

NO PARENT(HOOD) LEFT: ON THE NEED FOR (GOVERNMENTAL) INTERVENTION

Nancy Vansieleghem
Department of Foundations of Education
Ghent University
H. Dunantlaan 1
9000 Gent
nancy.vansieleghem@ugent.be

Introduction

The perfect parent doesn't exist', 'bringing up children can be difficult', 'it is common that parents get insecure, that they don't know it anymore', 'uncertainty about education must be a subject of discussion', 'information for parents must be accessible and understandable', 'consultancy-services must be accessible and available for every one', 'parents have to be able to inform themselves quickly and accurately' – these headlines from current policy documents of the ministry of Welfare, Public Health and Family (2007) vary but what they always seem to say is that it is no longer possible today, as a parent, to educate without support or consultancy. At different places it is argued that we are living in a complex and permanently changing society. In that society, so it is further argued, parental care and upbringing is not obvious and needs to be communicated. The parent is no longer expected to know what is good or bad for the child, to punish and to discipline his/her children. Instead, he/she is expected to be uncertain and to problematise his parenthood in relation to self-developmental and –actualisation possibilities of his/her children. The issue of an uncertain and changing society correlates with the question to make one's own choices on the basis of needs and to be responsible for these choices. Uncertainty and the changing society have from this point of view to do with choosing and calculating efficient and effective self-developmental possibilities. It has to do with choosing precisely these possibilities that stimulate the self-regulation and self-actualisation. Against this background, the parent is no longer expected to sanction or to discipline but to obtain information

and advice regarding self-actualisation needs, possibilities and problems of his or her children and to calculate these in the educational process.

In the light of the increasing attention that is paid to the need for advice and support, I will develop a critical analysis that problematises the political structure that is generated by this need. What are the consequences of the current need for services and advice for the public order and in relation to this for the meaning of the notion of parenthood? We will argue that the current need for consultancy and advice have a direct effect on the public order and the mode of (self-)government. They lead to important changes in the experience of time and space of the public order and of the way we are speaking and thinking about for instance the meaning of the notion of parenthood.

In mapping the political structure that informs the spatiotemporal structure of parental care, I will consider the theory provided by Giorgio Agamben on the state of exception and more especially the way Tyson Lewis (2006) describes it in his text on the school as an exceptional space. In line with Lewis, I think that Agamben's theory of the state of exception enables us to understand the ambiguities emerging from the complex field of technological procedures (in the form of consultancy and services) now prevalent in parental care. In a first part I will go into Agamben's theory of the state of exception in order to explore in the following parts – at a very general level- how parental care functions today (through government intervention) and, in turn, how it might function differently or at least open the possibility to do so. The purpose of this paper is to argue that the current need for support and consultancy can be regarded as both an effect and an instrument of a changing regime of power that generates the figure of the residual subject which involves a particular way of looking, thinking and feeling. The need for parental support will be used as a case to describe the particular kind of subjectivity or individuality that this presupposes.

Agamben and the state of exception

To describe the state of exception, Agamben goes back to the distinction made in Greek antiquity between life as *zoè* or naked life (natural life common to all living beings, i.e. animals, human beings and gods) and life as *bios* (qualified, cultural life typical for an individual or a group).

Opposed to the *good life* of the polis, there is the simple fact of *bare life* of the living organism. Opposed to life in public, that refers to a properly human existence or a form of life, there is private life- here understood as that part of life that has no meaning or durability, things are consumed and enjoyed, taken and destroyed. Through an analysis of the paradox of sovereign power, Agamben (2005) comes to the conclusion that the constitution of an institutional order, a *bios politicon*, implies in itself the exclusion of naked life, the exception. Naked life, so he writes, is included in the juridical order solely in the form of its exclusion (Lewis, 2006, p.162). In other words 'the state of exception becomes a part of politics through its very exclusion from the institutional order' (Ibid.). More particularly, Agamben describes efforts to pervert order and organisation also in terms of 'sovereignty' and 'law': it is that the sovereign can, in an act of great arbitrariness, decide to suspend the law (Ten Bos, 2005). Sovereign's authority, thus, does not only enforce the law, but is especially the potential to disband the law and to proclaim the state of exception. The sovereign is thus capable of defining which life is worthy of living and which life warrants death without reference to juridical norms. To the sovereign, who imposes the law, responds the figure of the exile or the residual which is excluded from the law. Exile or residual refers to that form of life what has been excluded from the 'good' life and has no 'rights' and no 'meaning': it is bare life that can be killed without committing a murder. As such, as Lewis writes the bare life produced through the sovereign's authority marks the principal moment of biopolitics, which implies that it is abandoned. Which means for Agamben (2005) that the exception finds in itself the paradoxical position of being the legal form of what cannot have a legal form, of what cannot be heard or said.

It is Agamben's hypothesis that the state of exception more and more has transgressed its spatiotemporal boundaries and, that it now has started to coincide with the normal order, and that everything becomes possible (Agamben, 1998; Lewis, 2006, p.166-167). The suggestion made by Agamben is that the normal order in which we, as average citizens of our late-capitalistic society, might feel so protected and secure might easily collapse into a state of exception. To live in the state of exception that has become the norm, means further for Agamben that the experience of difference between our biological and political body (the difference between private and public) disappears. Previous experiences that have always been called political, have been conducted to our biological body and private experiences suddenly put themselves forward outside ourselves, as political body. In fact, as Lewis writes the state of exception embodies an experience of power

that constructs the subject through 'exclusion and exile, rejection, deprivation, refusal, and incomprehension' rather than through 'normalisation, discipline, administration, intervention and examination' (Lewis, 2006, p.165). The state of exception does not produce a docile body or subjects of law, but rather a legally unnameable and unclassifiable body that does not seem to belong in the political or social life of the polis. In fact, 'the state of exception strips the subject of his or her subjectivity' (Ibid., p.164). What is of most importance in the state of exception is furthermore *the need to intervene*, not to create the citizen or individual life, but to assure a relation with it and to appropriate her existence which is characterised by non existence. With this matter, education that for a long time has been understood as an institution that transforms the child into a future citizen (a docile body) has entered a crisis in that sense that its function no longer seems to help to know oneself in relation to a final end but to fulfil one's own survival needs. Yet, in this crisis, educational interventions are directly expressed on the biological body in the form of the ban. Consequently it is this changed experience that we must begin to think of if we want to think of governmental policy and parental care. Since Agamben identifies the state of exception as the special location supporting the contemporary biopolitical state, there is no outside from where it is possible to identify an underlying set of power relations. In this sense, the theory of the state of exception implies a research position taken on both the nature of the phenomenon that we seek to investigate (parental care) *and* the logic most suitable for understanding it. In other words, we work from the assumption that 'thought' and 'reason' (about parental care) are not abstract facts of an idealist philosophy, or something developed from the innate qualities of the mind, but effects and instruments of a particular way of being. In this sense the state of exception as working paradigm itself brings us material to think of parental care and to enlighten her dark side. Our concern is thus not only with the institutional actors and organisational processes of a particular phenomenon, but with exposing the figure (the kind of subject) through which a phenomenon becomes meaningful and suitable for understanding. This means that we, in this article, understand the actual discourse on parental care and the way it is governed by the state not in the first place as an object that can be justified and analysed referring to the nature of human beings, but as the immediate expression of a way of being, thinking and feeling (and thus of understanding (governmental policy on) parental care and bringing up).

On the permanent need for consultancy and services

What follows is not a complete history of governmental policy in relation to parental care. Instead, I provide an outline of educational discourse spanning the last years as a cursory introduction to the problematics of the state of exception and of the biopedagogical. In particular I will focus on the relation between parental care and biopower or the state of exception and more specifically on how the discourse on ‘caring’ and ‘parenthood’ becomes connected with the figure of the residual self. As we shall see, the contemporary need for parental services and consultancy produced through (self-)government technologies and discourses, all too easily collapses into its own state of exception wherein educational life is immediately linked with biopower in that its function no longer seems to help to know oneself in relation to a final end that can be known. Instead it is more and more about informing how to know oneself in relation to an endless accumulation and transformation of that knowledge.

Parental care: recognizing and to communicating individual needs with a supernanny

In order to describe the kind of being or subjectivity that the current discourse on parental care generates, I will explore popular parental manuals, programs and websites. In a second step I will show how this discourse effects governmental policy on parental care.

Typical for the changing discourse on parental care that since the 70s becomes of importance, is the famous manual of Thomas Gordon P.E.T. Parent Effective Training (1970/1992) and it’s popular translation: ‘listening to each other: communicate and solve problems in the family’. The back flap of this bestseller is a good example of the discourse (Gordon, 1970/1992).

Most parents expect they don’t have enough basic knowledge and life experience to raise children. That mistakes will be made seems inevitable. Where else would you learn the profession but in the practice? Not so long ago there was any education or course for good parenthood. The American psychologist Dr. Thomas Gordon, confronted with disturbances in parent-child relationship, teenage-rebellion and youth-delinquency sought the core of these problems. [...] Gordon starts from the willingness of parents to admit their mistakes and to learn from them [my translation].

The starting point for Gordon is that effective parents do not need in the first place basic knowledge and life-experience to raise their children. Instead, they have to accept that it is normal to make mistakes and that it is especially important to learn from these mistakes. Concrete it is about a way of thinking that goes as follows: mistakes are inevitable, repeatedly mistakes can have serious consequences in the long run, therefore parents have to reflect upon their selves in order to learn from their mistakes, and the expert can assist the parent to become more effective in this learning process. Learning is understood here as a fundamental characteristic of human beings, and an individual case for which the learner herself is responsible. Gordon places an attitude of learning against an attitude of obedience. According to Gordon, an attitude of obedience implies that the parent is not thinking for himself, but that he/she is just fulfilling the norm (in a way of interfering, controlling, refusing, disciplining,...). He refers in relation to this to a general belief about parenthood that does not listen to what the child is saying, but that directs the child to the general norm. In emphasizing the importance of self-reflection and learning, the book refers to two so called traditional misconceptions about upbringing children and parental care. The first one concerns the assumption that the child is fragile or helplessness; who stands in need of protection from a dangerous adult world. The second one concerns the idea that the parent reproduces the social order and functions as a kind of role model for the dangerous child in order to prevent future social problems. Both of these misconceptions rely, according to Gordon, on a deficiency- or problem-oriented approach that has for a long time formed the basis of pedagogical practices and interventions. In opposition to these deficiency-based conceptions, Gordon assumes to stand for an alternative potential-based approach that recognises and addresses both the child and the adult as active human beings, as holders of certain capacities and potentials and as representatives, not of problems, but of specific needs and interests (Gordon, 2005, p.11). Parents have to accept their child as it is, this is the starting point for Gordon. Showing this acceptance actively gives the child the feeling to be somebody, to be able to realize itself and to be able to solve problems by itself. An attitude of interference implicates that the parent doesn't accept the child in it's human-being and restraints the development of what is inside the child. Gordon indicates that parents are not to be left alone in this and need support. The Gordon method is therefore regarded as a timeless and effective method that produces results immediately. 'It is a program that offers parents the specific

communication and conflict resolution skills it takes to build and maintain an effective relationship with a child in any and all circumstances' (Gordontraining, 2008). In these manuals, handbooks or programmes, parents are not really summoned to take care of their child but are learned how to deal with certain educational problems in a convenient and effective way. Moreover, these problems are not problems that can be characterised against the horizon of a certain educational ideal, but are seen as needs or shortcomings that arise in the learning process itself. The problem is not located at the question if parents will take care of their children. That they can take care is the starting point. Where it is about is that parents are not capable in 'recognising the core of the problem'. "They just lack assistance to become effective in raising children" (Gordon, 1992, p.1). It's about indicating the 'blind spot', says Peter Andriaenssens, another well-known educational expert. Jo Frost, known as The Supernanny, indicates in her book 'The most asked questions to the Supernanny' that she doesn't want to criticise nor to intervene, but to function as an observer of the family-dynamics, 'a fly on the wall'. Frost (2006, p.13) describes the problem as follows:

A lot of people in Supernanny, are themselves very conscious of their problems. However, what they do not see, is the way their children have an effect on their behaviour. Sometimes they are so rooted in established models, that they, neither their children see a way out of the difficulties. [...]. My part as external observer is to discover patterns of behaviour and subsequently presenting different ways in which parents can deal with their problems, in communication with their children. When a parent has to do an effort to keep up appearance everyday, it can be difficult to put a step back and to have a total view [my translation].

The supernanny appears as someone who learns parents what they are doing wrong and what they might do differently. In this understanding parental care becomes a learning process: learning to care and care to learn is assumed to provide the parent with desirable and even necessary capacities and skills for children's self-actualisation. This means that the parent does not only have to be prepared to read strategies or guidelines to address individual (or collective) needs and interests, but that he/she also must have the courage to recognize individual needs and to communicate these with a supernanny. In the manual Frost is very clear about that. Parents, so

she writes, must have the courage to communicate their parenting problems on reality television. The communication of personal problems in public becomes furthermore something that is promised as the way to build and maintain a more effective parenthood.

Parental programs, manuals, websites today are thus about equipping parents with information that enables them to determine the direction they want, according to the actualisation of the children's unique potentials. And it is about the permanent need to direct the parent, to this question. Through parental programs, manuals or websites the parent is expected to obtain information and advice regarding self-actualisation needs, possibilities and problems and to calculate these in the educational process. This means also that the parent *have to learn* to reflect upon his or her norms and values according to the self-actualisation needs and problems of his or her children, to make them transparent and to bring them up for discussion and communication in view of a continuous optimal functioning as a parent.

What comes to the fore here is thus a whole new way of thinking about man and his relation to society. A way of thinking that no longer has to do with preventing the disturbance of the peace of public order. What seems to be important is the mobilisation of effective and efficient means to facilitate developmental possibilities. In contrast with a paternalistic discourse on parenthood, expressed in the social expertise of the 'protective and normalising parent' (a discourse that generates the parent who has to protect the child against risks that exceed individual life) (Vanobbergen, e.a., 2006), the discourse on consultancy and parental services generates the learning parent. From the learning parent it is expected that he/she facilitates the learning process and that he/she provides her children optimal chances to learn and to actualise the self. Consequently, expertise in education and social work does not mean intervening in order to defend clearly defined aims and norms. Upbringing refers, as Simons (2006) writes, no longer to an organisation in a closed setting (the family) with rigid channels of interaction and in which human beings are positioned as individuals. Rather, it is understood today as an environment in which one circulates and becomes productive in the fulfilment of one's *own* (or the particular peer group's) self-actualisation and survival needs. Or the other way round: it is about the mobilisation of knowledge and skills related to individual needs. Against this background, parental expertise becomes an opportunity one has to learn in order to actualise and mobilise individual (or collective) needs. In this sense it appears no longer strictly as a general norm (and duty), but as *something* that promises the optimization of our wellbeing. Parental care is about an

ever better and more efficient orientation on the possibilities and needs of the self-actualisation of individual children. It is not only something one should have, but something of which we can never have enough. It is something one has to invest in, in order to make parenting ever more effective (Ibid.). Not a representation of a static dimension but a representation of a fluid gas (Deleuze, 1990/2003).

Parental care: from a technique to a technologisation

From the parents, in what is indicated as an information-society, it is furthermore no longer expected that they gain in the first place knowledge about established developmental categories and methods. It is argued that the knowledge produced by our current methods and theories no longer adequately represents the knowledge we need, 'nor a way to become more certain of how we act' (Zimiles in Bloch, 2000, p.259-260). Psychological sciences, and child development as a field of scientific knowledge emerges in this sense no longer as the only discourse that helps to frame what has to be thought of as normal and abnormal behaviour, typical children, mothers, fathers, and childrearing, and good teaching, as well as ways to improve or *save* ourselves through better scientific knowledge. More and more, in stead of systematic, quantitatively oriented psychological knowledge that has been dominating for a long time the fields of child development and developmental psychology (Rose, 1999), there is a growing interest by policymakers and researchers for parents' observations, experiences, and perspectives as valuable resources of data or information about the child and childhood, as well. One speaks in this sense about case studies, action research or examples of good practices. Remarkable is that this current interest for such research not in the first place has to do with a call to make 'better science' and 'greater certainty' through triangulation of methods and different forms of data as Bloch (2000) seems to suppose, but with a call for multiple sources of data and procedures to map trajectories of complex care for children from infancy through young adulthood and 'the parent's evolving needs for respite care' (MacDonald and Callery, 2007, p.209). What is of importance is in the first place to know which components play a role in the promotion of self-development and self-actualisation: which ones stimulate and which interfere with the self-actualisation process. Or else: there is a search for the *reasons* why and how some parents are more successful than others in mobilising resources and in translating enabling strategies of private enterprise management

(Pongraz, 2006). It is thus not so much (or not in the first place) about acquiring knowledge of developmental needs and risks and the reproduction of that knowledge as such, but about the communication and distribution of anticipated *needs* and *ever more effective solutions*. After all what parents need is no knowledge to form the self, but ‘predictable and assist service providers to anticipate needs and plan support’ (MacDonald and Callery, 2007, p.209); they need competences and infrastructure to map developmental possibilities, risks and needs and support services.

Knowledge, here, is thus not something parents have to learn by heart. Instead, it functions as data and services which parents, according to their needs and on demand, should always have at their disposal and access to. From that point of view it is all about the mobilisation and accessibility of resources to improve children’s social and cognitive outcomes. Questions as ‘what should be done?’ or ‘how should children be taught to live’ are replaced by questions as ‘what do I have to do in order ‘to affects children’s rate of cognitive and social skill growth’ (Hickman, 2006, p.657). Subsequently, where it is all about in education or parenthood is the acquisition of parental competences to communicate and to manage information.

Parental competences do not function as a kind of bearers of general formative (educational) knowledge, but as substitutes or extensions of our body, substitutions for these things we, as human beings, fail. They are means provided to make individual needs and aims transparent and communicable, they function to optimize learning processes. Following Marshall McLuhan (1967), we could say that competences are functioning as technological widenings or self-amputations of our body, continuations of functions of our limbs, organs and senses. Parental guidelines, Reality TV, or parenting shops developed especially to acquire competences, therefore, do not generate the effect that they secure the public order of disturbance. Since the function of competences is not the material manipulation of individuals, but the mobilisation of information and communication processes, they much more have the effect that they disturb public order in such a way that they at the same time (re-)produce the need for ever more and ever better advice and consultancy. *As a matter of fact parental care today is about providing shelter without shelter*. After all, individual needs are depending on the context and thus always different and new in a complex and permanently changing society. Therefore today parents are understood as beings that are permanent in a state of inconvenience and discomfort and they are spoken to as experiencing permanently a need to work upon their self and the wellbeing of their

children. This means that parents are continuously have to ask questions such as: How do I have to manage this situation? Is the way I do it the best way? What to do in this or that situation? Why does this happening? Can it also in a different way? Shelter (understood as parental care) means today thus not in the first place certainty, but the assurance of self-management possibilities and instruments, which means *the representation of a permanent focus on a more effective actualisation of individual capacities and talents and on the prevention of possible risks.*

Parental care: form government to governing

Above I have tried to show the effect information- and communication technologies produce on the way we are thinking, feeling and acting (about parenthood). The effect of this changing experience on the government became recently clear when a Dutch TV-program 'Netwerk' reports of commercial surrogate motherhood on the internet. Remarkable is that not in the first place the person who acts (the kind of subjectivity that generates these kind of actions) is at stake in this report, but the motives a person has for doing so. The motives function furthermore as means or information to define (new) domains for (government) intervention and to justify additional research in the prevention of possible risks. Next to a general call for more regulations about the use of internet, artificial insemination, the media and adoption, the TV-program causes the immediate need to forbid commercial surrogate motherhood (De Knack, 2008). There is no need to await the juridical process, the fact that commercial surrogate motherhood can influence others' self-management is a reason for mobilisation: a reason to enact a new law and to set up governmental campaigns to prevent parents against possible abuse of the internet, artificial insemination, etc.. After all policy makers and researcher are experiencing it as their task to respond to the need for consultancy and advice by facilitating services to become competent parents. Precisely related to the experience of possible individual (or collective) failure of the State, the necessity appears to forbid self-developmental risks and to subsidize preventive campaigns, help lines for parents, preventive parental research, preventive programs and instruments to screen possible self-developmental risks.

An example of a preventive program that is already implemented in parenting policy in Antwerp is the preventive program Triple P. Triple P is described as a preventive parental program that is not meant in the first place to give expert advice to parents who have got into

difficulties, but to ensure competent parenthood to those parents who live for instance in subordinated areas. Yet, so it is argued, a lot of parents seem to be absent from the discourse regarding quality early learning services. Reasons indicated are e.g. isolation; a lack of respect from other early childhood professionals, parents, family, and community; low commitment to the profession; low self-worth; and a lack of empowerment (Lanigan, e.a., 2006, p.70; Hickman, 2006). Accordingly Triple P is described as a program that does not want to test norms defined in advance, but concentrates on the norm to be surpassed. By stressing that the program concentrates itself to surpass the norm, it is argued that there is no conclusion to the intervention process. Programs such as Triple P do not want to stigmatize. The aim of these future oriented intervention programs, so it is argued, is to inform the parent about 'positive parenting practices' (Stipek, 2004, p.1-2). In this way parents are addressed to focus themselves on the need to provide 'safe and healthy learning environments that can support cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development' (Ibid.). Parents therefore are understood as partners in finding and formulating stimulating and hindering factors and are applied to detect and prevent problems of parental care themselves, as well. To realise this gaze, standardised checklists circulate. These lists are compound out of a number of so called signals or critical incidents that are both in international scientific research as well as in (parenting) practices regarded as important signals of risk for the origin of educational problems (Hellinckx, 2008). These are lists that contain characteristics of risks of the relation between parents and children, individual parent characteristics, child and family characteristics, with inclusion of rankings of indications of which characteristics of risk have a stronger relation with the origin of harmful situations than others. Future oriented intervention programs mean furthermore that directed actions have to be taken to prevent these situations. These actions can vary, going from what is described as further exploration of the situation to guiding or removing children from their family. In this sense it becomes perfectly accountable that parents are divest of their parental authority. It is about monitoring families at risk and to report, even before there is a suspicion of a criminal offence.

Related to this is the action of the Minister for Welfare, Public Health and Family to sensibilize school-participation for children before compulsory school attendance. Since research has reported that children who are participating pre-school kindergarten obtain significantly higher school results, it is experienced as necessary to consult families at risk. Also here it is explicitly mentioned: 'with respect for the choice of the parent whether they accept the invitation

of not' (Policy Document, 2007). The idea is that so called INLOOP-teams are starting with parental meetings in subordinated areas. In a second stage there are consultations planned and also visits at home. For this purpose, the minister of education will provide a database to communicate student-information to Child and Society. By informing families at risk about self-actualisation risks of children, parents pre-school absence can be reduced and school results enhanced, so it is argued.

As a conclusion of this part we can say that there is an obvious paradigm shift to notice from a surveillance to a pro-active way of intervening. This pro-active way of intervening differs from surveillance in the way Michel Foucault in *Surveillir et Punir* (1975) has written about it. For Foucault surveillance forms the starting point for intervention and control. Surveillance, nowadays, is subordinated to information-technologies and communication networks which make it possible to assess and account the risks of some behaviour, or in the case of criminal justice, delicts. Different governmental authorities and organisations make use of these information- and communication technologies.

The other side of this pro-activity is the side where intervention turns into the execution of an effective punishment. At that point we see a second shift which has in the same way, but differently, to do with direct effects generated through information and communication-technologies. It is an effect that becomes evident, when we explore the need to address also children and youngsters to inform themselves about possible risks. Hence organisations such as Childfocus, the Office of the Children's Rights Commissioner, or Child and Youth Phone, are all organisations which direct children to the need to obtain information and advice regarding self-actualisation needs and problems. Through these organisations, children are directed to look at their family as possible source of risk (in facilitating self-developmental possibilities). These organisations have prepared chatrooms and mobile phone numbers by which children and young people can be informed about what kind of interfering factors can hinder their personal life project (Vansielegem, 2008). These organisations offer checklists and pictograms that make visible the rights (translated in possible self-actualisation needs) of the child and relate these to the attitudes to be required by the parent. This implies that next to social workers and consultation services also the children are appealed to screen the parental process and to recognize possible risks. The aim of these organisations, internet sites, or mobile phones is

likewise to track possible risks. The downside is that everybody has been called to look at the other as potential inflictor of a crime. Whether the case is truth or not, the child is learned to track possible failures or risks and to recognize their parents as potential inflictors of a crime. The parent is in other words a bearer of risk-factors, a continuous risk or danger: an exile or a residual. At the same time it is also someone who is permanently in need of risk-management. By this, a new form of individuality (parenthood) is created, a virtual identity (parent) which is effective also when the individual (parent) itself is distracted. Parental intervention no longer functions as an order, but as something we all seem to will, and of which we can never have enough.

Parenthood connected with the figure of the residual self

Parental care appears thus as a process of learning that could and should be managed, in the first place by the parents themselves and precisely therefore there is an arsenal of services and consultancy to be mobilised. A parent in need of consultancy is thus not just someone who is in need of help, but could be regarded as someone in need of pro-activity. State governments have to contribute to this need and have to intervene by making it possible for every parent to inform (and to 'screen') him/herself and to acquire and enhance 'parental skills'. The parent is thus in need of permanent monitoring, coaching, and feedback in order to know oneself in relation to the call for optimal learning outcomes for every child. A call, however, that can not simply be perceived as a threat... but as a field of freedom and thus as a resource to be exploited (Bröckling, 2005).

Remarkable is that these forms of advice oriented initiatives and interventions are instrument as well as effect in that sense that they as instruments contribute to an intensified control and management of individual life, and at the same time precisely make individual life possible since they are cut to size to the advice seeking parent himself assigned aim: support in the provision of optimal self actualisation opportunities for his/her children. The fact that intervention means to support and to be supported and that it never gets the form of an order or prescription, makes that there is a permanent need to correct the self, and that the experience of individual dysfunction continually has to be readjusted and resurrected, if necessary by instruction and advice of an expert. By this, the 21st century parent finds him/herself in a

permanent state of becoming. Not the punishable fact that parents commit to their children itself is experienced as dangerous for the child and his/her future, but the effects the child or the young person experience by not yet actualised and communicated self-actualisation risks and needs. This makes it possible that the parent, long before he/she has committed a punishable fact, is already 'punished'. After all, a parent who refuses to be informed or to seek advice about his/her child is experienced as someone whose conduct is highly improper or reprehensible, but, and this is exactly what makes the whole situation so paradoxical, he or she is at the same time experienced as someone who is worrisome and needs advice at a high degree.

The figure of the parent today exposes in other words an impossible possibility. In this sense, the parent today has been legitimized by an implicit call for a situation that the advice seeking parent has created him/herself. Or to say it in its strongest sense: the advice searching parent who wants to prevent or remedy any possible disturbance of self-actualisation opportunities or chances, creates the state of exception, in the sense that the parent no longer represents the norm, but coincides with a sphere of human action that is entirely removed from norms. Or else, the norm today represents a standardised set of behaviours, as the arrangement and steering of learning situations, in which it is up to the individual to make the best of it (or to fail to do so). Implicitly the concept of self-management makes it clear that there is no longer anything the parent can hold on to, other than itself, its own survival. The fact that everyone has to give their all, so as not to lose their parenthood, is expressed in the maxims of *controllability* and *risk-management*, against which the outcomes of learning processes are measured (Pongratz, 2006). The zone of parental care that is at issue here is 'beyond both knowing and not knowing, beyond both disconcealing and concealing, beyond both being and not being' (Agamben, 2004, p.91).

What is left is an empty vessel or a residual self; an existing real *thing* that has gone beyond the difference between norm and life. Maybe we can say that the radical search for equality and emancipation, the historical turn to naked life and the need for services have changed life itself into an 'abstract' lifeless process. The transformation of the norm into the need has transformed life into a mechanical process that lacks every real need. Individuals who fill their life with ever more subtle and artificial evoked needs and pleasures have committed themselves to a life that has putted us beyond *naked life*.

By exposing the figure of the residual parent, the dark side of the discourse on expertise and counselling has become 'pragmatically' clear: namely a zone of indifference, where inside and outside do not exclude each other but blur with each other. It is the zone that is localized (or illocalized) at the pivoting point between self-intervention and state-intervention, between the private and the public, inside and outside. The will to be an expert or to think the parental care as a form of acquiring expertise, is after all connected to a requirement to make permanently use of it. From the parent it is expected to transform the responsibility for the prevention of possible self-actualisation needs and risks into a problem of care for the self and to control the management over this transformation. Counselling services in turn act as a proxy for this control. The discourse on parental expertise operates in other words as a state of exception by creating an absolute difference, a *caesurae* or empty interval between man and animal that is neither animal life nor human life: it is the exclusion of animal and human life by its inclusion. The figure of the residual parent exposes in other words the relation that binds and, at the same time, abandons the living being.

What I have tried to show in this paper, by exploring the discourse on parenthood, is how we, by putting the norm against the need, not in the first place have left the norm behind. Instead, we have transformed the need into the norm. Or else, what I have tried to show, is that whether one speaks in name of individual needs and interests, words and acts lose their representative meaning. What the discourse on parenthood shows is, in other words, that nowadays words and acts as representatives of that what happens here and now (in our world) have lost their meaning and become empty. At this point the (lost) meaning of the parent (of parenthood) appears in all her clarity: namely that of someone who shows what is, who gives the word to the child and makes it public (someone who gives orders).

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