

A Note On “Becker On Ewald On Foucault On Becker” : American Neoliberalism And Michel Foucault’s 1979 Birth Of Biopolitics Lectures *A conversation with Gary Becker, François Ewald, and Bernard Harcourt* ” ¹

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In 1991, I published a short account of Foucault's 1978-9 lectures on governmentality, liberalism and neoliberalism, as part of my introduction to *The Foucault Effect*. This had been preceded by an earlier, briefer summary contained in an essay on Weber and Foucault, published in 1987. Since the publication of the lectures themselves in 2005 (in the original French) and 2006-7 (in excellent English translations),² interest in their content has, very justifiably, continued to grow, while the need for those interested to rely on my highly condensed accounts and discussions has, for the most welcome of reasons, diminished. Access to the full texts of Foucault's lectures allows everyone to form their own unmediated assessment of their merits and relevance – and also, if they so wish, to test the accuracy of early, interim bulletins of what they contain. I have done some retrospective checks myself, noting a number of important elements in the lectures, several of which are of continuing and growing interest in the light of subsequent developments, which my overview failed to adequately address.³ But of course these lectures, including notably those on neoliberalism, are, just as much now as then, so prodigiously dense and rich in original insight that each re-reading of them leads one to notice, seemingly for the first time, further arresting and highly relevant insights.⁴

1 Social Science Research Network. University of Chicago Institute for Law & Economics Olin Research Paper No. 614U of *Chicago Public Law Working Paper No. 401*. http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2142163

2 Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978*. Edited by Michel Senellart, translated by Graham Burchell. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008; Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*. Edited by Michel Senellart, translated by Graham Burchell. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

3 Colin Gordon, “Governmentality and the genealogy of politics”, Birkbeck College, 2011. <http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2011/06/colin-gordon-governmentality-and-the-genealogy-of-politics/>

4 Two points which struck me anew while preparing these notes: that Foucault cites

I was very interested to see some of these lectures being revisited in a recent discussion between Gary Becker, one of the neoliberal thinkers Foucault had discussed, Francois Ewald, one of Foucault's close co-researchers whose work we had also included in *The Foucault Effect*,⁵ and Bernard Harcourt, an American legal and political scholar who is now editing some of Foucault's other lectures, and has himself commented extensively on the 1978-79 lectures.

I also had a personal reason to be interested in the following passage in part of Bernard Harcourt's contribution to this discussion:

Others have identified other critiques which I do not believe are entirely correct. Colin Gordon, in an early chapter of *The Foucault Effect*, focuses on the notion of the malleability of the neoliberal subject; and this notion of the malleability, the shape-ability, of the neoliberal subject is something that, I think, he views as cautiously problematic. He writes, "the American neoliberal *homo economicus* is manipulable man, man who is perpetually responsive to modifications in his environment. Economic government here joins hands with behaviorism." So [you can see here] this notion that the idea of human capital or the notion of *homo economicus* would feed into behaviorism and that that is particularly problematic.

Now, Foucault refers to this critique in this chapter – well, he comes back to that on March 28th, but he refers to that specific danger around page 228 of the English translation of his lectures when he talks about eugenics, the problem of eugenics. And he says, "as soon as a society poses itself the problem of the improvement of its human capital in general," that is, once we have a theory of human capital, and once we view the important issue as being improvement of human capital, that "it is inevitable that the problem of control, screening, and improvement of the human capital of individuals ... [is] called for."

Now that could be a sharp critique, actually. It would be a very sharp critique. To a certain extent, it would be a too-sharp critique, I think – which is what Foucault then says. And this picks up on this notion of power without coercion, but I think it's a little bit sharper in its ultimate implications. Because on the next couple of pages, on page 230 of the lectures, Foucault then says, "What, you will ask, is the interest of all these analyses?" So essentially he's pulling back and saying, "Why do we care about this theory of human capital?" And he says, "You will be aware of the immediate political connotations and there is no need to stress them further." The immediate political connotations being the ones that we just

liberalism as historically crucial to the legitimation of new sovereign legitimacy not only in West Germany after 1945, but also in the American colonies after 1776; and that migration is discussed not only as a life-experience of several among the founders of neoliberalism, but also as itself a theme of neoliberal economic thinking.

5 Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, Peter Miller, *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*. Brighton: Harvester Press, 1991.

went over, which was this notion of eugenics. If you have a theory of human capital, it could feed into a very conspiratorial, instrumental vision of how we need to shape human capital. And he says "No, but that's not what I want to do here." "If there were only this lateral political product," he says, "we could no doubt brush this kind of analysis aside with a gesture, or at any rate purely and simply denounce it." Because of course, we can simply denounce eugenics today. "But I think this would be both mistaken and dangerous." [8-9]

I have a few small concerns about this particular passage. Firstly: Foucault addresses *separately*, in two different lectures, the respective questions of neoliberalism's connections or affinities with behaviourism,⁶ and of the extent to which neoliberal theory postulates an innate, genetic component of human capital.⁷ Foucault makes no connection between these respective issues, nor does he suggest any linkage, affinity or symbiosis between behavioural and genetic ideas, practices or policies. Nor does Foucault (or anyone else, to my knowledge) in any way suggest that behaviourism and eugenics are equivalent or interchangeable systems of thought.

Secondly, the conclusions which Foucault suggests in his discussions of these two respective questions are notably different:

(1) Liberalism and behaviorism. Foucault himself puts forward the suggestion that the Chicago neoliberal conception of *homo economicus* as a being capable of rational response to external stimuli may have an intrinsic affinity with methods for the modification of individual behaviour, acting either directly on the individual subject or on the subject's environment:

This is a colossal definition, which obviously economists are far from endorsing, but it has a certain interest. It has a practical interest, if you like, inasmuch as if you define the object of economic analysis as the set of systematic responses to the variables of the environment, then you can see the possibility of integrating within economics a set of techniques, those called behavioral techniques, which are currently in fashion in the United States. You find these methods in their purest, most rigorous, strictest or aberrant forms, as you wish, in Skinner, and precisely they do not consist in analyzing the meaning of different kinds of conduct, but simply in seeing how, through mechanisms of reinforcement, a given play of stimuli entail responses whose systematic nature can be observed and on the basis of which other variables of behavior can be introduced. In fact, all these behavioral techniques show how psychology understood in these terms can enter the definition of economics given by Becker. There is little literature

6 Foucault (2008), Lecture on 28th March, pp. 269-70.

7 Foucault (2008), Lecture on 14th March, pp. 227-9.

on these behavioral techniques in France. In Castel's last book, *The Psychiatric Society*, there is a chapter on behavioral techniques and you will see how this is precisely the implementation, within a given situation – in this case, a hospital, a psychiatric clinic – of methods which are both experimental and involve a specifically economic analysis of behavior. [...] Becker's definition, which, again, although it is not recognized by the average economist, or even by the majority of them, nonetheless, despite its isolated character, enables us to highlight a paradox, because *homo œconomicus* as he appears in the eighteenth century – I will come back to this shortly – basically functions as what could be called an intangible element with regard to the exercise of power. *Homo œconomicus* is someone who pursues his own interest, and whose interest is such that it converges spontaneously with the interest of others. From the point of view of a theory of government, *homo œconomicus* is the person who must be let alone. With regard to *homo œconomicus*, one must *laissez faire*; he is the subject or object of *laissez-faire*. And now, in Becker's definition which I have just given, *homo œconomicus*, that is to say, the person who accepts reality or who responds systematically to modifications in the variables of the environment, appears precisely as someone manageable, someone who responds systematically to systematic modifications artificially introduced into the environment. *Homo œconomicus* is someone who is eminently governable. From being the intangible partner of *laissez-faire*, *homo œconomicus* now becomes the correlate of a governmentality which will act on the environment and systematically modify its variables. (269-71)

An article by Robert Castel which continues the analysis of the work Foucault cites here was included as the final chapter of *The Foucault Effect*, and is discussed in my Introduction. Although one wording of mine which Harcourt quotes, "the American neo-liberal *homo economicus* is *manipulable man*", is not said in so many words by Foucault, I think that this rendering of the sense of the above cited remarks is a not unreasonable summary. It is, I think, fairly clear from the context in my 1991 text and abundantly evident from the published text of the lectures, that my remarks cited above by Harcourt were a paraphrase of Foucault's discussion. That discussion seemed, and still seems to me coherent, important, and worth highlighting; I do not merit the credit for being its originator.

One other comment I made in 1991 about the sense of Foucault's analysis here goes a little beyond the text in situating it within a set of surrounding genealogies in Foucault's own work and that of others (including Pasquino, Castel and Ewald), which *The Foucault Effect* was seeking to showcase as a coherent joint venture. Foucault was, I felt, intrigued by the way that Becker's analysis treated the criminal as a rational agent not fundamentally different from the economic agent in general, and by that token rendered dispensable a century of criminological profiles of the deviant

psychiatric, psychological or anthropological nature of criminality. In Becker's analysis, I suggested, "*homo economicus* drives out the nineteenth-century *homo criminalis*" (43). The Chicago School is not, that is to say, an avatar of the Belgian school of social defence or the Italian school of criminal anthropology. By the same token, it is not self-evidently justifiable to read neoliberal human capital theory as an instrument for the marginalisation or segregation of population groups in which there is a higher frequency of criminal activity.

On the other hand – though I stress Foucault does not say this here – one might wonder whether Becker's beguiling case for an above-zero social tolerance of criminality might not be driven by a particular wish to limit over-zealous repression of *business* crime – a perspective consistent with a propensity of a deregulated US-style neoliberal economy to evolve into an organized kleptocracy. Given that, like many recent commentators, all three participants in this dialogue are content to limit their discussion to American, Chicago-school neoliberalism, it may be worth noting that deregulation is very much *not* a defining feature of the West German model of neoliberalism, as Foucault presented it in these lectures.

(2) *Neoliberalism, genetics, eugenics.* Foucault outlines how, based on recent writings of neoliberal economists, the question of the formation of human capital, in both of its genetic and environmentally formed components, are likely to become explicit issues of concern, potentially involving on the genetic side the full screening of populations; these forms of concern ranging over issues from the economics of marriage to family life, education and migration (mobility is also a component of human and capital). He comments (after mentioning the question of screening) that:

What we might call the racist effects of genetics is certainly something to be feared, and they are far from being eradicated, but this does not seem to me to be the major political issue at the moment.⁸

There is no explicit reference here to eugenics. Then, after the discussion of migration there is the comment which Bernard quotes, that merely to denounce these discourses would be "both mistaken and dangerous". He continues:

In fact, this kind of analysis makes it possible first of all to reappraise phenomena which have been identified for some time, since the end of the nineteenth century, and to which no satisfactory status has been given.⁹

8 Foucault, (2008), pp. 228-9.

9 Foucault (2008), p. 231.

The areas of this contribution are in the economic and historical explanation of differential patterns of economic development and growth in the developed and developing worlds.

Based on the above considerations, my small reservations about Bernard Harcourt's above cited comments, are therefore the following.

- He telescopes together and conflates two different discussions in Foucault's lectures of two quite different questions, and presents his answer to the second question as though it were (also or instead) his opinion on the first.
- He assigns to me, undeservedly, the intellectual authorship of a comment about neoliberalism which can be taken as a critique or at least indeed a cautionary warning (the comment on the link to behaviourism) which is actually Foucault's, and which I reported as such.
- He conveys to the reader the incorrect impression that Foucault himself discounted this critique.

Having stated these reservations about Harcourt on Gordon on Foucault, in further response to this interesting dialogue, I will add here a couple of further queries about Harcourt on Foucault. These minor complaints need – one should emphasise at this point - to be measured against the considerable respect due to Harcourt's trenchant and effective critiques of American penal order.

After the passage of Harcourt's comments cited above, the remainder of this discussion continues to turn about the same themes. François Ewald restates something like Foucault's warning about behaviourism, without using the word itself, by arguing that neoliberalism has an 'impoverishing' conception of the human subject, such that it can reasonably be reproached for treating humans like animals. Becker rejects this reproach and affirms neoliberalism's committed interest in the higher, aspirational human faculties. Bernard Harcourt, for his part, and without invoking the spectre of eugenics as such, advances a critical argument against the neoliberals which he suggests to be both pointed, well-founded, and supported in Foucault's analysis. He argues, drawing on a brief remark at the end of Foucault's discussion, that human capital theory has been a policy driver (no doubt among others) for the US penal policies since the 1970s of the partial reactivation of capital punishment and the greatly increased practice of long term and lifetime imprisonment – in order to take out of the economic circuit those individuals whose low level of being human makes them unproductive members of society. Becker also denies this charge, here citing in evidence his own, well-known past positions in favour of liberalising of drug laws.

Harcourt quotes Foucault's remark : "What, you will ask, is the interest of all these analyses? You will be aware of the immediate political connotations and there is no need to stress them further."¹⁰ The reader in 2013 might need some help in knowing just what obvious, self-evident contemporary contexts Foucault may have had in mind when speaking these words in 1979. They might, one could plausibly suppose, have included the fact that a centre-right government in France was at the time applying its own versions of neoliberal policy, versions (not mentioned in this Franco-American dialogue) which Foucault had indeed discussed in his immediately preceding lecture, while in the USA, Foucault himself explicitly linked neoliberalism to critiques of the New Deal and Great Society social policies of the Roosevelt, Truman and Johnson eras. The idea that Foucault's unspecified allusion here might have been specifically to the type of policy option for the management of an underclass which Harcourt is postulating lacks any direct support in the text of the lecture, and is not particularly encouraged by Foucault's remark a couple of pages earlier (and already cited above) that:

What we might call the racist effects of genetics is certainly something to be feared, and they are far from being eradicated, but this does not seem to me to be the major political issue at the moment.¹¹

It seems that Gary Becker may not have read the whole of Foucault's 1979 discussion of the Chicago school, since he refers to 'two lectures' (evidently those of 14th and 21st March 1979), whereas it is in the first section of the following lecture, given on 28 March 1979,¹² that Foucault talks about the Chicago school's conception of *homo economicus*, contrasting this with the ideas of classical liberalism. It is here that Foucault establishes the link or affinity between this approach and the use behavioural techniques, which is the source for the 'critique' which I reported, and which Harcourt represents as my own. In the light of Becker's exchange with Ewald, it is a pity this discussion missed the opportunity to put these comments to Becker and invite his response.

I may have a small share of responsibility for provoking Bernard Harcourt's interesting speculation. In the spring of 2011, we corresponded, in advance of his participation in an event commemorating *The Foucault Effect* at Birkbeck College, about his recent book *The Illusion of Free Markets: Punishment and the Myth of Natural Order* and its coverage of Foucault, neoliberalism and

10 Foucault (2008), p. 230.

11 Foucault (2008), pp. 267-71.

12 Foucault (2008), pp. 267-71.

contemporary American penal policy.¹³ I felt that this interesting book did not convincingly demonstrate a causal link between neoliberal thought and the major recent developments in American penal policy; Bernard Harcourt responded to my comments with a new, alternative version of his thesis, which he presented in his paper to the London conference,¹⁴ and which he restates in this discussion, claiming support from remarks in Foucault's lectures. It is entirely proper and useful to investigate, as Bernard Harcourt has done, the contribution that the hegemonic influence on neoliberal thinking in recent decades might have had on penal policies, and especially on the spectacular expansion of the American prison population. In attempting by this new line of argument to clinch the case, however, he may still be at risk of forcing the evidence.

Foucault warned in 1979 – well before most of the Left seems to have even registered the existence of neoliberalism – against facile ideological and polemical responses to, and misrecognitions of, neoliberalism's contemporary impact and originality. Since 1979 the Left has to some extent, and rather belatedly, caught up with the topic, but in so doing it has seldom chosen to heed Foucault's warning. It is now not uncommon for Foucault to be credited with “prescience” for his early attention to neoliberalism, but Foucault was not a prophet, and an analysis of the effects and manifestations of neoliberalism in the past three decades cannot and should not be simply read off from his comments at that time – useful and salutary in various respects though they may still be.

It is of course always helpful to be clear what one means by a term such as neoliberalism, if indeed it is not being used simply as a floating signifier of evil, a new signifier of the inveterately evil nature of capitalism, catering to the moral comfort of those no longer sure of their faith in the historico-economic victory of capitalism's foe. For many Left commentators, neoliberalism seems nowadays to primarily denote the combined phenomena of deregulation, privatisation and globalisation – often perceived as developments dating essentially from the 1980s. None of these themes happen to be central to Foucault's discussion: even Foucault was not prescient enough to cater for all our later concerns, or to leave us a full genealogy of the decades since his death.

13 Bernard Harcourt, *The Illusion of Free Markets: Punishment and the Myth of Natural Order*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2011.

14 Bernard Harcourt, “The Punitive Order: Free Markets, Neoliberalism, and Mass Incarceration in the United States”, Birbeck College 2011.
<http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2011/06/bernard-harcourt-the-punitive-order-free-markets-neoliberalism-and-mass-incarceration-in-the-united-states/>

It seems eminently likely that Foucault might have had liberalism and neoliberalism (among other things) in mind when he said in an interview that “everything is dangerous, nothing is evil in itself”.¹⁵ It follows from this maxim that what is dangerous cannot be recognised simply on the basis of its evil nature, that things not evil in themselves can still be sources of danger. As Foucault had noticed in his own contribution to the genealogy of risk, modern technologies of security begin precisely at the point where dangerousness is separated from demonstrable and culpable fault. One of the dangers of orienting our thought around beliefs in major principles of evil is that our ability to analyse true sources of danger may be compromised. There is as yet, to my knowledge, no convincing evidence that American neoliberalism is a decisive contributor to the monstrous inflation and exacerbation of the American penal system in recent decades. To date, it does not seem evident that Bernard Harcourt, has provided such cogent evidence, either in this discussion (with Foucault's purported assistance) or elsewhere (without it).

In his last book, he argues for an intrinsic connection between *laissez-faire* economics and penal severity on the grounds that such a linkage exists in the thought of the 18th-century Physiocrats: in a Tertullian-like way, this argument appears to introduce a notion of inherited original sin into the genealogy of governmentality, and perhaps the negative political theology of neoliberalism as it is routinely practised on the Left will be receptive to such a doctrinal innovation; but the evidence of Becker's views provided by Foucault in 1979 and (to his credit) by Harcourt in 2011 still seems to offer little empirical support to such a conclusion. And of course if one wanted to evaluate the “prescience” of Foucault's 1979 lectures, then one would have to say that they entirely fail to predict or account for the subsequent trend in American prison populations: to the extent that any purchase on reality might have been attributed to Becker's theories of crime and penal policy, Foucault's analysis would rather have inspired some expectation of an opposite trend. Other scholars (for example David Garland, James Q Whitman and Jonathan Simon) have proposed alternative analyses of American penal developments (both of which draw on partial assistance from Foucault's work) which, although perhaps not conclusive, seem worthy of consideration. In a recent survey of the question, Pat O'Malley contends that “neo-liberal penology is much more open and unstable than is often imagined, capable of being

15 Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, Second Edition with an Afterword by and an Interview with Michel Foucault*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983, pp. 231-232.

merged in very different ways - and with highly diverse policy effects - by politics ranging from neo-conservative to social democratic ."¹⁶

Writing and reading

There is a final comment to make here about ways of utilising Foucault. Of course, the very idea about obeying or dictating rules on how to use another thinker's work is generally agreed to be incompatible with any faithful understanding of Foucault's thought. (One does not have to be Jacques Derrida to spot the paradox in this ethic of obedient infidelity and authorised insubmission.) My particular point is about the authorial and authoritative status of Foucault's published lectures. Beyond the challenges of imperfect and incomplete cassette tapes and the minor aesthetic and deontological issues of editing the slips and tics of oral delivery (issues which seem to be to have been excellently managed by the Foucault editions and translations to date), it is possible to argue that the experimental, exploratory or provisional status of Foucault's public lectures either limits their value as reliable sources, or licences an exceptional degree of freedom in their utilisation. Bernard Harcourt says in this discussion:

By way of background, I think it's important to say that, obviously, Foucault never turned these lectures into a written text and that's very important. Daniel Defert, Foucault's partner, is fond of recounting how Foucault wrote his books. And he wrote them, according to Daniel, three times. The first manuscript he would throw out and say that he'd written everything he did *not* want to say. The second, he would have typed up and he would use as the basis for the third manuscript, which was the book. So as a historical matter, it's possible that these lectures represent the first draft: What he did not feel that he needed to say or necessarily wanted to say. So that should put us, I think, in a bit of a cautious interpretive position to begin with. (7-8)

I have heard Daniel Defert speak on two occasions about Foucault's writing methods – both times in London, at LSE in 2004 and Birkbeck in 2011. In a recent interview he returns to this question. One point which Defert emphasised on all of these occasions was that Foucault's method of writing his books was different from that of his lectures. A similar observation is made by

16 Pat O'Malley, Neoliberalism and Risk in Criminology. In T. Anthony & C. Cunneen, eds., *The Critical Criminology Companion*, Sydney: Federation Press, 2008, pp. 55-67;; *Sydney Law School Research Paper No. 09/83*. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1472862>

the general editors of the editions of Foucault's lectures, François Ewald and Alessandro Fontana in their foreword which is included in each volume. "Foucault approached his teaching as a researcher: explorations for a future book as well as the opening up of fields of problematization were formulated as an invitation to possible future researchers. This is why the courses at the Collège de France do not duplicate the published books. They are not sketches for the books even though both books and courses share certain themes. They have their own status."

My recollection is that in his 2004 talk, Daniel Defert described Foucault's first draft of his books as the formulation of a problem; the second, as a developed research hypothesis; the third, the result of testing the hypothesis against further evidence. In the recent interview, he describes things a little differently:

In general, there were three versions: some sort of immediate version, what he thought about the subject and which constituted what precisely was no longer to be thought. If you thought that a subject did not necessitate any research then you should get rid of it. It so happens that we never talked about the genesis of his books, but he had written to me in one of his letters: "it is almost finished, it no longer has anything to do with what I thought. The imperative "think different" is a true form of asceticism, and a permanent method. First there was the version of what was not to be said, thought out a bit spontaneously. Then a period of at least three years was devoted to research and once the research was done it was time for the rewriting. In the intervening period there were surely some plans, but they have been destroyed. Foucault then gave the second manuscript to the editor to have it typed out, and rewrote, on the writing machine, the third version which is to be seen more as a literary cleaning.¹⁷

On the relation and difference between the books and the lectures, Daniel Defert's comments contain some significant nuances. He sees the lecture courses as having a compositional unity, like books (which is one reason for the progressive trend in their editing to avoid over-faithful reproduction of the accidental hesitations of oral delivery) – but they are largely composed in a single, rapid draft, unlike the procedure Defert described for the books:

In the beginning we tended to have scruples: the stammers, the uh... and the laughs in the room were transcribed, and then, little by little, we slowly rubbed these out and favored the respect of what is a book. All the more, Foucault conceived most of his lectures as books. There is a progression, a

17 Daniel Defert, "I Believe In Time...", Daniel Defert Legatee of Michel Foucault's Manuscripts. Interview with Guillaume Bellon, *Revue Recto/Verso* N°6 – Septembre 2010. Available at <http://www.revuerectoverso.com/spip.php?article186>

dramacity and a conceptual plot that make them look like books. [...] With Foucault, each session is a chapter and the whole year constitutes a book. Even if I am not positive I think that most of the time his lectures were written in one go. [...] At times it is written over the weeks and at the same time it is surprisingly mastered. He almost wrote one volume every year, on top of his books which would take him five years and that were written very differently.¹⁸

One notices that one thing Defert does not say here is that the lectures are sketches or drafts of books – either first drafts, second drafts or third drafts. None of the currently available Collège de France lecture courses (at present 10 out of 13), nor for that matter the longer lecture series that Foucault delivered elsewhere at Berkeley, Brazil or Louvain has a straightforward preparatory relation to a subsequently published book, or is said by Foucault to be have such an intended purpose. One exception looks like being the 1982 course, *Subjectivity and Truth*, where the course summary says precisely that it is brief because there will be a forthcoming publication; most of us have yet to find out whether these lectures look like a draft for the two volumes published two years later, plus or minus the third which was meant to quickly follow them. Two of Defert's longest-serving co-editors, Michel Senellart and Frederic Gros, both identify major stylistic differences between the books and the lectures.¹⁹

We can in any event observe that, while Foucault sometimes formulates his lectures in avowedly tentative and exploratory terms, and while there are interludes or digressions in a lighter, recreational mood, the tone is generally a considered one and, while there are methodological or thematic shifts, it is less common for a specific idea or hypothesis to be subsequently rescinded. There is no good reason to suppose that anything Foucault said in the 1979 (or any other) lectures was something that he 'did not want to say', or was indeed saying anything other or less than what he did want to say. Foucault was given to considerable prudence and caution in qualifying his remarks in these lectures, and, where possible, seeing to anticipate and avert misunderstanding. I would entirely agree with Bernard Harcourt that we need to keep to a "cautious interpretative position" if that means caution about reading more into Foucault's words than they say. That is not to say, as Ewald and Fontana also remark, that there are not some contemporary lessons and implications which Foucault intentionally leaves the listener the freedom to draw, if they

18 Ibid

19 See their contributions to L'Herne 95, *Michel Foucault* (2011).

choose, from his lectures, “taking a diagonal bearing on the present through history”. But in the 1979 lectures, Foucault is speaking directly about the present. On the question of neoliberal theories of human capital and *homo economicus*, Foucault gives himself several pages in the successive lectures to develop what he finds original, interesting and on occasion concerning in them. (Becker remarks in this discussion: “At one point he says, 'Becker has a very interesting theory of consumption. I don't have time to go into that here.' I think it is a pretty interesting theory. [Laughter]. But it is interesting that he read some of that and made that comment.”(11) But in fact, directly after the quoted remark in his lecture, Foucault does actually take the time to concisely state the key ideas of Becker's theory of consumption, and why he finds it innovative and interesting). Having chosen to talk about neoliberalism, it is reasonable to think that Foucault was able to say, and did say, the things he wanted to say about it. That is all the more reason to be clear that nowhere in these lectures does Foucault appear to say anything indicating that, in Bernard Harcourt 's words,

once *we all* have bought into the notion of human capital, once it is part of our collective imagination, it then produces these policies of growth that involve investing in some populations and not in others. There are populations that are not worth investing in. (9)

Whether or not he should have said this, Foucault simply does not say this, or mention the question of which “populations”, according to neoliberal thinking, might or might not merit investment in their human capital. Harcourt writes:

it's in the final two pages of lecture nine, on pages 232 and 233, that Foucault gives his sharpest critique of the idea of human capital: It is the idea that the notion of investing in human capital creates distinctions and discriminations as to which parts of the population you invest in, and which parts of the population you don't invest in. (9)

Foucault does not in fact say this, on these pages or elsewhere. The point actually attributed by Foucault to neoliberals – one to which, it is worth emphasising, Foucault seems willing to accord genuine analytic merit - is that global locations and times of strong economic growth are associated with strong preceding investments in human capital: this is the meaning of the sentence Bernard Harcourt goes on to quote:

Only a fine analysis of the composition of the human capital, of the way this human capital has been augmented, of the sectors in which it has been augmented, and of the elements which have been introduced as investment

in this human capital, can account for the real growth of these countries.
(232)

The claim being discussed here is that there is an association between economic growth and investment in human capital - not the claim that only some human capital is worth investing in. There may well be, in the neoliberal economic literature, discussions of which locations or forms of investment in human capital are more or less effective in generating economic growth – but Foucault does not discuss or mention any here; nor, for that matter, does Bernard Harcourt. Harcourt's hypothesis of a neoliberal economic rationale for the mass incarceration of the black urban underclass in the USA seems still to be in want of a satisfactory evidential basis, or at least of a basis in these lectures.

Harcourt writes, at the point where he setting out his own elaboration of what Foucault does say: “now again, the book was never written”. This could be taken mean either or both of two reasonable things: firstly, Foucault might have gone beyond the remarks in these lectures if he had developed them in a subsequent book, and if he had done so he might then have said what Harcourt argues here; secondly, we may never know whether Foucault would have been minded to do so. Subject to correction, I am aware of no evidence that Foucault planned a book about neoliberalism.

If *we* want to think our own thoughts which go beyond the remarks in these lectures, we are – of course - free to do so. It would the most perverse of homages to Foucault's work to deny either its limits or its unfinished status, or to deny to ourselves or others the aspiration to continue his project. We are at liberty to imagine, and indeed (given the talent) write the books we would like Foucault to have written, or which he should or would have written. But it is perhaps better that we take our own responsibility for any new items we bring to the party.