

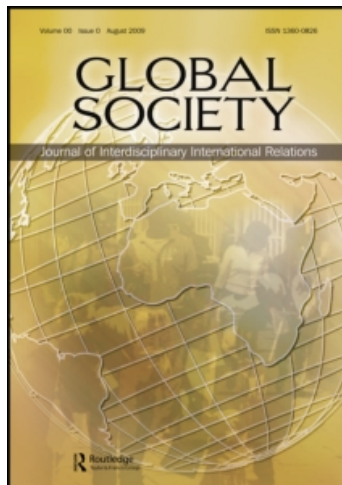
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Nicholas J. Kiersey ; Jason R. Weidner ;Doerthe Rosenow

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Response to Chandler

NICHOLAS J. KIERSEY, JASON R. WEIDNER and DOERTHE ROSENOW

In his response to the articles assembled in the special issue of *Global Society* (Vol. 23, No. 4), David Chandler suggests that much is “politically at stake” in the embrace of “Foucauldian IR” for the study of world politics today.¹ He contends not only that Foucault-inspired theorising in IR gets Foucault wrong but also that the work of Foucauldian IR theorists tends to reproduce an understanding of the relationship between power and politics which works to elide the real nature of the crisis of liberalism today, thereby further contributing to the disablement of any political remedy to this crisis. However, while Chandler’s contribution raises several interesting points, we find regrettable his rather selective reading of the pieces he takes on and, in particular, his assertion that the authors are somehow dogmatic in their approach to Foucauldian methodology, posing a subject that is merely a “secondary product” of global power.

In the below, we start by briefly summarising Chandler’s understanding of the crisis of contemporary liberalism, and his understanding of how this crisis might best be remedied. We proceed from there to read this narrative into his attack on Foucauldian IR, suggesting two basic and interrelated problems with Chandler’s response. First, that by focusing on the state as the essential site of politics he overly constrains the scale of contemporary global power relations. As we contend, one of the principal virtues of the concept of governmentality is that it poses politics as practice, thereby admitting the analysis of power over a wide range of sites and scales. Thus, in stark contrast to Chandler’s Foucault, we present a version of governmentality that is essentially agnostic on the question of the state, focusing our attention instead on practices of subjectification. Moreover, and this is our second point, Chandler’s ontology also essentially binds him to a hegemonic notion of what may be said to count as “politics” in the first place. That is to say, premised as it is on the idea that political critique *necessarily* recognises the agency of the state, Chandler’s argument works to legislate the contestation of power, thereby reproducing the sort of border-policing politics that Foucauldian IR strives to destabilise. This is indeed ironic, for despite Chandler’s claims that the very idea of global governmentality puts power “beyond politics” he nevertheless fails to notice the ways in which his own arguments do precisely that.²

1. David Chandler, “Globalising Foucault: Turning Critique into Apologia—A Response to Kiersey and Rosenow”, *Global Society*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (2010), p. 135.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

Liberalism's Crisis, and How Best to Respond to It

Chandler's critique of liberalism is not an especially novel one. As noted in Kiersey's contribution to the special issue, Chandler's core argument bears a striking affinity with the work of American political scientist Robert Putnam, who argued that contemporary liberal politics is beset by a kind of hyper-individualism.³ As with Putnam, Chandler's hopes for contemporary democratic life have been dashed by the emergence of a crisis of political representation wherein many feel alienated from political power and, as such, choose to retreat from political life. For Chandler, the "implosion of liberal frameworks of meaning" constitutes the defining problem of our time.⁴ Thus, where once the "Copernican revolution" of liberalism gave the masses a sense of their rights as autonomous individuals, and a language around which they could effectively express their demands for these rights, today the masses have withdrawn from politics and no longer seek to keep power in check. This withering of political contestation is rooted in a transformation of the discursive framing of the relationship between power and politics. The masses today feel alienated from power, quite simply because they think that power is somehow beyond them. At the individual level, the result is a sense of extreme helplessness and a kind of mass "dropping out". At the macro level, the result is an intensified individualism in the Western world, corresponding with a general erosion of the capacity of the liberal world to engage in the hard work of promoting and maintaining a regime of global liberal governance.

For Chandler, then, liberal politics is beset by the emergence of a subject of such political passivity that there is simply no meaningful way in which political leadership can generate a sense of common fate or shared destiny among the wider population. As such, while not necessarily a sceptic of globalisation, Chandler does suggest that the existence of this crisis makes it impossible to speak of globalisation as a *liberal* phenomenon. Cosmopolitan theorists may therefore wax hopefully about the emergence of a global communicative space for political deliberation, facilitated by a major transformation in media and information technology, and derive from this the concomitant emergence of a global regime of humanitarian values but, for Chandler, such talk is rather fanciful. For there is no real evidence to support the existence of a coherent global liberalism. Instead, he avers, to the extent that the traditional state-based model of political life is in decline, this should be attributed less to the emergence of any sort of liberally minded transnational sovereign and more to the "attenuation of political contestation".⁵

Chandler's critique of Foucauldian theory in IR shares much with his critique of Cosmopolitanism. Like Cosmopolitan theory, he says, Foucauldian IR presupposes the existence of a global liberal space and the importance of the pursuit of "global solutions to global problems".⁶ As such, he suggests, it also works to distract us from the real task of resolving liberalism's crisis of representation. Now, it is not clear from Chandler's reply as to what exactly he believes these

3. R.D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000); N.J. Kiersey, "Neoliberal Political Economy and the Subjectivity of Crisis; Why Governmentality is Not Hollow", *Global Society*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (2009), pp. 363–386.

4. Chandler, "Globalising Foucault", *op. cit.*, p. 138.

5. David Chandler, "Critiquing Liberal Cosmopolitanism? The Limits of the Biopolitical Approach", *International Political Sociology*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2009), p. 56.

6. Chandler, "Globalising Foucault", *op. cit.*, p. 136.

“global problems” consist of, or to what extent governments should be cognisant of them at all. What is very clear, however, is that Chandler believes that a proper resolution to “the crisis” will minimally involve some form of (re-)engaged political community at the state level. That is, the construction of a body of self-conscious citizens who could effectively express a demand that the power of actually existing governments be redirected to serve their core interests. Importantly, since at the global level we find neither a legitimate sovereign authority nor a global form of citizenship, the only vehicle for such a legitimate and efficacious political community is something like that provided by the traditional nation-state. For Chandler, then, there is literally no other place for politics than that of the nation-state—politics being essentially defined as the relationship between the citizen and the state. Thus we can appreciate Chandler’s lament that Foucauldians in IR “efface the state or sovereign as political subjects, collapsing them into rationalities of global power”.⁷ And when he suggests, therefore, that the debate about whether Foucault should be “scaled” to address global issues is simply a “red herring”, the meaning is quite clear: Foucauldians are in fact participating in a discourse which submerges the problems of the state and gives priority to a global constituency that is simply incapable of “holding power to political account”.⁸

Sites and Scales: On Power, Practice and Subjectification

We see, then, that Chandler is concerned that the concept of “global governmentality” unduly shifts the centre of gravity in the operations of power from the national to the global, thereby leading IR Foucauldians not only to misdiagnose the crisis of liberalism but to further obstruct its remediation. One of his principal complaints with this move is that while it poses the power of global liberalism as somehow real, it demonstrates neither how this power is constituted in the practical sense nor how, in the absence of a genuine global sovereign, it might gain a genuine efficacy. In this sense, as Chandler contends, Foucauldian IR is founded on a “rupture between power and politics”.⁹ Yet to what extent is this a fair representation of the way IR Foucauldians think of the global? On the one hand, it might be protested that Chandler has simply overlooked the body of Foucauldian IR which, rather than take concepts such as globalisation and the global for granted, actually does offer a critical examination of the constitution of the global as a form of power/knowledge that is intimately connected with specific projects that seek to govern human subjects.¹⁰ On the other hand, however, it may well be worth recalling that, for Foucault, power is always immanent, and never emanating from a sole author or sovereign. This is something Chandler appears to recognise:

Although, for Foucault, power does not reside solely in the sovereign nor operate solely through formal political and legal processes, there is

7. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

10. For example, Wendy Larner and William Walters, “Globalization as Governmentality”, *Alternatives*, Vol. 29, No. 5 (2004), pp. 495–514.

a problem when we apply this insight to the global level. In this application, power becomes external and constitutive of society, rather than securing itself through it and therefore cannot be grasped as a political product.¹¹

Yet, as we see in this quote, Chandler also appears to think that once the question of a “global” power is posed then it ceases to be amenable to the Foucauldian model. In other words, the concept of a global power is problematic because it cannot be understood as a product of political practice. Research inspired by Foucauldian methods thus runs the risk of taking “its object or subject matter at face value” and developing a critique, therefore, “which does not go beyond surface appearances”.¹²

What exactly is it about the concept “global”, then, which, for Chandler, obscures its nature as a product of politics? What is it that he believes lies underneath this “surface appearance” of the global? To us, the word “surface” presumes that there is an underlying structure which, while not perhaps immediately apparent in our preoccupation with quotidian practices, nevertheless somehow constitutes the “real” determining power in our political lives. Implicit in this argument, of course, is the notion that there exists an authentic or naturally existing scale or domain of action wherein politics “really” takes place and, moreover, that this scale is a naturally existing category, quite independent of the forms of knowledge that produce it. To us, however, the fact that Chandler issues his rebuttal to us by, essentially, posing *his* site of analysis as somehow more real or important than that of the “global” demonstrates that he has entirely missed the point of our critique. That is, consistent with the methodological nominalism of Foucault, we eschew the idea that *any* scale of analysis is in and of itself *necessarily* real.¹³ Instead, we view spatial and scalar categories as forms of power/knowledge, produced through discursive and material practices and through political contestation. Thus, just as the space of the nation-state is the contingent product of discursive and material factors, of struggle and contestation, so too is the space of the global the result of specific political practices and struggles. Moreover, we would add, examining these practices that help constitute the global—their attendant logics and rationalities, the political projects to which they are connected—is of central concern to most “global governmentality” studies.

At the very least, then, it appears that Chandler has entirely misunderstood our argument. Beyond this, however, it would appear that he engages in a rather problematic reading of Foucault, too. This is clear, for example, when he claims that Foucauldian IR “rejects Foucault’s subjective agent-centred focus on state governmentality and replaces this with the subject-less and agent-less governmentality of global power”. What Chandler appears to be saying here, against a weight of evidence, is that Foucault was in fact not very promiscuous in his approach to political scale. Foucault, we learn, was concerned principally with “the methods by which the liberal state secured and legitimated itself through its relationship with society”.¹⁴ Indeed, suggests Chandler, a reading of Foucault’s

11. Chandler, “Globalising Foucault”, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

13. For discussion, see J. Protevi, “What Does Foucault Think about Neo-liberalism?”, *Pli—The Warwick Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 21 (forthcoming 2010).

14. Chandler, “Globalising Foucault”, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

Birth of Biopolitics reveals that he innovated the theory of governmentality as a way of *rebutting* the view that “the modern state was no longer the focus of power and of politics, explaining the discursive shift to institutionalism as a way of legitimising power in response to the crisis of liberal framings of representative legitimacy in post-war Germany”.¹⁵ In this sense, he concludes, theories of global governmentality have “little in common methodologically” with Foucault.¹⁶

This assertion aside, however, Chandler makes absolutely no effort to substantiate this claim. As such, it is difficult to square his position with the argument Foucault clearly develops in the text that liberalism emerges as a critique of power—of a certain form of power, namely that of *raison d'état* and the forms of government associated with cameralism.¹⁷ Throughout his body of work, moreover, one of Foucault's central arguments was that we can never step outside of relations of power, and that political critique is always located within the field of power. As Foucault explains, “power” is first and foremost a name for a “complex strategical situation in a particular society”.¹⁸ Seeping through the web of all social, political, and economic relations down to its very “depths”, power is not a “general system of domination exerted by one group over another” but rather something that is exercised from “innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations”. Power is not extended from the top to the bottom, but comes from below, thereby precluding a “binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled [...]”.¹⁹

Foucault thus rejects the fantasy of establishing some kind of universal normative foundation for politics that is free from relations of power. As such, if Foucault's work had a mantra, it would be that we should never take an institution like the state or law as a starting-point of analysis. The state is merely an effect of power, or a “legal framework of unity”.²⁰ Yet characterising the state as a unitary effect of power is different from starting an engagement with power and politics based on a concept of the state that is derived from a politico-legal definition, such as that offered by Chandler. Consequently, just because an equivalent “legal framework of unity” does not exist at the “global” level, it does not follow that an analysis of politics, or political contestation, should extend beyond the framework of the state. To the contrary, we recall how, in Bigo's terms, the disciplinary *dispositif* of the prison, with its specific mechanisms of control and surveillance, could be observed to operate in a manner “scattered throughout society in institutions such as factories, barracks and schools”.²¹ Similarly, we think it plausible that dispersed relations of power, and their effects, can be found at a range of sites and scales, depending on the particular practices of subjectification under scrutiny.

Importantly, then, it should be understood that an essential pillar of Chandler's rebuttal of our work is that we have essentially *mislocated* power. For his part,

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*

17. M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population; Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 101.

18. *Idem*, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume I* (London: Vintage Books, 1990), p. 93.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 92, 94.

20. M. Foucault, “Omnes et Singulatim”, in Sterling M. McMurrin (ed.), *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 307.

21. D. Bigo, “Globalized (In)Security: The Field and the Ban-opticon”, in D. Bigo and A. Tsoukala (eds.), *Terror, Insecurity and Liberty: Illiberal Practices of Liberal Regimes after 9/11* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 31.

however, Chandler ignores the question of how power achieves unity through practices of subjectification over diverse scales. This is significant because if we are to think of power as heterogeneous and relational then its location cannot be determined solely by asking about the “level” upon which its effects can be registered. In Foucault’s own terms, governmental power is “not confined by definition to a precise domain determined by a sector of the scale, but should be considered simply as a point of view, a method of decipherment which may be valid for the whole scale, whatever its size”.²² As such, if Chandler is to insist on the level of the “state” as the one where power and politics can be “reunited” due to a necessary ontological anchoring of the latter in the former, we might say, equally, that he is participating in the solidification and isolation of a certain domain of power. Ironically, then, similarly to the poststructuralists he purports to critique, he privileges a certain theoretical concept of “politics” over its actual practices, which we insist are to be found at a variety of concrete sites and are ultimately quite difficult to label as strictly “global”, “international”, “local”, etc.

Policing “Politics”

The locus of power today is a central problem not only theoretically but also with regard to political action. The massive protests that seem to accompany every meeting of the international financial institutions and the G8 provide evidence that while the national state remains an important site around which political claims take place, there also exists an international or transnational set of institutions which are increasingly the sites of political contestation. This fact is hardly novel or controversial, and forms the basis of much liberal institutional analysis in the field of IR. Some IR scholars, however, have applied a Foucauldian methodology to this problem by focusing on the varied and diverse operations of power—the forms of knowledge, technologies, rationalities, and subjectivities that are assembled in order to shape and direct the relationships and activities of subjects—that often take place outside the more formal political organisations and institutions that form what liberal scholars understand as a system of “global governance”.

What exactly can be said to count as the contestation of politics in this context? And what might governmentality as a “method of decipherment” offer us as an avenue of political critique? A second pillar of Chandler’s objection to the articles he discusses is that they seem to preclude genuine political critique or any form of contestation. This is an interesting aspect of Chandler’s argument, to us, for while he seems to accept that the Foucauldian ontology is rooted in an “active” subject he nevertheless charges us that the subject of global governmentality is “no more than a secondary product of the global discursive practices of liberal power”.²³ Thus he says that for Kiersey, the “framework of the autonomous subject cannot be a critique of power but merely part of its reproduction and enforcement”.²⁴ Similarly, he is concerned that for Rosenow “even the aspiration to develop a political critique is held to be invalid and is an act either of oppression or of complicity”.²⁵

22. M. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics; Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–79* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 186.

23. Chandler, “Globalising Foucault”, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 141.

25. *Ibid.*

Chandler's critique here clearly parallels that of Bruff.²⁶ Like Bruff, Chandler argues that Foucauldian IR elides the political autonomy of the individual in favour of mere "objects shaped and created by 'global capitalism'".²⁷ Like Bruff too, however, Chandler also appears to be using arguments against Foucauldian IR which we more commonly see deployed against structuralist theories. Two points, we think, should be made here. First, following Gordon, we would remind Chandler that Foucault used governmentality as a theory of *power*.²⁸ His point, simply, was that power is not a "commodity" to be wielded by a "phenomenological" subject.²⁹ Foucault was motivated by a concern that we might overlook the various ways in which power can create regimes of "subjectification", directing the will of the subject in different historical contexts. However, we note, a crucial aspect of Foucault's definition of power is that it only really describes situations where a certain margin of freedom can be identified. Power is exercised, he notes, "only over free subjects". That is, for power to be exercised, the subject must be presented with a situation "in which several kinds of conduct, several ways of reacting and modes of behaviour are available".³⁰ Far from posing the subject as a "secondary product" of power, then, the Foucauldian model of power suggests a certain solicitation of the self who "turns him- or herself into a subject".³¹ In this sense, a certain freedom, a capacity for resistance, or the potential for a doing otherwise than power might intend, "comes first".³²

Chandler thus misses the whole purpose of our engagement with Foucault in this regard, which is to avoid reliance on the category of a "universal subject". Now, of course, Foucault's position here can be misunderstood as a categorical rejection of any attempt to provide a foundation of the political. Our second point, however, is that this was never Foucault's position; rather, his stance forced those who would undertake such a project to come to terms with the implications of such an endeavour in terms of power. The point, therefore, is that a Foucauldian perspective allows no free passes. If you want to argue for a certain political state of affairs, you have to accept that you are inevitably operating within the domain of power. That doesn't make it illegitimate or "wrong", but it precludes a stance whereby one political perspective can claim to be innocent of the operations of power. In fact, it is precisely that claim—that a certain understanding of the political is untainted by power and offers a universal truth for understanding the political—that can be seen as an attempt to separate power from politics par excellence. In this sense, then, we think it is important to expose a certain absolutism in Chandler's methodology. That is, in so far as it degrades all forms of contestation taking place at sites other than the nation-

26. See I. Bruff, "The Totalisation of Human Social Practice: Open Marxists and Capitalist Social Relations, Foucauldians and Power Relations", *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2009), pp. 332–351.

27. Chandler, "Globalising Foucault", *op. cit.*, p. 141.

28. Colin Gordon, "Governmental Rationality: An Introduction", in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 2.

29. M. Foucault, "Truth and Power", in J.D. Faubion (ed.), *Power* (New York: New Press, 2000), pp. 111–133 (p. 118).

30. *Idem*, "The Subject and Power", in J.D. Faubion (ed.), *Power* (New York: New Press, 2000), p. 342.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 327.

32. M. Foucault, "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity", in Paul Rabinow and Robert Hurley (eds.), *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (London: Allen Lane, 1997), p. 167.

state and taking other concepts than the autonomous individual rights-subject as a starting-point, Chandler's own concept of "politics" is quite hegemonic. He denies the political status of any critique of power that falls outside of his own purist ontology of contestation.

Thus, contrary to Chandler's claim that for IR Foucauldians "power stands outside the world of politics", it is the argument that there exists a "universal perspective from which power can be critiqued or understood in political terms" that is perhaps the most powerful attempt to separate power from politics, in that it represents an attempt to de-politicise (i.e. remove as a subject of debate and contention) the very meaning of the political itself. By insisting that there is only one possible basis for understanding the political (which for Chandler is based on the existence of the autonomous individual who can make claims against the power of the sovereign), Chandler attempts to make power invisible within a foundational claim of the political, thereby trying to mask the inherent power operation involved in defining the political. It would seem, then, that rather than "reuniting" power and politics, Chandler wishes to occlude the role of the former in defining the latter.

In conclusion, Foucauldian approaches endeavour to avoid dictating the terms of politics, preferring to leave the question of how politics is ultimately defined to the subjects in question. If we are tempted, then, perhaps in a moment of slight exaggeration, to say liberalism has a "consciousness of itself as a theory which seeks to incite entrepreneurialism to the point of crisis", we are clearly not alluding to a "free-floating power" of global governmentality. Rather, we are referring much more concretely to a deliberated response to the liberal problematique which is itself embedded in a multifaceted series of reflexive practices of subject constitution where the potential for resistance is always present. Instead of being "apologetic", then, as Chandler claims, for an all-encompassing global power, we see our purpose in taking the concept of global governmentality seriously as more akin to giving "tactical pointers" (as Foucault says) rather than "imperatives" for political contestation.³³ We appreciate the modesty of this language here because, ultimately, we recognise that this contestation will necessarily be intertwined with power—there is no outside! As such, we hope to disable absolutist accounts of how political contestation needs to take place.

33. *Idem*, *Security, Territory, Population*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.