this way, the assumption is that ‘our experience of educational quality’ is blind without orientating, fundamental knowledge, without a ‘real handbook on quality assurance’. It is a recuperation

of (and immunisation towards) an attitude and question that are rooted in what we earlier called the existential-ethical tradition into the common ground of the knowledge-based/oriented tradition. Thus, emerging from an experimental and limit-attitude, a question such as ‘who are we, who am I, for whom educational quality is indispensable to talk meaningful about education?’ has a different and more radical meaning; it may lead to trying to escape from the term quality and related practices itself. It is a question that includes the subjectivity of the researcher in the critical inquiry, and works as an experience that makes it no longer possible to relate in the same way to issues of quality in education. It is an attempt to displace oneself in the present and to disengage oneself from oneself, or more precisely, the question itself displaces (and transform) one’s mode of being.

ESSAY, ETHICAL DISTANCE, SELF-STUDY

This explains why Foucault refers to the critical ontology of the present (and by extension we want to add studies of governmentality) as a kind of ‘essay’. An essay – as the French word *essayer* or ‘to try’ indicates – is a careful attempt to modify our mode of being in the present. It is a “transforming test of oneself in the play of truth” or and “askesis, an exercise of the self, in thought” (Foucault, 1984a, 15). Again, it is important to stress that the researcher’s relation of the self to her present self is a relation of care and not a relation of knowledge. In order to answer the question (‘who are we, we who...?’), of course, knowledge is required. But it is a particular kind of knowledge having a particular function. The value (and ‘validity’) of this kind of knowledge does not reside in its conformance with scientific method, but in its usefulness for the care of the self and for the self-mastery that one aspires. As such it should be labeled as ‘experimental knowledge’ for the self. It functions as a touchstone to test whether it is still possible to take care of the self in the present and to establish a relation of rectitude between what one does and thinks. Here, the term ethics of de-governmentalization receives its positive meaning; it is on the one hand a work of de-subjectivation but on the other hand an attempt to take care of the self in view of self-mastery. Hence, the ethics aims not at all at a withdrawal from the world, but its aim is to “live the present otherwise” (Foucault, 1979a, 790).

Finally, we have to focus briefly on the truth-telling that is based upon the ethics of de-governmentalisation and on its educational dimension, and foremost the dimension of self-study (for the researcher involved). In order to indicate the particular scope of truth-telling, it is important to recall the major importance of curiosity. It is a curiosity that is related to an experience of ‘deconversion’ or a loss of assurance or certainty as to who we are or have to be today (Rajchman, 1991, 141). In other words, it is a curiosity that assumes that it is not knowledge (and its conditions) that guarantees access to truth but care of the self and a modification of the self. Being engaged in a study of governmentality is in view of this not about wanting to accumulate and transfer knowledge (and processes of governmentalisation), but to live a true life and to be a touchstone for others to take care of the self and to live a true life oneself. Hence, in her truth-telling the researcher addresses others (readers, students) not as subjects of knowledge (in need of a

handbook on educational quality for instance) and does not judge their involvement in education matters (based on true knowledge). Studies of governmentality along the existential-ethical tradition do not assume the kind of truth-telling that addresses people as (potentially) intellectual beings that should become enlightened by valid knowledge for better understanding, neither are these studies addressing human beings as in need of (practical) knowledge that is useful for better action.

Based upon on experiment of oneself in the present the truth-telling and true knowledge functions as a book of experience or touchstone, i.e. it can be used as an experiment or test by others in their care for the self. In this context, Foucault's claim that "knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting" is illuminating (Foucault, 1984c, 88). Understanding is about accumulating knowledge or including new experiences and ideas, while cutting refers to the (indeed almost physical activity) questioning of who we are and what we regard as fundamental in our understanding of ourselves and the world. It is about cutting in our present and how we live the present; knowledge that cuts "introduces a discontinuity", or works as process of de-subjectivation (Ibid., 88). In other words, it opens up spaces to take care for the self, to live the present otherwise. At this point, the ethics of de-governmentalisation is mirrored in a "governmentality of ethical distance" (Gros, 2001, 520-523). This is about a way of behaving oneself where the ethical distance limits the ambition and absorption of the self in tasks and modes of conduct that are imposed, thus an attitude of ethical distance that disconnects self-government from government. The distance resides in a conversion to the self and one's ability to take care of the self. What is at stake is not just to free oneself from the power that is being exercised, but from the subjectivity and individuality it imposes (cf. Foucault, 1982).

This brings us finally to the educational dimension of the studies of governmentality motivated by the critical ontology ourselves. Because (and as far as) it is engaged in the study of the present in which one is partaking oneself, this research is always a kind of education or pedagogy or self-study for the researcher herself (cf. Rabinow, 2003, 9). It is important to frame education or self-study not within the knowledge-oriented/based tradition. Instead of looking at education as an activity of knowledge transfer or accumulation, it could be regarded as 'work on the self' and hence opening up space to take care for the self through limit-experiences or processes of de-subjectivation. The act of displacement and of disengagement with the self in order to be exposed to the limits of (oneself in) the present, could be regarded as a mode of self-study. Hence, education in this existential-ethical tradition refers to, as the etymology of the Latin verb *e-ducere* shows, being led out of ourselves, leading us outside, out of position, exposed (Masschelein & Simons, 2002). E-education as the experimental self-study included in studies of governmentality.

The ethical-existential transformation is the condition to become – as a touchstone or through one's book of experience – a teacher or truth-teller for others as well. Again, studies of governmentality do not lead to knowledge that additionally serves as the basis for a 'lesson' or a 'demonstration of the truth'. As Foucault mentions regarding his own work, he is not giving a 'lesson' (in view of understanding), but inviting others (in view of cutting in their self-understanding and their taken for

granted relation to the present). E-educational truth-telling takes care for others, however not by telling them what to do (based on true knowledge) but by opening up spaces to take care for oneself and to verify one's life. While the authority of the knowledge-based/oriented teacher is based on her access to true knowledge, the authority of critical studies of governmentality is different; critical studies of governmentality can function as true touchstone or books of experience to the degree that this work is based on experimental research in which the self (of the researcher) and her present is at stake. Then, and we use the term that Foucault uses in relation to his own work, the studies of governmentality can become 'public gestures'. It is the public dimension of these gestures that will be the subject of the concluding thoughts of this paper.

TOWARD A POLITICS OF 'MAKING THINGS PUBLIC'

Hopefully we made a convincing case on the particular critical attitude of de-governmentalisation that could inspire studies of governmentality, and preventing these studies (for their lack of explicit normative responsibility, political orientation or methodological and empirical scope) to be integrated within or assimilated to traditional registers of sociological, political and philosophical research. Taking studies of governmentality that are motivated by a particular existential-ethical self-study into protection against that disciplinary integration or assimilation does not mean we want to prevent any elaboration or further development of these studies and the critical attitude at stake. It is our contention that this elaboration at least should try to grasp the specificity of these studies. In conclusion, we want to formulate two outlines for further elaboration that seem to be interesting to us and both are related to the public or political scope of studies of governmentality.

What studies of governmentality attempt to do is to cut in our present being, to introduce a discontinuity, and hence to open up spaces for care of oneself or spaces to live the present otherwise. Maybe there is another way to open up such spaces, in addition to 'cutting' in our present. Instead of the cutting activity of the *critical* ontology (of ourselves), we could think of a *creative* ontology (Hacking, 2001). This type of ontology aims at the articulation of (inspiring) 'ideas' for people to take care of oneself (and to develop a governmentality of ethical distance). As Hacking states: "With new names, new objects come into being. Not quickly. Only with usage, only with layer after layer of usage." (Hacking, 2001, 8) In view of this, the aim would be to invent new words and concepts, a new language (of education) that articulates what is at stake in the care of oneself today. Instead of a destructive act, these studies would be motivated by the 'creative act' of forming, inventing and fabricating new concepts as well as by the aim to introduce new techniques and practices to govern oneself (disconnected from processes of governmentalisation) (cf. Deleuze & Guattari, 1991). This creative (positive) attitude could be underlying 'studies of governmentality of ethical distance'. But similar to the critical ontology of the present, it would be worthwhile to explore how these studies could look like if they want to function as gestures inviting people to take care for oneself (instead of being an attempts to transfer knowledge in view of (better) understanding).

Except for trying to develop positive next to negative 'public gestures', it would also be interesting to elaborate the term 'public'. Common reactions towards studies of governmentality include the questioning of their so-called a-political character, their crypto-normativity (hence their being politically dangerous) and, related particularly to the work of the latter Foucault, the insistence on ethics and aesthetics (and the so-called private dimension of the care of the self) at the dispense of politics and issues of public concern. The complaint in fact is that studies of governmentality want to criticize processes of governmentalisation without clearly mentioning on what basis and hence not giving any direction of more humane or just processes of governmentalisation. This complaint is related to the tendency to integrate these studies within a broader, more 'solid' and 'complete' programme of critical (educational, social, political) research. It will come as no surprise that we do not agree with these complaints – although we do think some more elaboration is welcome at this point.

In fact, and as the term 'public gestures' clearly indicates, there is a public concern. The care of the self, and the concern for the present, is not a private or a-social activity, but includes precisely a relation to a 'we' and to 'our present' (see also Gros, 2001, 519). By questioning the present ('who are we, we...?') what is opened up is a space for a possible future 'we' and for a future relation of oneself to that 'we'.⁶ Due to this point of departure ('our present') the gestures resulting from studies of governmentality will always be public gestures; not just because these are gestures to a public of contemporaries, not only because they articulate something of public concern, but foremost because throughout these gestures 'public space' is created. Studies of governmentality indeed do not have a particular 'we' (or normative framework, or procedure) in mind that they use to judge the present and to shape a knowledge-based/oriented guidance of future politics or of processes of governmentalisation. Instead, studies of governmentality precisely by relying on the existential-ethical work of the researcher could be regarded as attempts, and we rely for this on a formulation of Latour, to 'make things public' (Latour, 2005).

Making things public, in line with Latour, is not about formulating (like in the knowledge-based/oriented tradition) 'matters of facts' that should lead to a public agreement or understanding in view of knowledge-based/oriented political reform or resistance. Making things public instead is about 'matters of concern' and their becoming public correlates with the constitution of a public, that is, people invited to share this concern. Making things public (as matters of public concern) is thus the result of existential-ethical work on the self that breaks open the horizon of our self-understanding and taken for granted practices (that is, what 'we' regard as matters of fact) and hence transforms it into a matter of concern i.e. "an issue to talk about" (Latour & Sanchez-Criado, 2007, 368). In this regard, Foucault's work on madness, prisons and sexuality contributed in one way or another to the transformation of these issues into matters of public concern. And maybe, although this needs further elaboration too, it is possible to regard these 'public gestures' (resulting from studies of governmentality) as what Rancière would call "demonstrations of equality" or "democratic acts" of taking part in the whole although one has no part in the current whole according to the present distribution of parts (Rancière, 2005).

Indeed, the art of de-governmentalisation (and not wanting to be governed in this or that way) results in introducing new concerns (and not (knowledge-related) facts) into the field of governmentality and in its organisation of ways of thinking, directing and acting. As such, these gestures function as a demonstration of equality and verify the idea that there is ultimately no (rational, ethical, divine) reason to stick to the existing form of governmentality or way of governing people. An elaboration of this line of thinking, could indicate that studies of governmentality do not just have a public concern but as well a democratic one.

It is however important to consider that the elaboration of these lines of thinking only make sense if one is prepared to pay a price to have access to the truth. The prices for studies of governmentality is not the submission to (methodological, deontological) rules of scientific knowledge production, but the transformation of oneself and putting oneself at risk in one's research.

NOTES

- ¹ The authors translated themselves the quotations from French texts, including some of Foucault's own text.
- ² There are several discussion around this term; for instance on the question whether the neologism is a combination of 'government' and 'mentality' or whether it refers to a kind of potential (similar to for instance the term 'musicality'), or on the question whether governmentality is a perspective on (and framework to analyse) power relations or whether it refers first of all to a particular (historical) configuration of power relations (Osborne, 2001; Senellart, 2004).
- ³ In line with Foucault, and contrary to our current (Christian or New Age) understanding of the concepts, 'spiritual' and 'ascetic' do not refer to practices of self-denial and self-renunciation, but (in line with the classic Greek understanding of the term) to intellectual (and other) exercises or practices in order to become attentive to the self and to transform the self (cf. Rabinow, 2003).
- ⁴ For the ancient Greek the context of this idea of care of the self is the problem of finding and describing an 'art of living' or 'technique of existence' (*tekhnē tou biou*). Care of the self is a general principle to develop a kind of *tekhnē* or art to master the self, others or life as such. While initially, this principle and the art of existence were located within the domain of education (the preparation of governing others and often to compensate for the lack of adequate education), in the Hellenistic period it gradually became a prescript for the whole duration of one's life (Foucault, 2001, 428-430). These ideas and their subtle transformations have been discussed in detail (cf. Adorno, 1996, 119-138; in the field of education: Peters, 2003; Peters & Besley, 2008). Within the scope of this paper we limit the focus to a general discussion.
- ⁵ The focus on the ethical, spiritual level and the relation to the self also means that this concept of ethics has to be distinguished from concepts and ideas introduced by other French philosophers (Levinas, Lyotard and Derrida) that stress the relation with the Other (cf. Biesta, 2003; Standish, 2002). These philosophers focus, each in their own way, on the limits of knowledge (representation and language), on ethics (as a unconditional, infinite relation of responsibility to the Other) that precedes ontology (the totality of being) or on justice as an unconditional condition of truth (Lyotard, 1983; Levinas, 1991, Derrida, 2001). It is not our aim however to discuss at a theoretical level the differences between Foucault on the one hand and other theories on ethics on the other hand. For present purposes, it should be sufficient to indicate that we discuss ethics at the level of the immanent relation of the self to the self, the work of the self upon the self and its influence on the mode of being of the subject and not at the level of the fundamental relation of transcendence that 'works' on the self and transforms it into a subject of responsibility.

- ⁶ Foucault stresses that his writings receive their truth once they have been written and not before (as if the book would just articulate what was known before or what can be said within a regime of truth): "I hope that the truth of my books is in the future." (Foucault, 1979b, p. 805)

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