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ANTI-FOUNDATIONALISM

Let us get one point out of the way at the beginning: anti-foundationalism is an epistemological doctrine not a critical approach to politics.[1] Anti-foundationalism is a doctrine in the philosophy of knowledge. In most versions it asserts that none of our knowledge is absolutely certain. In some versions it asserts more specifically and more controversially that we cannot provide knowledge with secure foundations in either pure experiences or pure reason. I will argue, moreover, that we would be wrong, especially if we are anti-foundationalists, to assume that epistemological doctrines ever lead directly to particular approaches to political science. Anti-foundationalism could be compatible with a wide range of political sciences – from rational choice to ethnography – and an equally wide range of ideologies – from conservatism to socialism.

There is something strange about an epistemological concept being used to define an approach to British politics. This sense of strangeness dissipates, however, if we allow that the connection between anti-foundationalism and critical approaches to politics is a historically contingent one. Hence, after briefly reviewing anti-foundational philosophy and its relation to political science, this chapter will provide a historical narrative of the contingent ways in which anti-foundationalism has been brought to the study of British politics from within critical, socialist traditions.

What is Anti-Foundationalism?

To begin, I want further to spell out the relationship of anti-foundationalism to political science. An anti-foundational epistemology has several implications for social

philosophy. I will begin by briefly mentioning some of the less contentious implications, although even these might be subject to some debate. Thereafter I will explain why anti-foundational philosophy is compatible with diverse approaches to political science, and, to end this section, I will consider the implications of my analysis of anti-foundationalism for its place in the study of British politics.

Anti-foundationalism and Philosophy

The term "anti-foundationalism" is of recent popularity. It is used to refer to any epistemology that rejects appeals to a basic ground or foundation of knowledge in either pure experience or pure reason. Anti-foundational epistemologies thus include many that pre-date the recent spread of the term itself. Examples of anti-foundationalism include not only postmodernists and poststructuralists but also many analytic philosophers who follow the pragmatists, W. V. O. Quine, or Ludwig Wittgenstein.[2] It has even been argued that the high positivists of the Vienna Circle were anti-foundationalists (Uebel 1996). So, contrary to what many political scientists appear to believe, anti-foundationalism is not an obscure, outlandish doctrine to be easily dismissed as a ridiculous rejection of the idea of an external world. Anti-foundationalism is a commonplace among philosophers, and it is surely time political scientists developed enough philosophical literacy to understand it and consider its implications.

The most obvious implications of anti-foundationalism are perhaps meaning holism and anti-representationalism.[3] Given that we cannot have pure experiences, our concepts and propositions cannot refer to the world in splendid isolation. Concepts cannot directly represent objects in the world since our experiences of those objects must

in part be ones that we construct using our prior theories. Hence anti-foundationalists conclude that concepts, meanings, and beliefs do not have a one to one correspondence with objects in the world, but rather form webs. Although anti-foundationalists have defended many different epistemologies, from pragmatism to radical scepticism, many of them conclude that we cannot justify isolated propositions; rather, any justification of a knowledge-claim must be one that applies to a web of beliefs or research programme. It is these kinds of epistemological ideas that inspire anti-foundational critiques of the positivism and naïve empiricism found in much political science.

Anti-foundationalism, with its meaning holism, has implications for social ontology. Meaning holism implies that our concepts are not simply given to us by the world as it is; rather, we build them in by drawing on our prior theories in an attempt to categorise, explain, and narrate our experiences. Hence anti-foundationalists typically uphold social constructivism: they argue that we make the beliefs and concepts on which we act and thus the social world in which we live. This social constructivism asserts not only that we make the social world through our actions but also that our actions reflect beliefs, concepts, languages, and discourses that themselves are social constructs. It is this constructivist ontology that inspires anti-foundational critiques of the reified and essentialist concepts found in much political science.

Meaning holism feeds into anti-foundational analyses of social explanation. It undermines reductionist attempts to explain actions by reference to allegedly objective social facts without reference to the relevant beliefs or meanings. The crucial argument here is that because people's beliefs form holistic webs, and because their experiences are laden with their prior beliefs, therefore we cannot assume that people in any given social

location will come to hold certain beliefs or assume certain interests. To the contrary, their beliefs, including their view of their interests, will depend on their prior theories. Hence anti-foundationalists conclude that social explanation consists not of reducing actions to social facts but of the interpretation of meanings in the context of webs of belief, discourses, or cultural practices.

Social constructivism also feeds into anti-foundational analyses of social explanation. It undercuts a scientism in which social explanation appears as a quest for ahistorical causal links. The crucial argument here is that because beliefs and concepts, and so actions and practices, are historically contingent social constructs, therefore we cannot adequately explain them in terms of a trans-historical correlation or mechanism. Human norms and practices are not natural or rational responses to given circumstances. Hence many anti-foundationalists conclude that social explanation contains an inherently historicist moment: even those concepts and practices that seem most natural to us need to be explained as products of a contingent history.

Anti-foundationalism and Political Science

Approaches to political science are peculiar entities. What political scientists identify as an approach is usually a jumble of philosophy, methods, and topics. So, for example, behaviouralism combined positivist philosophy with new statistical methods and the study of the political behaviour of individuals and groups. Yet the philosophy, methods, and topics do not entail one another. They do not logically have to go together. So, for example, several political scientists study group and network behaviour without using any statistical techniques, and even political scientists who use statistical

techniques to explore voting behaviour now often do so without adhering to a positivist philosophy.

To understand the implications of anti-foundationalism for political science, we should distinguish between philosophy, method, and topics. Anti-foundationalism supports a social philosophy characterised by holism, constructivism, interpretivism, and historicism. This social philosophy provides a stark contrast to the lukewarm positivism of much political science. It is clear, in that respect, that anti-foundationalism offers a major challenge to political scientists to clarify and defend the philosophical assumptions that inform their work. Yet, to challenge political scientists to rethink their philosophical assumptions is not necessarily to require them to reject their favoured methods or topics. Anti-foundationalism cautions political scientists how to reflect on the data they generate; it does not tell them that they must or must not use particular techniques to generate data on particular issues.

I am suggesting that an anti-foundational philosophy does not require or preclude particular methods or topics in political science. Anti-foundationalism itself should lead us to recognise that there is just such a conceptual gap between a social philosophy and an approach to political science. Meaning holism implies that our beliefs or concepts form a web. Hence it is possible that political scientists could reconcile anti-foundational philosophy with any given method by suitably modifying their other beliefs or concepts. Political scientists can make their favoured techniques of data generation compatible with anti-foundationalism by modifying their other beliefs so as to suggest that the data they generate is not only saturated with their prior theories but also data about holistic and constructed webs of meaning to be explained by interpretations that include a historical

moment. Foundationalists might insist on particular techniques on the grounds that some techniques generate pure facts while others do not. Anti-foundationalists, in contrast, should allow that all kinds of techniques generate theory-laden data that we can accept or challenge in narratives.

Anti-foundationalists might choose to undertake critical studies that reveal the historical contingency and partiality of beliefs that present themselves as naturally given or inherently rational. Equally, one might imagine anti-foundationalists relying on large-scale surveys to generate data from which to postulate certain beliefs of which they then offer a historical explanation. Or one might imagine them using formal models to explore the outcomes that arise from actions based on particular beliefs and desires, and even then postulating particular beliefs and desires on the grounds that doing so best explains certain observed outcomes. No doubt any anti-foundationalists who used behavioural or rational choice approaches to political science would have to allow that the stories they told were provisional ones that related actions and practices to socially constructed webs of meaning. But there is no reason why their provisional stories should not rely heavily on surveys, statistical analysis, or formal models to generate data.

It is worth adding here that anti-foundationalism might even prove compatible with only slightly modified versions of the forms of explanation that are associated with behaviouralism, institutionalism, and rational choice. Anti-foundationalism is, of course, incompatible with a naïve belief in the validity of explanations that treat data as pure facts to be explained in ways that reify practices so as to treat them as natural, fixed, or inherently rational. However, political scientists might accept an anti-foundational analysis of social explanation while offering ad-hoc or pragmatic justifications for

explanations couched in terms of reified concepts. Perhaps they might argue that such simplified explanations are more able to generate policy-relevant knowledge than are nuanced accounts of historical contingency and diversity: they might defend aggregate, formal correlations between poverty and race, gender, marital status, and education on the grounds that these help the state to develop policies that alleviate poverty. Equally, of course, anti-foundationalists might respond by arguing that the dangers and exclusions of having power and policy based on essentialist concepts and formal explanations always outweighs the benefits of acting on simplified correlations or models, or they might argue that other approaches to policy formation are capable of generating similar or more substantial benefits. For now, the important point is that anti-foundationalism itself does not appear conclusively to resolve such arguments in a way that rules out all possible uses of reified or essentialist concepts in formal correlations and models.

Varieties of Anti-foundationalism

In principle anti-foundationalism could be combined with all sorts of approaches to political science. Hence we cannot explain the impact of anti-foundationalism on the study of British politics by appealing to purportedly intrinsic conceptual links between an anti-foundational epistemology and a particular approach to the study of politics. To the contrary, the links between anti-foundationalism and approaches to political science must themselves be contingent historical ones. To explain the impact of anti-foundationalism on the study of British politics, we thus have to explore the particular historical traditions against the background of which political scientists have turned to anti-foundationalism. Indeed anti-foundational approaches to British politics owe as much to the persistence of

concepts, concerns, and topics from various historical traditions as they do to purportedly logical consequences of an anti-foundationalist epistemology.

While anti-foundationalism in principle could be combined with all kinds of approaches to British politics, it in practice is associated more or less exclusively with political scientists inspired by critical, socialist traditions of inquiry. We might identify three types of anti-foundationalism in the study of British politics. Each arose against the background of a different critical socialist tradition and absorbed a different type of anti-foundationalism. Table 1 provides an overview. Governmentality theory arose against the background of socialist theories of social control, and it absorbed a focus on regimes of power/knowledge. Postmarxists combined Saussurean linguistics with a socialist concept of hegemony. Social humanists infused postanalytic themes into the New Left's concern with culture, agency, and resistance.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

My aim in distinguishing these three traditions is to offer an admittedly simplified account of broad movements in the study of British politics. I have divided anti-foundational approaches according to intellectual background because my aim is to provide a historical narrative of the contingent ways in which anti-foundationalism has entered into the study of British politics. Let me stress, then, that these three traditions are not separate from one another. To the contrary, themes often flow from one to the other, and anti-foundationalists often combine themes from different traditions. To offer one example: Stuart Hall's work combined the New Left's emphasis on the sociology of

culture with a concept of hegemony around the same time as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe combined the concept of hegemony with a poststructuralism linked to Saussurean linguistics (Hall, Lumley, and McLennan 1978; Laclau and Mouffe 1985). To offer a more personal example: my work on New Labour instantiates a social humanist concern with ideologies and agency, but one of its main focuses is on how discourses from the social sciences have impacted on public policy to create a new governmentality (Bevir 2005). Bearing such caveats in mind, let us look at the three anti-foundational approaches to British politics. In each case, we will trace a historical movement from an early socialist background (Althusser, Gramsci, the New Left), through the appearance of anti-foundational themes (Foucault, Laclau and Mouffe, Hall), on to the studies of British politics they have inspired.

Governmentality

Governmentality theory derives from the writings of Michel Foucault. It has been applied to British society and politics mainly by the so-called Anglo-Foucauldians. The early Anglo-Foucauldians typically had been attracted to the work of Louis Althusser, and, more generally, to Marxist theories of social control. Foucault's work reproduced many tropes from social control theory (Resch 1992; Stedman Jones 1996). He deployed structuralist and poststructuralist ideas to imply that distinctions such as those between madness and sanity or sickness and health were products of particular epistemes or discourses rather than neutral or rational ways of capturing reality (Foucault 1989 and 1973). He suggested that the function of institutions such as asylums and clinics was not the scientific and humanitarian promotion of health, but rather social control and the

normalization of deviant individuals. Governmentality theory applies a similar approach to explore modern power.

Foucault on Modern Power

Foucault defines governmentality as the conduct of conduct (Foucault 1991). He traces it back to the emergence of the "art of government" in the middle of the sixteenth century. Before that time, writers, notably Machiavelli in The Prince, had adopted a monarchical notion of sovereign power: princes stood apart from their territory, having a fragile relationship to it, so that ruling consisted of identifying and forestalling threats to their rule. Then, in the middle of the sixteenth century, anti-Machiavellian theorists of the art of government began to focus on the conduct of conduct. These theorists explored questions about how to act on individuals so as to influence, limit, correct, and determine their behaviour whether in terms of the state, the economy, the family, or the soul. They concerned themselves with the activities and relationships in a given society, not the one relationship between a prince and his territory. In doing so, Foucault argues, they set the scene for the rise of modern governmentality.

In Foucault's account, modern governmentality combines sovereignty with bio-power and pastoral power (Foucault 1977 and 1978-1985). The anti-Machiavellian concept of the conduct of conduct implied a downward continuity from the well-organised state to an efficient economy and well-run families. In the seventeenth century, this downward continuity was associated with a broad concept of "police" that embraced all attempts to exert disciplinary political power over people and their activities, including schooling, work, family life, and consumption. In the eighteenth century,

populations were constructed as a social object liable to death-rates, epidemics, and patterns of growth, and the extension of policing to populations gave rise to what Foucault describes as bio-power, that is, new techniques of discipline that aimed to increase the health, longevity, and productivity of the population.

The final stream that feeds into Foucault's analysis of modern power is a pastoral one. Foucault traces pastoral techniques of government back to practices that developed in the Church. Pastoral power requires individuals to internalise various ideals and norms so that they both regard an external body as concerned with their good and strive to regulate themselves in accord with the dictates of that external body. For Foucault, the secularisation of pastoral power involved the state replacing the spiritual end of salvation with worldly ends such as health and well-being. When people accept such ends, they examine, confess, and transform their own behaviour in accord with the regime of bio-power.

The Anglo-Foucauldians

Anglo-Foucauldians often deny that Foucault provided a theory that constitutes the best way of understanding politics. They take him instead to have sketched out a mode and field of inquiry. The mode of inquiry (or method) is genealogy. The aim is to provide cultural histories of discourses that inform current practices so as to reveal their contingency and undermine any suggestion of their being neutral, humanitarian, or scientific. Anglo-Foucauldians describe themselves as offering critical genealogies of problems set by the present. Nikolas Rose writes, "rather than conceiving of our present as an epoch or a state of affairs, it is more useful, in my own view, to view the present as

a series of problems and questions, an actuality to be acted upon and within by genealogical investigation, to be made amenable to action by the action of thought" (Rose 1999, 11). Typically the Anglo-Foucauldians suggest that the purpose of genealogy is to open up new possibilities, and even new ways of being. They dismiss the idea of promoting a particular way of being as tarnished by the utopian dream of eliminating all forms of power/knowledge. They argue that through genealogies, "the received fixedness and inevitability of the present is destabilized, shown as just sufficiently fragile as to let in a little glimpse of freedom – as a practice of difference – through its fractures" (Barry, Osborne, and Rose 1996a, 5).

The Anglo-Foucauldians' field of inquiry (or empirical domain) directs us away from an excessive focus on the state toward a study of the diverse processes by which subjects are normalised so as to sustain a pattern of rule. This field of inquiry covers all the diffuse ways in which government and social power impact upon individuals, groups, and populations. It draws our attention to the ways in which conduct is shaped to certain ends by discourses and practices. As Rose explains, "the state now appears simply as one element – whose functionality is historically specific and contextually variable – in multiple circuits of power, connecting a diversity of authorities and forces, within a whole variety of complex assemblages" (Rose 1999, 5).

The concept of the state as just one element in circuits of power might sound very similar to a much elder literature on policy networks. Yet, the Anglo-Foucauldians depart significantly from this literature precisely because their interest lies not with the study of formal institutions but with genealogies of discourses that inform contemporary practices. Anglo-Foucauldians are interested in how apparently neutral, scientific discourses serve

to establish particular forms of subjectivity. They might focus on the ways in which expert discourses about education, health, risk, and insurance feed into public policies that then establish normal patterns of behaviour. Or they might focus on the ways in which statistical analysis and formal modeling provide new ways of measuring and analysing populations and thereby governing people.

Liberal governmentalities

Foucault's essay on governmentality was first made available in English in 1978. It appeared in a collection of essays, The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality, edited by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller. The Foucault Effect also includes essays exploring governmentality written by French and Italian scholars as well as some Anglo-Foucauldians. The essays define the mode and field of inquiry associated with governmentality, but they do not particularly focus on themes germane to British politics. Nearly twenty years later, there appeared another collection of essays, Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism and Rationalities of Government, edited by Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Rose. This collection, with its Anglophone cast of contributors, illustrates themes that characterise a governmentality approach to British politics.

The subtitle of Foucault and Political Reason captures one such emphasis. Anglo-Foucauldians conceive of liberalism in terms of a series of political technologies that arose from the nineteenth century through the welfare state and on to the neoliberalism of the Thatcher years.[4] Governmentality theorists portray nineteenth century liberalism as a political rationality that arose out of worries about extensive policing. In this view,

liberalism appears less as a rejection of state intervention and more as a positive political rationality by which to manage complex interactions in society and the economy. Liberalism seeks to produce certain outcomes through dynamics in society and the economy themselves rather than by state activity.

Governmentality theorists discuss the rise of the welfare state in relation to changing problematics of liberalism. In their view, modern industrial society gave rise to new social problems with which liberalism had to contend. Liberalism tried to guarantee the security of the economy and the state, in other words, by addressing social problems through an array of new technologies that collectively constituted the welfare state. For governmentality theorists, public housing, unemployment insurance, and public health are understood as technologies of power that serve to normalise subjects.

The governmentality theorists' account of liberalism sets the scene for their understanding of neoliberalism and contemporary British politics. On the one hand, neoliberalism appears as a critique of welfare state liberalism: it promotes rationalities in society and the economy, especially technologies of the market, on the grounds that welfare systems, trade protection, state planning, and Keynesian intervention are unproductive interferences with market relations. On the other hand, neoliberalism appears as a range of governmental technologies that actively foster competitive market relations so as to shift responsibility to the individual while increasing social efficiency: under neo-liberalism "it was the responsibility of political government to actively create the conditions within which entrepreneurial and competitive conduct is possible" (Barry, Osborne, and Rose 1996a, 10).

Making subjects

The governmentality theorists have also extended Foucault's concern with the ways in which apparently neutral, scientific discourses establish particular forms of subjectivity. Indeed, they often conceive of liberalism, welfare state liberalism, and neoliberalism as composed of policies that seek to normalise subjects by drawing on technical discourses from disciplines such as medicine, social science, statistics, and public health. Rose's work on the self, freedom, and psychology provides a more general exploration of contemporary forms of subjectivity (Rose 1999; and also Rose 1989 and 1998). Rose argues that the shift from liberalism through welfare liberalism and on to neoliberalism saw the morals and psyche of the individual replace larger units as the main objects of governing rationalities. In his account, early nineteenth century liberalism, guided by classical political economy, did not seek to manage individual morality so much as to guarantee the security of economic relations. Yet, Rose adds, in the middle of the nineteenth century, liberal governments began to regulate the morals of certain segments of the population. Distinct institutions, such as the poor house, appeared to discipline and correct people who had particular pathologies of character.

For Rose, an even more dramatic change occurred with the rise of the welfare state. He argues that early in the twentieth century, statistics, which had been used mainly to calculate national incomes, began to be used to analyse and govern characteristics of the population. In his view, an emerging discourse of "social" issues focused on problems that afflicted large portions of the population, and a new governmentality arose to prevent these problems spreading further. The welfare state and Keynesianism appear, in Rose's

account, as technologies by which experts attempt to govern subjects so as to manage pathologies made visible by new social statistics.

Rose also suggests that neoliberal governmentality constructs and enforces a particular subjectivity. He associates advanced liberalism with an individualization of responsibility. Whereas the welfare state embodies a collectivist ethos, individuals are now constructed as responsible for their own conduct. Neoliberalism promotes freedom, understood as personal choice, at the same time as it deploys psychology to create new forms of control. Psychological technologies increasingly affect how individuals think about almost every aspect of their lives, including sexual relations, work, health, and consumption choices. For Rose, then, advanced liberalism is a form of governmentality in which individuals discipline themselves to use their freedom to make responsible choices. Individuals are expected to analyze themselves and to improve all aspects of their lives in ways that benefit themselves, their community, and the state.

Postmarxism

The postmarxists, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, are influenced less by the structuralist Marxism of Althusser than by Gramsci's concept of hegemony. Mind you, they modify, and arguably even overturn, Gramsci's humanism by infusing it with the concepts of language and mind developed by structuralists such as Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Levi-Strauss and then reworked by poststructuralists such as Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan. In Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, Laclau and Mouffe analyse discourses primarily in terms of the quasi-structural properties of signs. They trace the

relations and properties of signs and discourses not to class or other social conflicts but to a quasi-structural psychology associated with Lacan.

Laclau and Mouffe

Laclau and Mouffe set out to rework Marxism in order to dissociate it from foundationalism and essentialism. They reject theories that privilege the economic (rather than the ideological) and social class (rather than discursively constructed identities). In doing, so they redefine hegemony to evoke a submerged strand of left-wing thought that resisted essentialism. Gramsci used hegemony to refer to class domination through ideology: a class could establish an ideological hegemony such that its dominance rested on moral consensus. Gramsci implied, in particular, that bourgeois hegemony explains why the workers consent to capitalism and so why there has not been a revolution. Laclau and Mouffe, in contrast, use the concept of hegemony not just to think about the role of ideologies in a capitalist system defined by means and relations of production, but also actively to dismiss social theories based on economic and class analysis. In their view, "the search for a 'true' working class and its limits is a false problem, and as such lacks any theoretical or political relevance" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 84).

Once Laclau and Mouffe empty Gramsci's concept of hegemony of its Marxist content, they can suggest that historically it has acted as what Derrida calls a supplement. Hegemony has acted as a concept with which to deal with evidence that does not accord with a privileging of the economic base over the ideological superstructure, that is, cases in which the identity of a class does not correspond to its objective social location. Laclau

and Mouffe define their project, echoing Derrida's strategy of conceptual inversion, as one of making their concept of hegemony central rather marginal.

Laclau and Mouffe hope that by rethinking Marxist theory, they will redefine the strategy of the left. They argue that the reduction of ideology to class consciousness and thus objective social facts inspires a totalitarianism associated with the belief that Marxist parties can act as a vanguard of the workers. Leninism, they explain, promotes "political leadership within a class alliance" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 55). Leninism legitimates an authoritarian Party or state by suggesting that the Party or state purses the objective class interests of the workers. In contrast, the postmarxist concept of hegemony is meant to draw attention to the need to provide "intellectual and moral" leadership to construct subject positions, identities, and discourses. Laclau and Mouffe even write, "political subjects are not – strictly speaking – classes, but complex 'collective wills'" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 67). Hence they conclude that the left should renounce Leninist vanguardism in favour of a historically specific, grassroots struggles.

Discourse Theory

The debt Laclau and Mouffe owe structuralist theories of language appears again in their use of the word discourse as an alternative for ideology. The concept "discourse" is, after all, less tied to ideas of class and social location than is the concept "ideology". Postmarxists approach a discursive formation as "a configuration, which in certain contexts of exteriority can be signified as a totality" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 106). Their language and approach stem from Saussurean linguistics. Saussure argued that the relationship of a signified (or concept) to a signifier (or word) is arbitrary (Saussure

1966). Any signifier can evoke any signified provided only that it differs from other signifiers. Hence the value of any signifier derives solely from relations of difference in a system of signs. Poststructuralists, such as Derrida, are often taken to have argued that the relation between concepts and reality is similarly arbitrary: our concepts too can be understood not as referring to the world but solely in terms of the relations of difference among them within a discourse.

A Saussurean legacy appears in three prominent features of Laclau and Mouffe's concept of discourse. First, Laclau and Mouffe dismiss concerns with the relationship of discourses to a putative extra-discursive reality, such as that of class struggle. Sometimes they imply that the world, including class antagonisms, is a product of discourses. At other times they appear to allow for an extra-discursive reality while contending that only signs in existing discourses can be comprehended. Either way, they rule out attempts to understand discourses as either reflections of or responses to the world. Second, Laclau and Mouffe stress the constitutive role of relations of difference within and between discourses. They imply, for example, that in any given discourse, a binary structure governs concepts of identity such that identities are necessarily defined in opposition to an excluded other. Third, Laclau and Mouffe are dismissive of human agency: they argue that discourses fix or limit what individuals say and do, and they analyse discourses in terms of the structural relations among the signs of which they are composed rather than the use of language by agents.

Laclau and Mouffe tie their concept of discourse not to pre-discursive social facts but to Lacan's psychoanalytic theory. In their account, the subject (or individual) desires "fullness", conceived as psychological stability based on the integration of the self with

the other. Yet, this desire for fullness is thwarted structurally by a primordial "lack" since there is always doubt as to whether the "other" has recognised the self. This "lack" then leads to the other getting blamed for blocked identity. This psychoanalytic theory implies that a quasi-structural antagonism between self and other is integral to the very process of identity formation. Laclau and Mouffe argue that this quasi-structural logic also applies to discourses. On the one hand, discourses exhibit a logic of equivalence in that they try both to integrate many views into one worldview and to stress commonalities in contrast to an other, but, on the other hand, they thus exhibit a logic of difference in that they are constituted by an antagonism to the other – an antagonism that always limits the extent to which they can achieve integration. The interplay between equivalence and difference in discourses constitutes hegemonic struggles. So, Laclau and Mouffe argue that a hegemonic discourse increases its bloc of control through the logic of equivalence but its ability to do so is limited by a logic of difference that precludes its achieving full closure and so creates a space for counter-hegemonic discourses to emerge.

Racial Identities

After Laclau and Mouffe wrote Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, Laclau concentrated on redefining and defending their approach to discourse analysis, while Mouffe attempted to link their approach to a normative theory of agonistic democracy (Laclau 1990; Butler, Laclau, and Zizek 2000; Mouffe 1993; and Mouffe 2000). The job of applying their work to specific discourses has fallen mainly to students of Laclau from the University of Essex (Howarth, Norval, and Stavrakakis 2000; Howarth and Torfing 2005).[5]

Many attempts to apply postmarxism have concentrated on discourses connected with identities of gender and race. Postmarxists argue that subject positions are the constructs of contingent discourses, rather than natural or biological givens. In their view, the subject positions that a discourse creates derive not from pre-discursive social relations or biological facts but from political strategies and the structural relations between concepts in discourses. The appearance of normality that attaches to some subject positions is merely an effect of the hegemonic status of the relevant discourse.

One attempt to apply postmarxism to British politics is Anna-Marie Smith's New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality. In the 1950s, Enoch Powell opposed the retreat from imperial power on the grounds that Empire was integral to British identity. Then, once decolonization seemed inevitable, he promoted a new British identity distinct from Empire. Smith writes, "by representing the Empire as accidental and external, Powell was able to claim that Britishness had remained essentially the same through the imperialist period and would not be significantly altered by de-colonization" (Smith 1994, 132). Powellism arose as a discourse of a "pure" British identity defined against a menacing alien identity. Race was its "nodal point". It needed to create an "other" if it were to postulate some internal space destroyed by decolonization. Hence Powellism reconceived black populations as aliens. Black immigrants represented a disorderly and dangerous other threatening Britain. What is more, Smith adds, Powellism constructed black immigrants as predatory, masculine subjects. In Powell's famous "rivers of blood" speech, for example, he read from the letter of a "white woman old-age pensioner" portraying her as the victim of a black invasion that was taking over the once

"respectable" street on which she lived. The influx of blacks had made her a prisoner in her own home. No one came to her aid.

In Smith's account, Powellism exhibits the logics of equivalence and difference that postmarxists associate with hegemonic discourses. Powellism claimed inclusiveness – a centrist position against "excessive" immigration – even as it excluded groups. More particularly, Smith identifies several devices by which Powellism pursued equivalence. Powellism claimed to represent the interests of both whites and blacks: it "invoked the image of black supporters . . . to de-racialize his consistently racist discourse." Powellism also left a place for the "good assimilable black" even as it railed against the "dangerous black invader" (Smith 1994, 140). Powellism did not assert that blacks are inherently "prone to wrong-doing" so much as claim that the immigration of unassimilated individuals leads to social problems, tensions, and violence.

Governance and Policy

Postmarxists have focused on discursive identities associated with gender and race. There is less work addressed to topics such as parliament, political parties, policy networks, and local politics. One exception is Stephen Griggs and David Howarth's analysis of the campaign against a second runway at Manchester Airport (Griggs and Howarth 2000). In exploring this case study, Griggs and Howarth ask: how did the local village residents and direct action protestors overcome their collective action problem? As postmarxists, they take the problem of collective action to be less about individual rationality than creating a shared identity through discourse. In the Manchester case, they point to three bases for the creation of such a discourse. First, there was a group identity

in that all were affected by the environmental costs of the runaway. Second, there was a social network and political entrepreneurs. There was a strong conservationist tradition in the villages and the leaders of the relevant associations had the support of professional people in meeting the costs of the campaign. Third, the campaign forged new political identities aligning "the Vegans and the Volvos". According to Griggs and Howarth, this alignment worked because the pro-runway campaign used heavy-handed tactics and stigmatised residents and protestors alike, and because the media linked residents and eco-warriors as fighting a common foe. But, Griggs and Howarth continue, the alignment of the Vegans and the Volvos proved temporary. The protestors lost. The eco-warriors, after being evicted, moved on to the next protest site. The residents split over whether to mount a national level campaign or to concentrate on the Public Inquiry. The local authority offered an environmental mitigation package and pursued their case with "ruthless efficiency."

Social Humanism

It is interesting to compare Smith's study of race in Britain with one written some ten years earlier – Paul Gilroy's There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack.[6] Both studies concentrate on meanings, and both are inspired by socialist traditions. Yet, whereas Smith's title gives pride of place to "discourse", Gilroy's subtitle proclaims his study to be one of "culture and politics", and whereas Smith draws on Laclau and Mouffe with their quasi-structuralist theories of language and psychology, Gilroy adopts a historical and even "materialist theory of culture". For Gilroy, culture is both a product of agency and the inherited life-world of agents. His extensive use of black music (reggae and hip

hop) suggested that subaltern agents might forge cultures of resistance to a dominant ideology.

Gilroy's concerns with agency, culture, resistance, and history all reflect the influence of the New Left on another tradition of anti-foundationalism. Governmentality theory and postmarxism draw on structuralism and poststructuralism with their dismissal of subjects, agency, and humanism (Bevir, Hargis, and Rushing 2007). In contrast, the New Left, including E. P. Thompson and Raymond Williams, espoused a humanist Marxism that emphasised the processes by which agents and classes made cultures, especially cultures that resisted capitalism (Thompson 1978).

The New Left

The New Left preceded Laclau and Mouffe in attempting to liberate Marxism from authoritarian politics and economic determinism. Many members of the New Left responded to the Soviet invasion of Hungary, and knowledge of the brutalities of Stalinism, by leaving the Communist Party and championing an indigenous tradition of radical cultural and moral criticism (Dworkin 1997; Kenny 1995). Historians such as Thompson and Christopher Hill reconstructed a popular tradition of resistance from the Peasant's revolt through the London Corresponding Society to Chartism (Hill 1965; Thompson 1981; and more recently Stedman Jones 1983). Literary critics such as Williams and Richard Hoggart reconstructed working-class auto-didacticism, and a tradition of literature from the romantics to George Orwell in which the concept of culture challenged capitalism (Williams 1958; Hoggart 1957).

Williams provided arguably the most influential theory of culture from within the New Left. He appealed to culture as a way of explaining aspects of social and political life that did not fit with economic reductionism. He suggested that post-war economic prosperity had dampened the class struggle in a way that made culture an ever more pertinent counter to capitalist values. In doing so, he transformed the concept of culture. Whereas culture had often been associated almost exclusively with high culture, he conceived of mass culture as a site of political dissent and struggle. In The Long Revolution, for example, he argued that political battles were being fought out in the world of art and ideas (Williams 1961). He rejected the idea that the economic base determines the cultural superstructure. In his view, the impossibility of dominant groups entirely controlling social processes means that there is always space for subordinate groups to contest ruling ideologies.

Cultural Studies

While Williams and Thompson made culture and agency prominent concepts in the New Left, the emergence of cultural studies owed much to Stuart Hall and his work from 1968 to 1979 as Director of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham. Indeed, the relationship of the New Left to cultural studies was sometimes problematic. On the one hand, there is no denying the importance of the New Left as personal and intellectual influences on a younger generation who pursued critical approaches to the study of culture. Thompson's approach to a history from below inspired numerous explorations of the lived experience of subordinated groups – women, racial minorities, gays and lesbians, and peasants, as well as the working class. On the

other hand, however, the New Left often remained at least loosely tied to an orthodox socialist historiography that privileged the economy, production, and class relations (Bevir and Trentmann 2002a). Students of race, such as Hall, and gender, such as Angela McRobbie, sometimes found themselves fighting against the privileging of idealised white male working-class cultures from which the racism and sexism had been written out.[7]

Hall followed the New Left in conceiving of culture as a form of expression that is manifest not only in high art but also in the everyday life of subordinated groups. But, in the late 1960s, an encounter with anti-foundationalism and poststructuralism led him to modify the New Left's notion of lived experience.[8] Williams, and especially Thompson, tended to describe cultures of resistance as responses to experiences of the brutal realities of capitalism. In contrast, Hall now paid more attention to the way in which ideological traditions constructed people's experiences (Hall and Jefferson 1993). The point was not to return to the old view that ideologies represented a false consciousness that hid the reality of the class struggle. The point was, rather, to insist on the importance of ideology as a site of struggle for social change. Other authors have recently explored the ways in which even capitalism and markets have been constructed in part through cultures of resistance (Bevir and Trentmann 2002b and 2004).

To bridge the gap between culturalism and anti-foundationalism, Hall turned to Gramsci's concept of hegemony. For Hall, hegemony is a specific process of ideological struggle – a process that he understands in terms of a humanist historicism rather than the quasi-structural psychology adopted by Laclau and Mouffe (Hall 1988 and 1986). Culture thus appears as a site of hegemonic control and struggle: it reinforces present power

relations while allowing space for dissent and resistance. Popular culture can reinforce hegemonic ideas and identities, notably by representing them as, say, natural, inexorable, or rational. But popular culture can also be a site of resistance by subordinated groups. Indeed, Hall's concern with agency and resistance spills over into an emphasis on the consumption as well as the production of culture. Subordinate groups can resist cultural discourses and symbols by consuming them in ways that draw on local patterns of dissent.

Thatcherism and After

Social humanists characteristically explore ruling ideologies and resistance to them. The most obvious examples have been studies of Thatcherism and New Labour. In the 1980s, Hall offered an account of Thatcherism as a hegemonic project characterised by "authoritarian populism". In his view, Labour attempted to be both a working-class Party and a responsible caretaker of a capitalist economy. When the economy declined, Labour tried to sustain its caretaker role by adopting corporatist management strategies. It thereby weakened its connection with the workers. The failings of the left thus set the scene for Thatcherism. Thatcherism aligned the neglected workers with anti-collectivism as an alternative solution to the problems of the economy. It presented neoliberal ideas as the common sense of the British people. Hall explains, "the essence of the British people was identified with self-reliance and personal responsibility, as against the image of the over-taxed individual, enervated by welfare state 'coddling'" (Hall 1983, 29; and also see Hall 1988). This right-wing populism combined themes from a tradition of "organic Toryism – nation, family, duty, authority, standards, traditionalism – with the aggressive

themes of a revived neoliberalism – self-interest, competitive individualism, anti-statism" (Hall 1983, 29). However, Hall adds, Thatcherism governed through authoritarianism. It brought an "intensification of state control over every sphere of economic life", the decline of democratic institutions, and even the curtailment of formal liberties. The tensions between Thatcherism's populism and its authoritarianism provided a space in which the left might recoup its ideological losses.

No doubt New Labour likes to think it recouped these losses. Social humanists generally disagree. Hall himself portrays New Labour as little more than a continuation of neoliberalism. He argues that New Labour is a hybrid regime, combining a dominant neoliberalism with a subordinate social democratic notion of active government, and able to hold these two discourses together only through the constant use of "spin" (Hall 2003). Younger social humanists, in contrast, have been more attentive to the ways in which New Labour has transformed both social democratic and neoliberal traditions. Some suggest that New Labour has given up on grand ideological visions of a transformed society, and turned instead to modernisation in accord with social theories that purport to analyse inexorable changes in the world (Finlayson 2003). Others argue, in addition, that the social theories on which New Labour most relies are communitarianism and new institutionalism (Bevir 2005; also see Moss and O'Loughlin 2005). They suggest that New Labour's policies deploy these theories in an attempt to transform state and society.

Governance and resistance

Social humanists have explored the ideologies associated with political parties. They have also studied other traditions of governance and cultures of resistance. Social

humanists decenter governance. They show how several different traditions contribute to the construction of the complex patterns of rule found in contemporary Britain.[9] Even when governments promote policies inspired by a given discourse, the formation and implementation of these policies involves diverse actors who imbue the policies with different content against the background of other traditions. These actors, whether intentionally or inadvertently, draw on diverse cultures to resist the governing narratives.

Dissent and resistance are, of course, found far beyond Westminster and Whitehall. Social humanists such as Thompson and Williams argued, as we have seen, that citizens are situated agents who can and do draw upon local cultures to express skepticism and resistance to governing discourses. More recently, social humanists have explored resistance among street-level bureaucrats and citizens. Several chapters in a volume on Governance, Consumption, and Citizenship, which I co-edited with Frank Trentmann, show how social movements, street-level bureaucrats, and citizens have actively developed their own beliefs and narratives of "choice" in explicit contrast to government narratives. John Clarke argues, for example, that the meanings of choice are contextually bounded not universal, and that service providers and citizens alike are skeptical about official discourses (Clarke 2007). His interviews in policy areas such as policing and health reveal a resistance to the appropriateness of "consumer" and "choice" as identities and activities. Service providers and service users alike believe that the idea of choice sits uneasily alongside values such as equity. Citizens resist the language of choice and shopping as inappropriate for policing and health care.

Social humanists emphasise the contingent, diverse, and contested nature of governance. In doing so, they imply that governmentality theorists and postmarxists

adopt too monolithic an analysis of discourses such as neoliberalism. Governmentality theorists, with their debt to ideas of social control, focus almost exclusively on official discourses and policies, paying little attention to how these are received or enacted at local levels. In contrast, social humanists, with their debt to the idea of traditions of resistance, explore the diverse ways in which street-level bureaucrats and citizens articulate and practice consumption and citizenship in their everyday lives, often in ways that challenge government narratives. The focus thus shifts from the discourse of policy-makers to the fractured and diverse processes by which discourses and policies are translated into actions.

Conclusion

Anti-foundationalism is an epistemological position that has implications for ontology and social explanation. While in principle it is compatible with all kinds of approaches to political science, in practice it has been absorbed by a range of overlapping critical, socialist theories. On the one hand, the different socialist traditions do much to explain the different concepts and topics associated with the Anglo-Foucauldians, post-Marxists, and social humanists. Yet, on the other hand, we would do well to recognise that, whatever their differences, anti-foundationalists have developed a broadly shared research programme. That research programme contains at least the following four themes:

- A commitment to studying meanings (beliefs, discourses, and traditions) as constitutive of social and political practices

- A belief in the contingency and contestability of meanings, and so an opposition to claims that a culture, web of beliefs, or practice is natural, inexorable, or inherently rational
- A commitment to historical explanations of meanings, where historicity conveys contingency thereby undercutting appeals to formal models, fixed institutions, or reified social patterns
- A use of historical critiques to reveal the contingency of webs of belief, which understand themselves as natural, inexorable, or inherently rational.

So, anti-foundationalists portray British government as a historically specific and contestable endeavor. They highlight the importance of exploring the changing meanings that constitute British economic, political, social and cultural practices in broader post-imperial, European, and other transnational settings. They encourage studies of changing patterns of governance and conceptions of politics, notably in relation to how practices of statecraft are conceived in relation to their objects of intervention. They encourage studies of how society and its discontents have been understood, especially in the context of traditions of social thought and protest and their role in framing patterns of sociality, inequality and resistance. And they encourage studies of the role of the cultural domain in these transformations and the separation of culture as a discrete realm with its own institutions, forms and conventions.

The anti-foundationalists' emphasis on meanings, contingency, historical narratives, and critique opens up the study of British politics. Anti-foundationalists have initiated dialogues between British politics and historiography, cultural studies, and post-

colonial studies. In addition, they have posed theoretical and interpretive challenges for other students of British politics. They have challenged a lingering, lukewarm positivism that tries to avoid questions of meaning and contingency behind appeals to social facts, institutions, structures, and correlations. If other political scientists take up this challenge, the benefits would include greater philosophical sophistication and recognition of new research topics.

Table 1: Varieties of anti-foundationalism

	Governmentality	Postmarxism	Social humanism
Socialist background (i) Thinker(s) (ii) Key concept	(i) Louis Althusser (ii) Social control	(i) Antonio Gramsci (ii) Hegemony	(i) New Left – Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson (ii) Radical cultures and traditions
Anti-foundational background (i) Thinker/Theory (ii) Key concept	(i) Michel Foucault (ii)Power/knowledge	(i) Poststructuralism (ii) Semiotic code – relations among signifiers	(i) Diffuse postanalytic themes (ii) Agency situated in cultural practices
Prominent topics	Technical discourses as ways of making subjects through public policy	Collective identities – especially those of gender, race, and sexuality	Governance, with an emphasis on ideologies and resistance
Examples	(i) Rose (1999) (ii) Barry, Osborne, and Rose (1996b)	(i) Laclau and Mouffe (1985) (ii) Smith (1994)	(i) Hall (1983) (ii) Bevir and Trentmann (2007)

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[2] For a useful (if unsatisfactory) account of anti-foundationalism as temporarily having triumphed in a perennial philosophical debate Rockmore and Singer 1992.

[3] The philosophical implications of anti-foundationalism are debatable, especially in their details. I have mentioned only those about which there is considerable agreement. Yet, in discussing why anti-foundationalism implies various other positions, I inevitably hint at my personal analysis of the logical connections involved. For details see Bevir 1999.

[4] For Foucault's own discussion of liberalism, especially German post-War liberalism and the Chicago School, see Foucault 2004, and for comment Lemke 2001.

[5] Laclau's students have also written books introducing his theory (Howarth 2000; Smith 1998; Torfing 1999).

[6] It is well worth pointing out that one legacy of the New Left and cultural studies is an extensive and incredibly important literature in post-colonial studies. The combination of an anti-foundational focus on meanings with a post-colonial focus on transnational flows seriously challenges the almost ubiquitous persistence of assumptions about the nation state in the study of British politics – arguably including the very idea of a Handbook of British Politics. Tariq Modood's chapter in this volume provides one approach to race. Good examples of the studies of race and transnationalism associated with cultural studies include Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies 1982 and Gilroy 1993.

[7] Much gender theory is anti-foundational. For a detailed discussion of feminism see Vicky Randall's contribution to this volume.

[8] Hall identifies with an "eclecticism" that has little concern for coherence. Typically, he

flirts with a range of fashionable Marxist terms – from the Althusserian "articulation" to signification – inserting them into a broadly constructivist and yet sociological approach to ideologies and cultures of resistance. His lingering debt to the New Left appears in his constant return to agency, practice, resistance, and (in my view rather problematically) modernist sociological categories. Compare Proctor 2004.

[9] The literature includes Bevir and Rhodes 2003 and 2006; Clark and Gains 2007; Clarke and Newman 1997; Dudley 2003; Morrell 2006; Newman 2001; and for comparative studies Bevir, Rhodes, and Weller 2003.