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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Wickham, G., & Kendall, G. (2008). Critical discourse analysis, description, explanation, causes: Foucault's inspiration versus Weber's perspiration. *Historical Social Research*, 33(1), 142-161. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.33.2008.1.142-161>

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# Critical Discourse Analysis, Description, Explanation, Causes: Foucault's Inspiration Versus Weber's Perspiration

Gary Wickham & Gavin Kendall\*

**Abstract:** »Kritische Diskursanalyse, Beschreibung, Erklärung, Gründe: Foucault's Inspiration versus Weber's Perspiration«. The FOUCAULTian governmentality approach, in relying on a teleology—the ultimate purpose of human endeavour is the quest for ever-growing human reason, a reason that is the universal basis of moral judgements, especially moral judgements about political and legal actions—leads not to description, explanation and the possible identification of causes, but to critique, to the inappropriate conflation of, on the one hand, description, explanation and the identification of causes with, on the other, political criticisms sourced in the teleology. Drawing on some of WEBER's methodological insights, an argument is developed that critical discourse analysis, in taking on the FOUCAULTian approach, gives up the best traditions of description, explanation and the identification of causes in favour of the expression, in many different forms, of the teleology.

**Keywords:** FOUCAULT, governmentality, critique, critical discourse analysis, description, explanation.

## 1. Introduction

A good deal of qualitative research within critical discourse analysis (for example: ANDERSON, 2001; HOOK, 2005; FAIRCLOUGH, 2000; LUKE, 1995-96; TEO, 2000) draws inspiration, whether directly or indirectly, from FOUCAULT's genealogical work on governmentality (see esp.: FOUCAULT 1978b, 1980, 1988). Of course this body of critical discourse analysis is not alone in using FOUCAULT in this way. Many other bodies of research, from a number of other fields, particularly sociology, political studies and socio-legal studies, have equally been inspired by FOUCAULT's governmentality approach (for example: BARRY, OSBORNE & ROSE, 1996; BURCHELL,

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Print Version of: Wickham, Gary & Kendall, Gavin (2007). Critical Discourse Analysis, Description, Explanation, Causes: Foucault's Inspiration Versus Weber's Perspiration [30 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 8(2), Art. 4, URL: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/2-07/07-2-4-e.htm>.

GORDON & MILLER, 1991; DEAN, 1999; DEAN & HINDESS, 1998; DONZELOT, 1988; EWALD, 1987; GARLAND, 1996; GOODIE & WICKHAM, 2002; HUDSON, 1998; HUNT, 1992; HUNT & WICKHAM, 1994; KENDALL & WICKHAM, 1999; KOSHAR, 1993; MILLER & ROSE, 1990; O'MALLEY, 1998-1999; 1999a; 1999b; 2000; PAVLICH, 1996; PEARCE & TOMBS, 1998; ROSE, 1996; ROSE, 1999; ROSE & MILLER, 1992; ROSE & VALVERDE, 1998; WICKHAM, 1990, 2000; WICKHAM & PAVLICH, 2001).

The approach can be said to deliver a number of advantages to critical discourse analysis, allowing it to explain its objects in terms of a much more sophisticated account of power than those based on older, cruder understandings, especially MARXist understandings. In this way, the use of the FOUCAULTian approach gives critical discourse analysts access to explanations in terms of: an account of the historical transition from sovereignty in the pre-modern world to liberalism in the modern world; an account of power as an omnipresent feature of society; and an account of the government of people and things in terms of a NIETZSCHEan will to power that is seen to have been built into social and political arrangements in the West for the last few hundred years.

Be that as it may, we are not concerned here with the approach's admirable qualities. Instead, on the back of an argument that the use of the FOUCAULTian approach speaks mainly to the "critical" in critical discourse analysis, we pose two methodological criticisms, related to what we take to be the two primary tasks of discourse analysis—to describe and explain examples of discourse at work, perhaps to the point of proposing causal links between them. Our criticisms, taken together, add up to the following proposition: the FOUCAULTian approach is a pointless burden on discourse analysis, one which forces description in a pre-ordained direction—the effect of a teleology—thereby rendering the only explanations that can be built from them almost meaningless, inasmuch as they can be nothing other than expressions of the metaphysical presuppositions at the heart of the teleology.

In the first section we fill out our argument about the "critical" focus of the FOUCAULTian approach, sketching the approach as an example of "critique" and in the process highlighting its reliance on the teleology. In the second section we set out the two methodological criticisms of critical discourse analysis in more detail, dealing with the five examples listed above (the five are: ANDERSON, 2001; HOOK, 2005; FAIRCLOUGH, 2000; LUKE, 1995-96; TEO, 2000), by way of establishing our proposition about the pointlessness of the critical components. In doing this, we are thereby suggesting that discourse analysis per se is a superior form of analysis to critical discourse analysis. In the third section, inspired by Stephen TURNER's reading of WEBER in his book *The Search for a Methodology of Social Science* (TURNER, 1986), we sketch the WEBERian arguments behind our methodological criticisms. In the

conclusion we directly apply the points from this sketch to critical discourse analysis, in the form of WEBERian suggestions.

## 2. Governmentality, Teleology, Critique

There is a trajectory in FOUCAULT's work from the analysis of discourse or forms of knowledge, especially human science knowledge (FOUCAULT, 1970, 1972), to the analysis of the workings of power in modern and premodern western societies (FOUCAULT, 1971; 1973; 1977, 1978a), shifting later to an emphasis on the government of self and others (FOUCAULT, 1986a, 1986b). In the middle stages of this trajectory, when the genealogical approach to governmentality reached its peak, FOUCAULT locked himself into a metaphysical worldview that featured the omnipresence of power—a worldview owing much to NIETZSCHE. In this body of work, FOUCAULT understands power as radically decoupled from human actors—power, rather, moves between the poles of knowledge—and, no doubt reflecting on the lessons learned from Georges CANGUILHEM (e.g. 1994)—veers towards what one might almost call a form of vitalism, but there is nonetheless ever-present here an attachment to critique. We need to say a few things about the nature of critique before returning to FOUCAULT's particular attachment to it.

By “critique” we mean the tradition of intense criticism against those mechanisms of the state and the law developed in early modern Europe in a bid to limit the worst excesses of religious violence, especially the violence of the Thirty Years War in Germany (1618-1648), which has been estimated to have cost the lives of over half the German population (STERN-RUBARTH, 1946, pp.74-8). These limitist mechanisms are often associated only with the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, which formally ended the Thirty Years War. We think it more important that these mechanisms be seen to have developed over several hundred years, from the second half of the sixteenth century, at the early outbreak of Reformation religious violence in France and in the Netherlands, through to the middle of the eighteenth century, when techniques of secular government were becoming more adept at promoting and maintaining civil peace. Behind the limitist mechanisms lay the “civil philosophy” of thinkers like Thomas HOBBS, Samuel PUFENDORF, and Christian THOMASIUS. Both the mechanisms themselves and their effects can be captured by expressions such as “the separation of church and state” and “the state under the rule of law”, though we recommend consideration also be given to their detailed emergence in different places at different times: to, for example, the intricacies of the advocacy of absolutism as a system of limited government in both England and France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; to the slow growth of a public legal conscience, in direct opposition to a private religious conscience, in England from the fifteenth through to the seventeenth century; to the development of distinctive forms of public law in Germany in the late-

seventeenth and early-eighteenth century, in a bid to make the separation of church and state work, such that the state would be concerned with the government of this-worldly matters while the church would be concerned only with spiritual matters; to the promotion of neo-Stoic and neo-EPICUREan disciplined forms of personal conduct, such as *constantia* and *decorum*, in the Netherlands, Germany, and England, from the sixteenth through to the eighteenth centuries, in a bid to train soldiers in restraint and to train an emerging class of officials in the service of states in line with the instrumentalist goal of maintaining civil peace; and to the invention of various other techniques for checking and balancing the use of political power towards this instrumentalist end, particularly the parliamentary systems of Britain and the USA in the eighteenth century (some of these mechanisms have been discussed by one of us elsewhere: see WICKHAM, 2006, 2007; WICKHAM & FREMANTLE 2008; a sample of the specialist literature is: BARNARD, 1971; HOBBS, 1994; HOLMES, 1988; HUNTER, 1998, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b; KRIEGER, 1995; KRIEGER, 1969; OESTREICH, 1982; OSLER, 1991; POCOCK, 1987; PUFENDORF, 2003; SAUNDERS, 1997, 2002; SAUNDERS & HUNTER, 2003; SCHILLING, 1986; SKINNER, 1978; THOMAS, 2004; WEILER, 1994).

In many ways the source of the tradition of critique against the mechanisms of the state and the law goes back to PLATO's and ARISTOTLE's formulations concerning the need for humans to attempt to achieve perfection through reason and to the later Christianised versions of their thinking, especially those of AUGUSTINE in the first instance and later the scholastic versions of Thomas AQUINAS and his followers and the versions of the Protestant reformers later still. These various Christianised forms promoted the idea that while perfection cannot be achieved in this life, we should strive for it nonetheless, as part of our earthly duty, undertaken in the name of God and in the name of "the City of God"—the sphere of the next life, a sphere where perfection can be achieved (see esp.: COLAS, 1997; HUNTER, 2001b). HUNTER (2001b, *passim*) argues that when the above-described limitist mechanisms brought religious violence under control, their success, including as it did the separation of church and state, and featuring as it did the idea that government should aim not at perfection but only at the best possible outcome in each set of circumstances, meant the relegation of the metaphysics and theology of perfection to the churches and to the philosophy departments of the universities. But, Hunter's argument continues, the metaphysics of perfectionism and the associated teleology—the ultimate purpose of human endeavour is the quest for ever-growing human reason, a reason that is the universal basis of moral judgements, especially moral judgements about political and legal actions—was not to be denied. They were quickly revived, in a new form designed to suit the changed circumstances. Gottfried LEIBNIZ, Christian WOLFF, and, above all, Immanuel KANT developed an alternative to civil philosophy that was not

obviously a return to Christianised Platonism or Aristotelianism. Their alternative is now most often called modern metaphysical philosophy, though it is sometimes also called critical metaphysics. It is taken to be the main source of the German contribution to a project known as “the enlightenment”, though HUNTER (2001b, pp.33-92) insists that it was in fact a “rival enlightenment” to the “civil enlightenment” achieved by the civil philosophers and their followers. HUNTER (2001b, pp.265-73) points out that one of the products of the rise and rise of modern metaphysical philosophy and its teleology of reason was the invention of a new form of political perfectionism, one perhaps most vehemently expressed by WOLFF, whereby all the actions of modern law and modern governments must be subjected to constant and unrelenting criticism for the failure to reach the highest available ideals of human reason. This is the basis of critique.

For many modern western disciplines concerned with the “critical” study of modern society and politics, critique is now the dominant way of being an intellectual, a mode of being for which “the politically unattainable best” is, “for the most part, a stick with which to beat the attainable good” (TURNER, 1995, p.397). Each of KOSELLECK (1988) and SAUNDERS (1997) provide useful insights into the growth of critique from the eighteenth through to the twentieth centuries.

KOSELLECK draws attention to a very particular dispossessed stratum of intellectuals in eighteenth-and nineteenth-century France, dispossessed not of its property nor its wealth but of its sense of political importance—“socially accepted but politically powerless ... without a proper place but of the utmost intellectual importance, like the philosophers” (KOSELLECK, 1988, p.65). The members of this stratum felt their expertise was not being fully appreciated. The officials of the French absolutist state, busy dealing with religious violence, were not prepared to allow these groups access to the key mechanisms of control—“legislation, the police, the military ... the field of foreign policy, with its decisions of war and peace”. This was all too much for those so keenly feeling this sense of dispossession: “These men, who determined their country’s cultural physiognomy ... were not allowed to decide its fate, for it was intrinsic to ... the Absolutist order ... that there was nothing at all for them to decide—all were subjects” (KOSELLECK, 1988, p.66).

They turned their hands to developing critique:

Eliminated from politics as a whole, the members ... would meet in wholly ‘non-political’ localities: at the exchanges, in coffee-houses or at the academies, where the new sciences were studied without succumbing to the ... authority of a Sorbonne; or in the clubs, where one could not pronounce judgement but where one could discuss the judiciary; in the salons, in which *l’esprit* could rule without commitment ... or in the library or literary societies (KOSELLECK, 1988, p.66).

Critique of modern society and politics—social critique—is in fact moral critique by another name, critique of the supposed moral failings of the state and the law. Practitioners of this form of critique, SAUNDERS argues, have successfully de-historicised their very own persona—the critic. They see themselves, and are widely seen, as the true representatives of universal and timeless “humanity”. They certainly do not see themselves as figures “unable to find a place” in the operations of the state, those who thrive in “safe and elegant settings”, cultivating “that habit of mind that criticises the State that supports it”, unable to face the fact that without the state and the law they so deplore they would have “no secure platform from which to project their vision of a new society and to preach their faith in redemptive moral politics” (SAUNDERS, 1997, p.9, quoting KOSELLECK). The critics have succeeded, SAUNDERS (1997, pp.9-11) goes on, in fixing in place “the image of a moral society beyond the reach of the State”, a society grounded “in inalienable rights and fundamental freedoms. Stripped of its historical role as the grantor and protector of religious freedom, the State was recast as the great threat to freedom”. The practitioners of critique urge us always to look towards “a future society” where morality can once again “govern and where men, escaping the confines of coercive legal citizenry, would at last be freely themselves”. They “promote the individual moral conscience ... as the ultimate site of an uncompromising universal adjudication”. They want, or say they want, “their version of a moral society ... [to] supersede the administrative State”, and they keep up “a constant moral dissatisfaction with existing institutions”.

FOUCAULT, or at least the FOUCAULT of the genealogical approach to governmentality, is, unfortunately, among their number. In this body of work, FOUCAULT is not concerned to retrieve the contextual details of the many twists and turns by which modern western government was contingently developing; he is not a historian of political thought in the mould of a POCOCK or a SKINNER (see esp. POCOCK, 1987; SKINNER, 1978). Instead, HUNTER argues, his project is to reconstruct “the relation between ‘reason’ and ‘power’ in the light of a series of observations regarding absolutist and liberal forms or rationalities of government”. HUNTER (1998, p.250) argues that the “philosophical aspect of the governmentality schema”, offering “an improvisation on a post-Kantian distinction”, is “responsible for the historical shortcomings of the account”, while SAUNDERS (1997, p.103) says, “Foucault’s account is perhaps more a theoretical position than a historical description”. In other words, FOUCAULT is not an historian in this body of work but a modern critical metaphysician.

SAUNDERS goes on to argue that when FOUCAULT proposes “a quite new political order, the ‘disciplinary society’ or ‘archipelago’, emerging in the eighteenth century”, he is issuing “an invitation for critical theorising to continue, uninterrupted”: “a brilliant dialectical projection in which exemplary oppositions—constraint and freedom, directive State and self-directing popula-

tion, government and self-government—endlessly play off one another in the usual manner of critique” (SAUNDERS, 1997, pp.104-5). SAUNDERS thinks FOUCAULT’s “exquisite formulae inciting us to ‘think otherwise’ and to ‘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’” should not blind us to his work as a practitioner of “critique”:

Foucault misses what his sometime critic Pierre Hadot ... sees: in times of worldly chaos nothing might be more ‘other’ than the ethos of those engaged in producing order ... [S]ocial stability as cultural achievement is a difficult theme for critical intellectuals. The abandon with which ‘difference’ and ‘transgression’ are now discerned in Foucault’s work for consumption as cathartic intellectual stimulants is a measure of how critics can become mindless of the ordered civic existence that makes their form of life possible (SAUNDERS, 1997, p.105).

It will be clear to anyone who knows FOUCAULT’s works that the position we are attributing to him on critique—that is, in saying that he is a practitioner of a very particular type of critique—is not at all the same as the position on critique that he himself took. Where we are describing him, with the help of HUNTER and SAUNDERS, in neo-KANTian terms—FOUCAULT’s “schema [in his governmentality work] seems to have much in common with post-KANTian philosophical history in that it portrays an inappropriately objectifying reason being replaced by one less inclined to impose its cognitive will on the immanent order of things” (HUNTER, 1998, p.246)—he understood himself to be engaged in a different project entirely, one he sometimes characterised as a “critical ontology of the self” (see esp. FOUCAULT, 1994, 1997a, 1997b). As PAVLICH notes, in an extremely useful essay on the topic (PAVLICH, 1998, pp.143-4), this was a project in which FOUCAULT, far from thinking of himself a neo-KANTian, took himself to be critically investigating the ways KANT practised critique as both “relentlessly questioning” and “transformative” (see, for example, FOUCAULT, 1994, pp.147-8). In this sense, FOUCAULT’s “critical investigation” of “critique” is another form of critique. He does not hide from this fact, but embraces it:

[Critique] is not longer going to be practised in the search for formal structures with universal value, but rather as a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves of what we are doing, thinking, saying (FOUCAULT, 1997b, p.125, as quoted in PAVLICH, 1998, p.150).

Critique will be the art of voluntary insubordination, that of reflected intractability. Critique would essentially insure the desubjugation of the subject in the context of what we would call, in a word, the politics of truth (FOUCAULT, 1997b, p.132, as quoted in PAVLICH, 1998, p.151).

[What is needed is] an attitude, an ethos, a philosophic life in which the critique of what 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 these (FOUCAULT, 1997b, p.132, as quoted in PAVLICH, 1998, p.152).

We have not the space in this piece to fully explore everything FOUCAULT has to say about critique in this particular phase of his writing. That is not our project here. We have said enough, we suggest, on the basis of our more general argument against critique, to have at least established a beach-head against the direction of most of FOUCAULT's direct arguments on the matter.

### 3. Discourse Analysis, Description, Explanation and the Urge to Critique

WODAK (2004) gives a concise account of the historical development of critical discourse analysis. In short, it emerged from other forms of discourse analysis and conversation analysis, the critical edge being supplied by its commitment to the demystification of dominant ideologies in the service of various forms of emancipation. FOUCAULT was co-opted to this programme because his emphasis on power supposedly gave a moral edge to what might otherwise be seen as a rather mechanical linguistic analysis. We want to add to WODAK's useful account that when discourse analysis took this turn it also took on the main teleology associated with critique: the ultimate purpose of human endeavour is the quest for ever-growing human reason, a reason that is the universal basis of moral judgements, especially moral judgements about political and legal actions.

In the eyes of the proponents of the move, the eyes of those keen to turn discourse analysis into critical discourse analysis, FOUCAULT's critical edge is crucial. It is a key to the city of a different way of thinking. It can even be added to, or replaced entirely, by other favoured theorists of ideology, especially PÊCHEUX, HABERMAS and BOURDIEU. But whether it is added to or not, even if it is replaced, FOUCAULT has a special place in critical discourse analysis. His genealogical approach to governmentality is treasured because it brings to discourse analysis an element of "unmasking". As WODAK (2004, p.198) points out, FOUCAULT's extended notion of discourse allows analysts of discourse to include the organisation of knowledge and worldviews on their list of appropriate objects for investigation; that is, it allows them to go "beyond" the oral performances and written documents of conversation analysis or textual analysis. As such, and more importantly for them, it allows them to describe any discourse or fragment of a discourse in a way that reveals it to be an example of the operation of the teleology, in a way, this is to say, that allows the discourse or fragment of discourse to be criticised for its failings.

Critical discourse analysis, then, as its name suggests, is a marriage of discourse analysis and critique—with all the restrictions of critique we have already discussed. Of our five examples, this is most clear in HOOK's case—not just clear, but dancing in the spotlight (as we have discussed elsewhere: WICKHAM & KENDALL, 2005):

[G]enealogy is first and foremost a mode of critique and only subsequently a ... project of knowledge-production (HOOK, 2005, p.4). [T]his paper is ... a discussion on qualitative research as mode of critique ... enabling the project of local critique (HOOK, 2005, p.4).

[W]e do not grasp adequately genealogy without appreciating the strategic critical imperative—the agenda of making critique—that drives it (HOOK, 2005, p.8).

There you have it: HOOK is forcing description and explanation into the back seat and letting critique take the wheel. To those who would have critique in the back seat, or even out of the car altogether, HOOK wants to say, “You are dupes of the ‘centralizing power-effects of institutional knowledge and scientific discourse’, you are standing in the way of Foucault’s approach that will actually rescue us from this monster”:

[G]enealogies [are] ‘anti-sciences’ which do not necessarily work against the methods or concepts of a science, but whose overall function is to oppose the centralizing power-effects of institutional knowledge and scientific discourse (HOOK, 2005, p.6, quoting FOUCAULT).

If we follow FOUCAULT’s assertion that knowledge is inseparably bound with the practice and maintenance of institutional power in modern societies, then we understand that genealogies aim to fight the power-effects of any discourse that attain the status of ‘science’ (HOOK, 2005, p.6, quoting FOUCAULT).

In other words, those who dare to think description and explanation are sufficient goals for discourse analysis, difficult to achieve and worthy to pursue, are to be considered the enemy, those to be “struggled” against:

[T]he work of genealogy is to play de-legitimized knowledges against the power-effects of established social scientificity, to render such knowledges ‘capable of opposition and struggle’, to ‘employ historical knowledge tactically’ (HOOK, 2005, p.7, quoting FOUCAULT).

It is more of a question of increasing the combative power of potentially subversive forms of knowledge than of simply attempting to amplify their ‘truth-value’; more a tactics of sabotage and disruption than a straightforward head-to-head measuring up of ‘supposed truth’ with a ‘truer’ counter-example (HOOK, 2005, p.7, quoting FOUCAULT).

The overtly political role of genealogy here comes to the fore, its analysis proceeds not along the lines of establishing ‘the anticipatory power of meaning’, but rather so as to unearth ‘various systems of subjection ... the hazardous play of dominations’ (HOOK, 2005, p.19, quoting FOUCAULT).

This seems to us to be the worst of both worlds. If discourse analysis is to go this far with the FOUCAULTian approach, if it is to fully convert itself from discourse analysis into critical discourse analysis, this is to say, it will not only lose touch with the long-standing tradition of research that seeks better descriptions and explanations, possibly even to establish causes, a tradition we discuss in more detail shortly, it will also lose touch with the benefits of the genealogi-

cal aspects of the FOUCAULTian approach itself. These benefits, touched on earlier by SAUNDERS, concern the capacity to see objects in ways in which they have not been seen before, or not been seen for quite some time, to stop assumptions in their tracks. It is a capacity FOUCAULT shares with Bruno LATOUR (see, for example, LATOUR, 1993, 1999) and it is a capacity HOOK captures well, making it even more difficult to understand why he goes so far with FOUCAULT:

Foucault poses an unconventional means for how we should mobilize these knowledges: by applying scholarly methods to them; the scholarly treatment, in other words, of that which has long since been ejected from the field of the scholarly (HOOK, 2005, p.6).

The procedures of genealogy hope to produce counter-intuitive ways of seeing, to enforce an awareness that things have not always been as they are (HOOK, 2005, p.7).

The category of the event might be taken as a way of protecting against the making of unwarranted generalizations in one's analysis (HOOK, 2005, p.11).

In the light of this discussion of the HOOK example, the reader will, we trust, understand why we approach the other four examples with some trepidation, why we want to ask them what they think they are doing extending their careful description and explanation into political criticisms, thereby, in our view, sacrificing their achievements on the altar of critique. We show in the next section, in discussing WEBER's approach, that we are not in any way opposed to the task of political criticism, we simply think it should not be conflated with the tasks of description and explanation. Political criticism is vital for any political system—such as those which flourish in the West, those with some form of rule by law and some form of parliamentary system—which has managed to create room for politics by argument, that is, those which have chased politics by killing from domestic political life. Projects of description and explanation are vital too. If they are conflated it is to the advantage of neither: both are weakened.

So, when we find FAIRCLOUGH (2000), one critical discourse analyst who does not use FOUCAULT directly, pushing his careful descriptions of some aspects of the discourse of “New Labour” in Britain in order to have it supposedly “reveal” the ways in which New Labour enables the exploitative practices of “New Capitalism”, such as downsizing and restructuring, we would prefer that he did the one thing—describing—in one place and the other thing—political commentary—somewhere else. Similarly, when we find ANDERSON (2001)—a discourse analyst who marries FOUCAULT to FAIRCLOUGH—making use of FOUCAULT to critique national education standards, we have the same preference. This is our feeling too when we find LUKE, another discourse analyst directly inspired by FOUCAULT, producing an account of social inequality between children and others as “moments for making explicit a political and social order in which caregivers and children construct ideologi-

cal versions of the world” (LUKE 1995-6, p.23) and when we find TEO, also FOUCAULT-influenced, producing an account of discourses about race that explicitly aims “to make transparent the processes that enter into the construction of social inequality and injustice” (TEO, 2000, p.44).

#### 4. The WEBERian Background to Our Methodological Criticisms

It may seem odd to begin a discussion of the WEBERian approach to the tasks of description and explanation with a point from the English political historian/philosopher Michael OAKESHOTT, but that is what we are going to do, for OAKESHOTT is extremely astute in thinking about the need to avoid teleology, the need at the heart of our turn to WEBER. OAKESHOTT suggests the concept of tradition as the best means of avoiding teleology. A tradition, in his hands, is that which we have received, that which shapes our thinking and may have causal effects—that is, may be the source of subsequent events, in the manner of one thing leading to another in a directly attributable way—but is definitely not the source of a teleology, whereby things lead to things not in a directly attributable way but only in a vague, general, force-beyond-us way. Crucially, a tradition is not something within us, not part of our natural reasoning capacities, not part of our natural morality. Indeed, a tradition has no necessary direction. OAKESHOTT’S (1993) essay “The History of Political Thought” provides an excellent example. Among its many useful points is the following point about the temporary nature of any causal links proposed:

At certain points conclusions may emerge which will be convincing insofar as there are no gaps or arbitrary jumps in the construction: their warrant lies, not in any self-evident truth, but in the continuity of the process which generated them ... This manner of understanding events may leave many questions unanswered; it may only result in making things a little less mysterious than they were (OAKESHOTT, 1993, p.4).

What better slogan could we have for the WEBERian approach to the crucial tasks of description and explanation? When OAKESHOTT (1993, p.4) says the stress in the history of political thought should be on the context, on retrieving the context of each piece of thinking, each utterance, in as much detail as possible, on seeking out “the ingredients of a disposition to think in a certain manner”, we can take it as our cue to draw from WEBER some methodological propositions that can be taken to be rules for fields such as discourse analysis, rules to help them avoid teleology, to help them avoid conflating their key tasks of description and explanation with the political goals of their individual practitioners. As we said in the introduction, we go about this task with the assistance of Stephen TURNER’S reading of WEBER.

TURNER stresses that nearly all WEBER’S main methodological insights were delivered either as asides, in the introductions or conclusions to substan-

tial investigations, or in direct responses to others' attempts to lay down methodological strictures, most of which WEBER found seriously wanting (TURNER, 1986, pp.163-218). In line with this, in summarising what TURNER has to say about WEBER's methodological points we are following him in ranging across the crucial concluding remarks in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (WEBER, 1958, pp.182-3), the later methodological remarks in the lecture notes published as the *General Economic History* (WEBER, 1961), and a few of the, often vituperative, responses to others' attempts to lay down methodological procedures, some of which were published in the collection *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (WEBER, 1949). We propose one summary point on what Weber was actually doing in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and then, on the basis of that, we propose nine summary points on description, explanation, the identification of causes and the relationship of these three activities to value positions, ultimately to politics. These nine points we then discuss, in our conclusion, in terms of critical discourse analysis and its relationship to discourse analysis per se.

The one summary point on WEBER's Protestant Ethic is that WEBER's investigations are concerned only with what has made the West unique; they are not universal or timeless, they are not teleological. They involve descriptions of actions, beliefs, and reasons, packaged into explanations, adding up to a tentative causal conclusion: that there is a causal connection between, on the one hand, the formation of certain aspects of personhood through the influence of Calvinism and, on the other, the development of certain early developments in modern capitalism. As TURNER (1986, p.210) puts it, "[t]he language of 'factors', 'produces', and so on suggests a causal rather than teleological interpretation of Weber's account of the origins of capitalism".

The nine summary points of methodology and politics are:

- 1) Describing is a detailed, painstaking business that should not be rushed ("real causality occurs at the level of full particularity" [TURNER, 1986, p.199]; ideal types are aids to this level of activity). The practical implication of this point is that description is a stage of research in which we gather together as much detail as possible about the object of our investigations, much in the manner recommended by Harvey SACKS and David SILVERMAN (see SILVERMAN, 1998, p.48).
- 2) From descriptions, and from packaging descriptions into explanations, candidates sometimes emerge as causes, though the evidence for this has to be strong enough to meet something like the probabilistic standard for a cause in law (TURNER argues that WEBER, as a trained lawyer, relies heavily on a probabilistic standard for causes very much like that employed in the law [see esp. TURNER, 1986, pp.163-79]). The practical implication of this point is twofold. First, it means that as the descriptive detail builds up in any investigation, researchers do not leave the details

sitting about in the form of long lists. Instead, the details are organised into different packages. The organisational logic of this step is often called explanation. In this sense, explanation is a tactical step by which researchers organise their details with the aim of having a particular effect on their readers or listeners (see SILVERMAN, 1993, pp.196-211). Of course, this leaves open the question of the logic by which the readers have decided to adopt one direction or another—the logic of their logic, if you will. We can only answer that it's explanations all the way down. The second practical implication follows from this. In a bid to reinforce the desired effects on readers or listeners of their details, packaged as their explanations, researchers will often make claims about the links between one set of details and another. They may be satisfied to claim only that there are links and to say no more than this. But more often than not, they go further, claiming that one link or other is so strong as to provide a warrant for the claim that one set of details is actually the *cause* of another. There is no single standard by which this move is made. In some cases researchers make causal claims on the basis of extremely limited evidence but a great deal of conviction, while in others a higher evidentiary bar must be jumped before a causal status is claimed (see also HACKING, 1975, pp.31-8). As we suggested above, following TURNER closely, WEBER, a trained lawyer, was reluctant to make this move unless and until the weight of details crossed a threshold of probability that would satisfy a rigorous legal procedure.

- 3) The candidates for cause should be able to explain the actions, beliefs, and reasons in terms intelligible at the individual level (“In historical explanation, this commitment to individual explanation implies that such *explanans* and *explananda* as the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism, rational law, rational accounting, the rational organization of labor, and so on must be treated in a particular way: they cannot be treated as ‘effective forces’; their causal and explanatory adequacy depends on the possibility of our ‘cashing them in’ for individual explanations” [TURNER, 1986, p.214]).
- 4) When a cause is offered it should never be taken to be a teleology; it has no relevance except as a cause for the particular object-being-explained; it cannot serve as a universal, timeless principle (hence, WEBER was not interested in posing “the process of rationalisation” as a teleology, or in posing anything else as a teleology: “explanation must be a work of tessellation, the composition of a pattern of actions. Ideal-types were a shorthand means of describing the patterns in this mosaic, but no more—not MILLian causes made up of institutional facts, and not the immanent universal historical forces of rationalization” [TURNER, 1986, p.216]).
- 5) No object proposed as a cause, no matter how widely it is accepted as such, is ever final; such objects themselves are, like all objects, always

available as both objects to be described and objects to serve in descriptions.

- 6) Values are present in all stages—the describing, explaining, and identifying causal status—but can and must be held to be separate for the purposes of the describing, explaining and identifying causal status (that is, the investigator can and should, albeit with training and with great effort, deliberately exclude his or her values from the describing, explaining, and identifying causal status).
- 7) The clash of values—politics—is unavoidable; it should be faced with honesty and determination, but it is never to be allowed to influence the describing, explaining, and identifying causal status.
- 8) The persona of the WEBERian investigator, then, is one of rigorous judgement, commitment to separate value choices from investigations, commitment to causalist thinking over teleology; and determination to separately support one's values.
- 9) This is an historically formed persona, not a natural one, it has to be achieved by training, it is not that of the philosopher or priest.

## 5. Conclusion

We have presented two key arguments. The first was that the FOUCAULTian governmentality approach, in relying on a teleology, leads not to description, explanation and possibly the identification of causes, but to critique. In turning to critique, the approach inappropriately conflates description, explanation and the identification of causes with political criticisms sourced in a teleology. We suggested that the teleology in question is: the ultimate purpose of human endeavour is the quest for ever-growing human reason, a reason that is the universal basis of moral judgements, especially moral judgements about political and legal actions. The second of our key arguments, posed in terms of some of WEBER's methodological insights and illustrated by examples from critical discourse analysis, was that critical discourse analysis, in taking on the FOUCAULTian approach, gives up the best traditions of description, explanation and the identification of causes in favour of the expression, in many different forms, of the aforementioned teleology.

It remains only for us to indicate what the nine WEBERian points of methodology and politics mean for discourse analysis, beyond the already-stated proposition that discourse analysis does not need a "critical" component. We do this as a comment on each point.

- 1) Describing is a detailed, painstaking business that should not be rushed.  
*Discourse analysis, at its best, not only knows this already, but is an example of the best practice of this type of description. At its best, discourse analysis seeks to gather detail in much the way we described immediately above.*

- 2) From descriptions, and from packaging descriptions into explanations, candidates sometimes emerge as a cause, though the evidence for this has to be strong enough to meet something like the probabilistic standard for a cause in law.

*Discourse analysis knows this too, though it does not put it like this as often as it might. In other words, discourse analysts are highly skilled in packaging details into explanations in a bid to have desired effects on their readers or listeners and they are highly skilled, and very careful, in claiming causal status for some sets of details in relation to others.*

- 3) The candidates for cause should be able to explain the actions, beliefs, and reasons in terms intelligible at the individual level.

*Discourse analysis knows this too, though again it does not put it like this as often as it might. In this sense, discourse analysts would do well to take a leaf out of WEBER's book and more carefully set out the standards by which they will accept some causal claims but not others.*

- 4) When a cause is offered it should never be taken to be a teleology; it has no relevance except as a cause for the particular object-being-explained; it cannot serve as a universal, timeless principle (hence, WEBER was not interested in posing "the process of rationalisation" as a teleology, or in posing anything else as a teleology).

*Discourse analysis needs to pay close attention to this point; it falls prey to teleology all too easily; in any case, its best work is done before the identification of causes is attempted.*

- 5) No object proposed as a cause, no matter how widely it is accepted as such, is ever final; such objects themselves are, like all objects, always available as both objects to be described and objects to serve in descriptions.

*Discourse analysis needs to remember this as it sets about choosing its objects for investigation; there is no need for discourse analysis ever to investigate the results of some previous teleological analysis; its objects are more readily available than that. Like everyone else, of course, discourse analysts must engage in the politics of research when they choose what they are to study. Our suggestion here is that they would do well to be more aware of this fact. It is both a constraint on their work as researchers and a key to more influence for its explanations.*

- 6) Values are present in all stages—the describing, explaining, and identifying causal status—but can and must be held to be separate for the purposes of the describing, explaining and identifying causal status (that is, the investigator can and should, albeit with training and with great effort, deliberately exclude his or her values from the describing, explaining, and identifying causal status).

*This point, alongside the previous point, needs to be stamped onto the passport of all who would practice discourse analysis; its importance cannot be exaggerated.*

- 7) The clash of values—politics—is unavoidable; it should be faced with honesty and determination, but it is never to be allowed in to the describing, explaining, and identifying causal status.

*See above, at 5 and 6.*

- 8) The persona of the WEBERian investigator—a persona that the discourse analyst should strive to assume—is one of rigorous judgement, commitment to separate value choices from investigations, commitment to causalist thinking over teleology; and to determination to separately support one's values.

*Again, at its best, discourse analysis knows this already; it should not so easily lose sight of it.*

- 9) This is an historically formed persona, not a natural one, it has to be achieved by training, it is not that of the philosopher or priest.

*This is another vital point for discourse analysis which is all too easily lost when its practitioners hear the siren song of teleology.*

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