I take the theme of rarity from Foucault’s *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (118-25), where it is used to characterise the existence of discourses. According to this characterisation, discourses should not be seen as the visible unfolding of a hidden linguistic plenitude but as relatively rare contingent occurrences. They should be described positively, in terms of their historical deployment, rather than hermeneutically in terms of their hidden depth of meaning. But even in the *Archaeology* the theme of rarity is more than just a rejection of structuralism’s “linguistic turn.” It forms part of a larger attack on the notion of human plenitude. In particular it marks a turning away from those conceptions of plenitude associated with Hegelian and Marxian historicisms where, in accordance with a logic first adumbrated by Kant, history is governed by the goal of “the complete realisation of human capacities.” In his later work on governmental technologies and ethical practices Foucault provides a more general formulation of this theme. The task confronting all those seeking to escape the ethical and political illusions associated with the notion of human plenitude is to learn to describe “the contingencies that make us what we are,” rather than the principles that promise to realise all that we might be. This paper offers a brief sketch of what it means to describe the modern school as one such contingency.

A good deal of academic educational theory presents a significant obstacle to such an undertaking. This is because it holds the school accountable to the principle of complete development or “human becoming.” Such theory finds it almost impossible to say anything positive, or even empirical, about the existing school system. Rather, it views this system only through the prism of what it should be - if it were the vehicle of complete development - and thereby ignores or repudiates what it happens to be. Typically, such theory views the school system as a lost historical opportunity. It sees the school as something that limped into historical existence by default, when the principle of human becoming (the dialectics of history and class consciousness, repression and resistance, the energies of desire and the body) collided with a reality bent on harnessing human capacities to its own limited purposes (capitalism, instrumentalism, patriarchy, modernity, colonialism). Educational theory thus finds its mandate in the unrealised principles of human development. From them it purports to read off an ethics and a politics of education, speaking in the name of democracy, emancipation, reason or (more recently) the body - all of them principles of human becoming and plenitude.

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Naturally, there is no shortage of intellectuals prepared to uphold these principles, in part because of the ease of holding them up, and in part because upholding them is the key to acquiring the prestigious and powerful moral comportment of the theorist. There are however both empirical and ethico-political reasons for calling the so-called principles of education into question, and for renouncing the prestigious comportment of the theorist who speaks in their name. First, it is not self-evident that the popular school systems that emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were attempts - failed or otherwise - to realise fundamental moral principles. Here we shall argue that the modern school is best approached as an improvised reality, assembled from a grab-bag of pedagogical and administrative instruments as a means for the moral governance of populations, and incapable of supporting principles higher or deeper than this. Second, despite (or perhaps because of) their claim to be “progressive,” it is by no means clear that those who speak on behalf of fundamental principles are capable of understanding or tolerating the plurality of ends actually served by the school system. Here it can be suggested that, in treating “the complete development of human capacities” as the ultimate educational principle, theorists mistake their own moral deportment for the end of social development. In doing so, they fail to respect the plurality of deportments formed in the school and maintained in civil life.

Those who treat the school system as a failed attempt to realise the principles of human becoming usually have in mind the principles of democracy, rationality, freedom and equality, typically in highly specialised senses of these terms. The two dominant forms of educational critique - those derived from liberal political philosophy and Marxian social theory - treat these principles in slightly different ways. For liberal educational theory - whose recent resurgence owes much to the work of the American scholar Amy Gutmann - these principles are invested above all in the rational and moral capacities of free individuals. Such capacities will apparently allow a society of rational individuals to use the school system as the democratic means to form itself as a society of rational individuals. For Marxian educational theory, however, it is not rational individuals that matter but classes and their economic interests; and the school is typically treated as the instrument by which the dominant class has imposed its interests thereby reproducing social inequality.

Still, these rival theories are not as far apart as they might seem in that, even for Marxian theory, the school system should be a democratic means for realising the principles of equality, liberty and rationality. The difference resides mainly in how the process of realisation is envisaged: liberals opt for a notion of individual development through political participation, while Marxists pin their faith on a notion of collective development through socio-historical transformation. One can see both the difference and the closeness of liberal and Marxian educational theory in some recent remarks by Bowles and Gintis:
... the liberal concept of human nature forces us to separate what are in fact integrally interrelated aspects of human welfare: learning (human development) and choosing (human freedom). By so doing, liberal educational theory justifies schooling as a form of domination in which the freedom of the student is subordinated to an institutional will. An adequate conception of human nature must recognise that learning occurs through the exercise of freedom. Such a concept allows the fulfillment of the liberal vision and corresponds to the notion of progressive social change as the full democratisation of social life. (Bowles and Gintis 24)

Hence, as far as the principles supposed to underlie the school system are concerned, both Marxian and liberal theories invest them in a certain image of the person. This is a conception of the person as a self-developing subject, who “learns” through freedom. It is in the spiritual light cast by this conception that the school appears in its ideal form: as the transparent vehicle for the person’s own self-formation or Bildung, as the Germans would say.

More recently the current of post-Kantian discourse that flows through liberal and Marxian theory has surfaced in a further variant, signalled via the notions of post-modernism and post-structuralism. Inevitably, this variant introduces itself via a critique of its predecessors, scorning their commitment to “the subject” as fixated and identity-driven in relation to such fluid principles as difference, desire and the body. From the point of view of this paper though these variations on the theme of human becoming are just as fixated by the image of the ideal (now postmodern) school - and hence just as incapable of acknowledging the contingent school - as those they purport to consign to the dustbin of history. Given the concerns of this paper, there is only a marginal difference between a view that invests the human plenitude in a “complete” form and one that invests it in a process of interminable unfolding or flux. What is important is that “modernist” and “postmodernist” theory both view that human capacities unfolded from fundamental principles of becoming - whether these are identified with history, language, or the body - rather than seeing them as contingent outcomes of historical realities such as the school system.

In addition to holding the school system accountable to principles of human becoming, educational theorists typically conduct themselves in a highly principled manner. This means that educational policies and institutions are typically criticised and opposed “on principle.” The principle invoked is of course that of the complete development of the person. And this means that no matter what actual improvements might be promised by particular policy initiatives - such as the Karmel Report, the Girls in Schools program, the Mayer Report, the “competencies agenda” - they can always be criticised for failing to realise the principle of complete personal development, hence as instrumental, technocratic, managerialist, and so on. We can thus identify the routine intransigence
of educational critique. Priding itself on its "critical" refusal to take the actual for granted, critique is actually based on a wholly taken-for-granted principled deportment.

No actual school system has ever been - or indeed could ever be - based on the principle of complete personal development. This is because the (religiously derived) notion of "completeness" involved is one that requires capacities to emerge independently of imposed disciplines - or, in Bowles and Gintis's formula, for individuals to "become through freedom." And this is not a requirement that can be met in any worldly milieu, where capacities - from piano-playing, to introspection, to state-management - are all the result of specialised disciplines. This fact is anything but an impediment to principled educational theory however. On the contrary, it is because no actual system has ever been based on this principle that theorists can conduct themselves as principled persons: rejecting the actual state system as merely empirical; denouncing attempts to describe it without critique as "positivist" and forming their own intellectual conduct on the basis of an uncompromising insight into what this system should be or will be, when history finally realises the ideal. Principled analysts can thus fall prey to a hyper-critical and prophetic intellectual fundamentalism.

One of the distinctive features of Foucault's genealogical method - perhaps the one that distinguishes it most radically from liberal political philosophy, dialectical social theory and post-modernist hyper-critique - is that it allows for an analysis of social institutions that is "unprincipled" in both the relevant senses. On the one hand, Foucault's genealogies show us how to avoid treating the modern school system as a failed attempt to realise the principle of complete personal development. They allow us instead to approach the school as an improvised historical institution; assembled from the available moral and administrative materials; providing a provisional means of dealing with specific exigencies (social disorder, economic backwardness, urban decay); and promising nothing more than fallible solutions to such problems. On the other hand, in adopting this approach, the analyst is less likely to denounce these provisional arrangements in the name of the principle of human completion which they supposedly fail to realise. Hence, rather than conducting themselves as the prophetic bearers of unrealised ideal principles, analysts are given the opportunity to temper their demands of the school system, and to situate their analysis in relation to the kinds of problems that the system has actually been improvised to cope with.

To what extent though does Foucault's only extended account of the school - given in *Discipline and Punish* - exemplify this sort of unprincipled analysis? There are of course important regards in which it does. The central symptom of this book's movement away from educational and political principles is its concern with what might be called the *habitus* or milieu of the school itself. By this I mean Foucault's concern to describe not the hidden principles of education or its underlying class functions but something quite different: the positive
organisation of the monitorial school as a purpose-built pedagogical environment. This is an environment in which what education can amount to is inseparable from the school's improvisation from a mix of physical and moral elements: special architectures; devices for organising space and time; body techniques; practices of surveillance and supervision; procedures of administration and examination.

It is still easy to overlook the distinctiveness of Foucault's intervention in this regard. There had of course been some earlier books on the architecture and disciplinary organisation of the school, such as Malcolm Seabone's important study *The English School* and, in Australia, Lawrence Burchell's lonely *Victorian Schools*. And there had of course been a plethora of earlier theoretical and historical studies of the principles of education and of the ways these principles had been betrayed by the social functions of schooling. The problem remained that if the former studies tended to (quite understandably) leave aside the profound social and moral consequences of the school milieu, then the latter tended to ignore the confines of the school as a built-environment altogether, treating it as the transparent vehicle of deeper principles or larger forces. Foucault's intervention in *Discipline and Punish* was thus to insist that it is not educational principles that matter but school premises. Hence analysis is misguided if it attempts to derive functions for education either from principles such as complete personal development, or from social imperatives such as the reproduction of class relations. Instead, Foucault's argument implies, the formations of the person carried in modern education, and the social uses to which education can be put, are both inseparable from the actual historical assemblage of the school as a moral and physical milieu dedicated to the mass training of children.

It might even be said that for Foucault there are no such entities as the "person" or "society" apart, that is, from ensembles of special milieux like the school system - ensembles of "machines for living," for forming oneself, for governing others. This is not to say of course that institutions like the school are somehow existentially autonomous of other social apparatuses and patterns of life. It is to say though that the modes of social inter-relation are not to be looked for in general theories of social development or political power whose principle of coherence lies in the notion of society as a collective person evolving towards self-determination. Instead, for Foucault the forms in which societies are organised and in which power is exercised are positive and contingent, inseparable from the historical invention of specific governmental instruments and rationales, and limited by the actual deployment of such instruments.

At this point, however, we have probably reached the limit of the perspective developed in *Discipline and Punish*. In fact there is an aspect of this work that is not quite proof against the temptation to general social and moral theorising. We can locate this aspect in a certain ambivalence surrounding the notion of discipline itself. At one level,
discipline is discussed in terms of the disciplines. These are techniques for problematising, organising, regulating and augmenting human activities and capacities, some of which were alluded to in our description of the school milieu: the timetable, the examination, the architecture of the schoolroom, practices of supervision, techniques for specific bodily and mental aptitudes. The disciplines are thus quite compatible with the account we have given of Foucault on the school, as they are constituents of the school as a contingently assembled formative milieu.

At another level, however, Foucault tends to use the notion of discipline in a generalised way in order to argue for an epochal transition between kinds of society, characterised in terms of their forms of power. It is in this regard that Foucault speaks of a change from societies in which power is exercised through the spectacle of royal vengeance, to ones in which it exercised through politically invisible disciplines, such as those housed in the prison and the school, whose object is the reform of the soul, not the symbolic destruction of the body. The problem with this latter notion of discipline, as a number of commentators have pointed out, is that it can be too easily construed as a general historical and sociological principle. One can begin to speak of a "disciplinary society"; as if the disciplines were not just devices of human formation employed in a specific group of institutions, but somehow organised society as a whole. Discipline in this generalised sociological sense imbues the social ensembles with both a principle of coherence and a negative ethical and political telos, so that "society" or the "state" re-emerge as monolithic totalities to be resisted or redeemed tout court. Down this path lies of course the figure of the "transgressive" Foucault, heroised by those who use the idea of the disciplinary society to neutralise his innovation of an unprincipled mode of social analysis and reabsorb his work into the themes of critical social theory.

In light of these remarks it is possible to suggest that today the parts of Foucault's work most significant for educational research are to be found not in the description of the monitorial school given in *Discipline and Punish*, but in the later works on "governamentality" and ethics, where the school is hardly mentioned. This is not to gainsay the sense in which the work of *Discipline and Punish* remains important in reorienting our approach to the school. It is to say though that once this reorientation has been achieved then the more general concept of discipline employed in that work marks the limits of its usefulness, and that to overcome these limits we must look elsewhere.

It is not difficult to illustrate this point. In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault takes the monitorial school - in which the teacher is connected to the mass of the pupils only through the hierarchical deployment of a phalanx of child monitors - as the type of the modern school. A number of commentators have pointed out that this account needs to be qualified, as the monitorial school came under immediate criticism from those in favour of a more "child-centred" pedagogy. In fact, in England and Australia at least, the monitorial school was relatively short-lived in its
pure form, being overtaken fairly rapidly by the modern classroom in
which the teacher is in direct physical and moral contact with the pupils.

Now this is an important rectification of Foucault's account; but it
should not be pushed too far, as it is, for example, when commentators
assume that the child-centred classroom is somehow intrinsically more
progressive than the monitory system. As Jones and Williamson were
the first to show, the child-centred progressive classroom emerged not
as a repudiation but as a modification of the disciplines employed in the
monitory school. It represented not an abolition of pedagogical power
in favour of an emancipatory pedagogy, but a modified exercise of that
power: one whose objective was to allow students to become responsible
for disciplining ("emancipating") themselves. Somewhat like the critique
of the prison undertaken by prison reformers, the critique of the school
carried out by progressive pedagogy was born with the modern school.
It represents an alternative modality of power inside the school system,
not (as it sees itself) a radical transfiguration of the school in accordance
with yet-to-be-realised principles.

That said, the child- or teacher-centred classroom does point to a
perspective that is missing in Discipline and Punish. The disciplines
deployed in this classroom are carried in a distinctive and irreducible
relation between the teacher and student. This relation is that of pastoral
care and guidance, and it was transmitted into the heart of the modern
school from its home in the institutions of Christian spiritual discipline.
It is fair to say that Foucault's lack of attention to Christian pastoral
governance in Discipline and Punish - his submergence of the pastoral
disciplines into an undifferentiated mass of disciplines that are depicted
as "swarming" into new regulatory apparatuses - is symptomatic of the
larger problem to which we have already pointed: the tendency of that
work to generalise "modern" forms of power into disciplinary power and,
consequently, to overlook the local and improvised character of the
institutions through which power is exercised. The notion that the
modern school emerged as the instrument and expression of a general
"disciplinary" transformation of society thus needs to be qualified: in
the first place by a stronger sense of the diverse character of the forms of
governance assembled in the school and, secondly, by a more historically
informed sense of the contingency of this assemblage.

Let me conclude by offering a few remarks addressing both these
issues. It is possible to show that the modern school emerged as a hybrid
of two very different departments of existence and orders of life. The
first of these was the administrative state whose early-modern prototypes
began to emerge in central Europe between the sixteenth and eighteen
centuries. In his later essays on the theme of "governmentality" Foucault
has characterised the novelty of these states in terms of a new rationale
and practice of government. This rationale of government, raison d'e'tat,
conceived of the state as its own end. It rationalised a form of government
whose objects were the security and prosperity of the state itself, and
which identified the welfare of the citizens with the achievement of these
At the same time, under the umbrella of this rationale the domains and objectives of government in fact began to multiply. This is because, once government was conceived in terms of an optimal “worldly” management of a territory and its population, then government fractured into a number of discrete domains - the economy, internal and external security, welfare, moral discipline - each increasingly controlled by its own expert personnel. These were the circumstances in which, during the eighteenth century, statesmen and bureaucrats in a state like Prussia first began to propose the building of a state school system: as a means for the mass moral training of the population with a view to enhancing the strength and prosperity of the state and thereby the welfare of the people.

At the same time, however, the state was in no position to simply invent the form of expertise responsible for administering this new sphere of government. The moral training of the people was the province of the Christian pastorate which, under the impact of the two reformations, was already intent on imbuing the laity with those forms of spiritual discipline and self-concern that had previously been reserved for a spiritual aristocracy. The second order of life informing the development of the modern school was thus the apparatus of Christian pastoral guidance. And, as Carl Hinrichs and James Melton have shown, the pietists of the Prussian state of Halle had begun to improvise a school system, conceived as a means of mass moral training, as early as the late seventeenth century; that is, while Prussia was still a rurally based agricultural society, albeit administered by an increasingly sophisticated and powerful bureaucratic government. This meant that while Prussian statesmen might see the pastoral school as a handy instrument for the social training of a citizenry, in offering to take it up, they were also taking up the forms of pastoral training and expertise of a religiously based institution of spiritual guidance. Moreover, the personnel of such a school system initially belonged to an independent social estate - the clergy - which jealously guarded its privileges against the encroachments of centralising state bureaucracies.

This is what it means to describe the modern school as a hybrid of two different orders of life. The school system did not emerge as a failed attempt to realise the principle of complete personal development. But neither did it surface on the crest of a wave of disciplines that was carrying the whole of society into a disciplinary modernity. Instead it emerged through a piecemeal series of exchanges between a state that conceived of the school as a bureaucratic instrument for the social governance of citizens, and a Christian pastorate that saw it as a means for the spiritual disciplining of souls. These exchanges, whose end is still not in sight, occurred not as an exemplary mediation of a dialectical principle but in the form of a whole series of improvisations at the level of architecture, pedagogy, administration - typified, for example by the pastoral modification of the monitorial school. If we speak then of the rarity of the school this is a way of indicating the fragility and contingency of the
process that brought it into being, and the scarcity of the basic pedagogical
rituals that our culture happens to have at its disposal.

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