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**THE WORKING SELF AND THE SUBJECT OF FREEDOM:  
MICHEL FOUCAULT'S ANALYTICS OF LIBERALISM AND THE WORK  
ETHIC AS A TECHNIQUE OF LIBERAL GOVERNMENTALITY**

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## ABSTRACT

In this dissertation I explore how the work ethic plays an important role in the government of modern life, specifically, how we use it to govern ourselves and govern others. First, I consider how Foucault's concept of government as "conduct of conduct" can be useful in coming to terms with the ways in which liberalism (as an art of government that is always suspicious of governing too much) governs, even in those spaces usually considered "free from" government. Using Foucault's notion of government, and the related notion of governmentality reveals ways that we are governed "beyond the state," i.e., through various techniques of the self and techniques of domination.

Second, this dissertation provides an overview of Foucault's "critical ontology" of liberalism; Foucault's work on disciplinary power and bio-politics, I argue, provides a useful critique that reveals how the space of freedom is actually constituted by specific political practices and how the production of this space assumes a specific kind of liberal subject, which is the product of disciplinary and bio-political regimes. Assessing Foucault's body of work through this "governmentality" lens reveals a more continuous line of thought concerned not only with power and subjectivity, but also government.

Finally, I use this Foucault inspired approach to political theory to examine how the work ethic operates as a technique of liberal government in the contemporary United States. Specifically, I focus on how the work ethic has informed psychiatric definitions of normality and how our assumptions about normal subjectivity have led to an individualization of the causes of poverty and unemployment, further marginalizing the

poor and unemployed. Ultimately we must rethink the nature of freedom with the knowledge that we are never truly "free from" government. By engaging in what Foucault calls a critical ontology of our limits, we might begin to grasp how things as seemingly benign as the work ethic govern us in specific ways and how we use them to force others to govern themselves accordingly.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
The Problem of Class	4
The Problem of Work	12
The Problem of Government I	18
The Problem of Government II	22
Chapter 2: Liberalism and the Government of Freedom	28
Government and Governmentality	29
Technologies of Government	31
A Brief History of Governmentality	34
Liberalism and the Government of Freedom	40
Chapter 3: Disciplinary Power and the Techniques of Governing the Liberal Individual	51
Disciplinary Power: an Overview	52
Disciplinary Power as Infra-Law	57
Discipline, Domination, and the Work Ethic	67
Governing the Ways of Being Free	73
Discipline, Self-Technology and the Work Ethic	78
Chapter 4: Bio-Power and the Reproduction of Liberal Subjects	86
Bio-power and the Problem of Population	86
Bio-power, Population, and the Working Subject	92
Bio-political Techniques of the Self	96
Bio-political Techniques of Domination	107
Race, Gender, and the Bio-politics of Class	120

Chapter 5: The Subject of Recent Liberalism	126
How to Define Contemporary Liberalism	127
Techniques of the Contemporary Liberal Self	134
Contemporary Liberal Techniques of Domination	138
Differentiated Freedom: Power and Subjectivity in Contemporary Liberalism	144
Chapter 6: Techniques of American Governmentality:	150
Toward a Genealogy of the Work Ethic	150
Where to Begin a Genealogy of the Work Ethic	152
Psychiatric Knowledge and Economic Freedom: Smuggling the Work Ethic into Scientific Discourse Work and Domination	156
Techniques of the Working Self in Contemporary Liberalism	161
Empowering the Work Ethic:	169
The Work Ethic and Advanced Liberal Governmentality	173
Chapter 7: Conclusion:	180
Bibliography:	185
	190

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

I come from working people. My grandparents, on both sides, were working people. My paternal grandparents were farmers, small family farmers of the sort that are, at best, on the endangered list. On my mother's side, my grandfather was a factory worker, a machinist. In the milieu of the nineteen fifties affluence, my maternal grandparents may have even bumped their heads against the middle-class, at least in the small, rural St. Lawrence River community where they lived. On both sides, my grandmothers worked, even in an age in which uncommon for a woman to do so. Up until her death in the mid-seventies, my paternal grandmother was the foundation that kept the family farm functioning. She was the first one to the barn every morning and the last one to bed every night; she fed the livestock and the children, cleaned the gutters and the dishes. When she died in nineteen seventy-six, my grandfather stopped farming, claiming that he could not imagine continuing without her; he meant that in more ways than one. My mom's mom was a small-business woman who operated her own beauty shop well into her eighties. It took two heart attacks to stop her.

My parents worked too, each in their own way. My mother has done nothing but work her whole life. Her first real job was as a nurse in a small rural hospital; she's still there. But it hasn't been that easy. There are not many small, rural hospitals around these days, and this one barely is. She's worked the day shift, the night shift, the ER, and the geriatric ward. At one point she worked her way up to an administrative position, as

purchasing director, a job that finally gave her weekends off. She was also a single parent, raising two children in Reagan's America—one job often wasn't enough. At various times in my life my mother has been a waitress, bartender, hostess, and a caterer, all the while getting up every morning and walking (often through harsh Northern New York winters) to the hospital, usually arriving a good hour before she had to, just because it was the right thing to do.

Like so many other working Americans, my mother's also been downsized and outsourced. After her hospital was integrated into a larger, urban medical corporation, there was no need for an onsite purchasing director. My mother's administrative vacation was over, and she took her severance and months of accumulated sick time without complaint. She wasn't away long, however. Without missing a beat, and with limited options available, my mother reactivated her nursing license and returned to where she started, working the floor, often on the night shift, again without once complaining about it. My mother is now a cancer survivor, and an anecdote might explain my mother's relationship to work better than words could: I called her after her first day of radiation treatment. Her appointment was at 8:00am, in a city forty minutes from where she lives. I called at 10:00am, taking a chance she might already be home. She was, my step-father reported, but had already left for work.

My father's relationship to work is a bit different, but no less instructive. It's safe to say he doesn't share my mother's sense of commitment. Where my mother has worked at the same job my entire life, I cannot begin to count the number of different places he's worked. An auto mechanic by trade, he has also worked as a bartender, caretaker, bowling ally attendant, and a general jack-of-all-trades. Sometimes this has



been above board and on the books; sometimes it's been under the table. Unlike my mother, who left one job in her life only when there was no longer a place for her, my father left every job he ever had. Compared with my mother, it was hard to understand my father's uneasy relationship to work, especially when the family sometimes suffered because of it. But I started to understand this little more when, after graduating from high school, I worked with my father for a short time in a Chevrolet dealership in Watertown, NY.<sup>1</sup> I know of few rich auto technicians, and there is a reason for that. Especially in the dealership setting, the deck is stacked against them. They see little of the inordinate hourly rate of labor that we all complain about, and if the work is under warranty, they see less. They are not usually paid hourly "straight time" like most of the working world; instead they are paid by the job, with the amount of time paid for each job coming from a standard manual that rarely considers how work gets done in the real world, how foremen interrupt to appease another customer, how the underbelly of a car can become so solid with ice that it needs an hour to melt before the work can be done, and how threads can strip and bolts can break, adding valuable minutes onto a job that the manual says should be completed in two and a half hours. It's not uncommon for an auto mechanic to spend forty-five hours a week *at work*, while only getting paid for thirty.

What I learned was that my father had a problem with work, and that problem had an obvious source—exploitation. Of course, he wouldn't have put it this way; he lacked the language to explain how he was being robbed of his labor power, contributing to the pool of accumulated labor that someone else was able to use to build a fortune and a big

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<sup>1</sup> I should point out that this is where I learned my Marx, far before I ever read him. Also, by "a short time" I mean that my father only lasted about a year after I was hired. I hung on for about five.

house in what passed for the suburbs. My father understood things much more simply, he just understood it as “bullshit,” and he was unwilling to put up with it. He didn’t understand exploitation; he felt it, and his first reaction was to run away. But unlike his son—who was able to run to the comfortable confines of the intellectual class—he had no place to run to, just another bad job and the same set of circumstances. There was rarely an incident, no strong words or appeals to someone’s sense of justice; more often than not he simply got fed up, rolled his tools out to his truck, and never returned. He gave little consideration to the fallout; where the next paycheck was coming from, or how he was going to support his family—and it didn’t always sit well with others. But the more I think about it, the more I think what my father disliked most about the jobs he had was that they reminded him of his powerlessness: I’m no longer so sure I blame him for running.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Problem of Class*

Given the personal history outlined above, it would be easy to conclude that I grew up working class. After all, my grandparents were workers; my parents were workers; and I even worked for a few years before deciding college might be a better option. But designating one’s class is not quite that easy. In some ways, it would seem that my background could be quite representative of a lot of Americans my age; the specifics would be different, but most Americans “come from working people,” don’t they? This seems to present a problem with coming to terms with the way class works in

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<sup>2</sup> For good ethnographies of “working people,” see Studs Terkel’s classic *Working : People Talk about what They do All Day and how They Feel about Doing It* (1974) and Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb’s, equally classic, *The Hidden Injury of Class* (1972).

contemporary America: It suggests a reason why class just doesn't resonate the way some wish it would. Was my family working class? Well, they certainly worked, if work is the defining criteria. Unfortunately, it seems work doesn't work all that well as a criterion for assessing or ascertaining one's socio-economic class. Regardless of what kind of work people are doing, there is little doubt that a lot of Americans are working harder than ever; some of them are succeeding and some of them are not. In this sense, it's hard to imagine class as simply an economic category determined by where one fits into the machinery of production or the distribution of wealth. There are a lot of people who have what once would have been considered working class jobs, but the range of income distribution within that imagined "class" would seem far too big to capture an accurate category of American existence. Does the auto worker topping out at \$20+/ hour have the same lived experience as the minimum wage Wal-Mart clerk? Do they belong to the same class of people? They might not think so, which might begin to get at why the working poor are so suspicious of labor unions.

This begins to get at the problem of perception when talking about class: Who decides what it means to belong to this or that class? It seems perfectly reasonable for academics to discuss the nature of class relationships in dissertations such as this. After all, we all share Aristotle's urge to classify. But our classifications seem somewhat meaningless if they don't resonate with the people being classified, and it only takes a quick look at the contemporary American political process to know that class no longer resonates. Sure, political speeches are filled with references to working families and the hard, back-breaking work that they do, but this never translates into an appeal to the working class. It's hard to argue that there is something called the American working

class if the category fails to have popular meaning. America, at least in its self-perception, is a classless society, or more specifically, it is a society made purely of a middle-class. Like so many of our fast-food establishments, where it is possible to order a medium sized drink although they don't sell a small, American class structure ignores all statistical rules and imagines itself as an average void of variation or extremes.

Originally, this dissertation was intended to come to terms with this “problem of class” in contemporary America. Specifically, I intended to use the work of Michel Foucault to consider how a classless subject comes into being, to understand how power shapes us in such a way that we fail to see class as something that gives us meaning. What I realized, however, is that class is a hard thing to get your head around, especially in the complex world of late-modern capitalism. Put simply, the concept of class really does seem to be losing its explanatory and descriptive power. The world has changed dramatically since Karl Marx and other critics of industrialization appeared on the scene, and although we might not want to give up class as a theoretical construct, a simple, bifurcated classification is somewhat of a hard sell, at least in the neat, clean terms that many class theories have imagined it.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>I should be clear that interesting work on class is being done. For instance, both Aronowitz (2002) and Zweig (2000; 2004) attempt to show that class is still an important element of contemporary American life. Although these are not the only recent works that show promise, they are indicative of the two trajectories taken by most of the recent literature. Aronowitz's work represents one trajectory of class studies—the attempt to explore the possibility of a class-based social movement. This body of literature is aimed at imagining what a contemporary social movement might look like and how class might fit into such a movement. For recent examples of this line of thought see Rose (2000) and Quan (2004). Zweig represents the second trajectory—the attempt to define class in such a way that its existence cannot be denied. This trajectory, whether theoretical or empirical, attempts to tell us exactly what class is so that we might recognize it when we see it. For recent examples of this perspective see Karla (1995); McNamee and Miller (2004); and Perrucci and Wyson (1995). Although there are fascinating studies in each of these trajectories, all of them seem to ignore the more important question: (to paraphrase the title of a recent conference on working class life hosted by SUNY Stony Brook) Why doesn't class work? In other words,

I'm not sure when class got so difficult to define, but two recent trends have increased the confusion. First, American society has seen a steady embourgeoisement of the working classes. One could certainly debate whether or not, in the grand scheme of things, the worker is better off now than, say, one hundred years ago, but there is little doubt that a number of factors have improved the life of the "average" American worker since Engels' eighteen eighty-seven reflection that the working class was "the lowest stratum of American society" (2004, 181).<sup>4</sup> For instance, it is hard to deny the positive impact of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century labor movement on the lives of workers. The minimum wage, the eight-hour day, and the weekend all came out of these struggles, and ultimately, the power of collective bargaining resulted in a period of American history where even the relatively low-skilled could expect a relatively high wage. Public education also played a role. By educating the children of the American working class and giving them their first opportunity for educational attainment, the lives of the next generations were substantially improved.<sup>5</sup> In fact, many of those children could not imagine working in the same jobs as their mothers and fathers. Then, of course

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this literature accepts class as a fact of American life and seems to ignore the fact that it often fails to resonate. Another problem with recent literature on class is that it, like so much of recent scholarship, maintains strict disciplinary boundaries; therefore, interesting work in sociology (e.g. Wright 1985) is rarely taken up by political scientists. Possibly the most interesting of the recent work on class has been done by an epidemiologist, see Michael Marmont's (2004) *The Status Syndrome: How Social Standing Effects Our Health and Longevity*. For another recent take on the "problem of class" and the problems that come from theorizing strict class divisions see Southern (2000). She also offers a good discussion of the role of "neo-Marxist" and "neo-Weberian" schools have played in their continuing insistence on strict class divisions.

<sup>4</sup> Granted, the trend might be headed in the opposite direction. The C. Wright Mills classic, *White Collar* (1974), makes an important distinction between the middle class of early America, which inhabited the "rural world of the small entrepreneur," (20) and the twentieth century "white collar masses" (76). Following Mills, my focus here is on the rise of the twentieth century middle class; this seems to be the version of middle class identity embraced by most Americans.

<sup>5</sup> For a more in depth discussion of the role of education in the perception of classlessness, see Benjamin DeMott's (1990) *The Imperial Middle*.

there's, credit. The popularization of credit in the late nineteen seventies and early nineteen eighties further empowered (at least economically) the ranks of working Americans who were now enjoying a solid middle class life: good jobs, good schools, and good credit all interacted to raise the working class standard of living, and to convince them that they were, indeed, the average American.<sup>6</sup>

There is another trend that makes class a difficult concept. If the twentieth-century has witness the embourgeoisement of the working class, then as we enter the twenty-first we are seeing an opposing trend as well: what Bowles and Gintis called “the proletarianization of white-collar labor” (1985, 53). It seems many of the professions that were once considered solidly middle-class are no longer so easily defined. This trend makes it even more difficult to come to terms with the relationship between work and class. As the economist Michael Zweig (2000) has explained, if class is considered less a product of what kind of work you do than the “the power and authority people have at work,” then the ranks of the working-class have grown substantially (3). Of primary importance to the construction of what Zweig understands as America's “working class majority” is the fact that more and more professionals are working in a world that has stripped them of much of their erstwhile power, efficacy, and authority. In the

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<sup>6</sup> Although I disagree with Paul Kingston's conclusion that that class forces aren't at work in American society, his *The Classless Society* (2000) does provide a good description of the phenomena that makes class terms difficult to apply. In *Steelworker Alley* (1999), Robert Bruno persuasively argues that there are bastions of working class community in America. In a fascinating ethnography of Youngstown, Ohio, Bruno suggest that some Americans still reject pervasive middle-class values. Two points are important here. First, the jobs that provided the life-blood for cities like Youngstown are rapidly disappearing from the American landscape, quickly breaking up communities founded on workplace solidarity. Second, even Bruno admits that “none of the workers” he interviewed “used class to describe what they experienced (161). Furthermore, he suggests that it was only through his questioning that many of these workers came to understand the class component of their lives as a class component” (164).

contemporary workplace, many professionals—doctors, lawyers, teachers, computer programmers, etc.— appear “more like skilled craftsman, less like independent agents” (25). The alienating effect of this trend is best captured in the title of Jeff Schmidt’s (2000) *Disciplined Minds: A Critical Look at the Salaried Professionals and the Soul-Battering System that Shapes Their Lives*. In this respect, one of the few places unionization is growing in the American workforce is among the professional class, as physicians, professors, teachers, and even graduate students turn to unionization in their continuing struggle to hold onto some sense of workplace efficacy and control of the products of their labor.

In the simplest terms, it’s fair to say that the concept of class in contemporary society is hard to get our heads around; it is a category that defies simple definition, especially in a complicated economic system that often appears to have contradictory logics. To begin to get at the problem of class, I found it necessary to focus on its component parts, to zero in on what makes class so problematic, and to ask how any notion of class (even the middle class) is constructed. To begin this process, I decided to turn my attention to the constitutive elements of class politics in America. To understand why the idea of a working class fails to resonate in American popular and political culture, a place to start might be the relationship between the two parts: work and class. To understand something new about class, it seems necessary to figure out how these parts fit together or, more precisely, why they don’t seem to fit together at all. To talk about the working class in America is to talk about everyone from a receptionist to a teacher, from a custodian to a middle-manager. A distinct class of workers with only their labor to sell seems like an awkward concept, when so many Americans, regardless of

their income, consider themselves to be in that category and also consider the category in which they fit to make up the middle.

Of course, the notion that workers make up a distinctive *working class* is a notion as old as Western political thought.<sup>7</sup> However, from the modern perspective, the idea of the working class as a “particular product” (Marx 1998, 21) of the industrial revolution and capitalist economics depends on the nineteenth-century recognition that workers “have, and are likely to have, political objects that concern them” as a specific political class (Mill 223). Marx is probably most important to *our* understanding of this linkage between work and class affiliation.<sup>8</sup> For Marx, labor was essential to our species’ existence, and within the capitalist super-structure, it was workers who were classified by the fact that they had only their labor to sell in order to survive. For the wage worker, labor power was the only available commodity; “it was the worker’s *life activity* [that] he [sic] sells to another person in order to secure the necessary *means of subsistence*” (1978, 204). This was the reality of capitalism as a mode of production with two antagonistic poles: The “accumulation of wealth at once is at the same time accumulation of misery, the torment of labor, slavery, ignorance, brutalization and moral degradation on the opposite pole.” It is on the latter that we find “the class that produces its own product as capital” (Marx 1977, 799).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> In *The Republic*, we are told that the “hirelings” are a distinct class of people who lack real political and cultural significance and exist because “they have plenty of bodily strength of labor, which they accordingly sell” (63).

<sup>8</sup> For a survey of more recent theories of class as well as attempts to quantify it see Grimes (1991).

<sup>9</sup> Even Weber’s more nuanced notion of class follows this early distinction between labor and capital. Ostensibly, of course, Weber backed away from such a stark distinction between classes when he argued that “we may speak of a ‘class’ when: (1) a number of people have in common a specific causal component of their life chances, in so far as (2) this component is represented exclusively by economic



But contemporary capitalism, especially its American variant, seems to confuse such strict class distinctions.<sup>10</sup> No longer can we distinguish between workers and an antagonistic class that owns the means of production. As the above discussion made clear, the working class now owns more property than ever, even holding shares of stock in the largest companies in America, and the bourgeoisie are being alienated from the products of their labor as never before, reduced to mere wage-laborers, forced to compete with each other on the open market. This too confounds the relationship between work and class; class can no longer be designated by a specific type of work, nor a specific approach to leisure. Given the availability of credit, and the proliferation of financing schemes, we can all enjoy the consumer goods that give both the outward appearance and inward satisfaction of a middle-class life. As Christopher Lasch (1978) has argued, the “propaganda of commodities” provides a very effective way to deflect social insecurities because it “extends aristocratic habits to the masses” (73), allowing everyone to imagine

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interests in the possession of goods and the opportunity for income, and (3) is represented under the conditions of the commodity or labor markets” (1958, 181). This definition posits class more as a position in a power continuum than a position on one pole or another. Even within the major economic classifications, Weber argues, there are a variety of differentiations dependent on where an individual fits into the world of the propertied or the non-propertied. Thus, in “Class, Status, Party,” Weber wants to enter other factors into the analysis of social power such as status group, ethnic group, political power (as differentiated from economic power), and other elements that impact one’s life chances. In other words, to say one belongs to the working class, is for Weber, a little too simple; instead, we need to understand where one fits into the working class, what other alliances influence his or her position, and what sort of possibilities exist for improving it. In the end, however, Weber does concede to the pre-existing logic of class as a product of the capitalist division of labor. The market system of labor, he argues, “monopolizes the opportunities for profitable deals for all those who, provided with goods, do not necessarily have to exchange them,” and gives them a substantial power advantage over those who “have nothing to offer but their services in a native form or goods in a form constituted by their own labor” (182).

<sup>10</sup> There have a number of interesting attempts at capturing the modern class structure. See, e.g., Giddens (1973), Fussell (1983), Wright (1985), Kerbo (1996), and Zwiag (2000).

him or herself as belonging to the same class.<sup>11</sup> It is not difficult to understand why most Americans feel that they are part of the middle class, because in every ostensible sense they are.<sup>12</sup> Any attempt to point out the contradictions of the system, the real dollar value of wages, or the loss of social power is met, understandably, with more than a bit of existential suspicion. Who are we critics to tell the working family that after adding up the products of their life's work, we have concluded that they have far less than they thought?

### *The Problem of Work*

So what is the relationship between work and class? More specifically, what is the relationship between work and classlessness? This is the question that I was left with after more than a little self-doubt about the relevance of this project. Work still plays an important role in how we understand ourselves as classed subjects, but the role has been somewhat reversed. Where once the necessity of work was a constitutive factor in distinguishing one economic class from another, now work is the proof that we belong to the middle class; it is evidence that we have embraced middle class values, even if our actual economic condition comes nowhere near what many would consider middle-class. As I became more and more convinced of the role work plays in the American “myth of the middle class,” I decided that a critical analysis of this aspect of work was necessary to the foundation on which I want to investigate class. Work is not the only factor, of

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<sup>11</sup> Of course, Horkheimer and Adorno (2001) argue that the “culture industry,” through the promotion of consumption as the only legitimate model for modern life, is in fact “controlling” and “disciplining” needs (144).

<sup>12</sup> I follow Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) in thinking that consuming mass culture can be just as alienating as producing it (53).

course. Religion, consumerism, nationalism, etc. all play a role, but work seems to have a prominent position when it comes to assessing where we fit into the culture and how we assess how others fit in. What we buy may say something about us on the surface, but our approach to work says something about who we are: it allows the world to look deep inside our soul.

This, of course, is not news. Claiming that work, or the work-ethic, is essential to the American self-identity is hardly a revelation. The more interesting question is: Where does this ethos of work and responsibility come from? How did it become so deeply ingrained in the American psyche? Paul Bernstein (1997) finds the sources of the American work-ethic moving along two interwoven trajectories: First, work has been posited time and time again as “*sign of salvation*,” second, and more recently, work has come to be considered a vital element in the process of “*self-development*” (19, emphasis mine). The first of these trajectories derives from America’s Protestant heritage, and comes from the tradition, that, beginning with Luther and culminating in American Puritanism, claimed “work in a calling the social product of” some sort of “religious quest” (Weber 2002, xxxix). Most are familiar with Weber’s argument in the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, that Protestantism represents a revolution in theodicy that not only justifies a worldly life but also rationalizes “conduct in this world” as vital to the guarantee of life in the hereafter (Weber 154, 1958). Through the works of men like Robert Baxter and Cotton Mather, this ethos was both brought to and made part of the early “American” relationship to the self and the world. From these religious foundations, spiritual and community leaders made “systematic work a byproduct of

faith,” a process that “shaped . . . American work values for generations to come” (Bernstein 1997, 78).

The second of these trajectories, work as self-development, is more recent and perhaps more relevant in both its philosophical and practical senses.<sup>13</sup> From a philosophical perspective, James Bernard Murphy (1991) has traced this notion of work back to Aristotelian beginnings.<sup>14</sup> Here the mundane and routine world of industrial work is criticized in favor of a moral rearrangement of the economy that interprets work as a process that satisfies Aristotle’s criteria for human development and justice—in short, an approach to work that brings together the “unity of conception and execution.” (227). Work, in this case, would provide the worker with a fundamental and necessary sense of autonomy over how any given job is both conceived of and carried out. This not only constitutes a much more moral approach to the problem of laboring, but suggests that giving workers both a degree of autonomy and creativity in their work—giving them more control over what they do and how they do it—is a necessary condition for human freedom.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> I will discuss this approach to work further in the final chapter.

<sup>14</sup> Jon Elster’s (1986) relies on Aristotelian themes, but finds the most persuasive notion of work as “self-realization” in Marx. In the “Marxist tradition,” he argues, self-realization can be defined as the “full and free actualization of the powers and abilities of the individual” (101). Work is considered a primary activity in the process of self-actualization, but it has to be a special kind of work, one that provides the individual with the ability to develop some of his abilities as a human being (101). In Marx’s own terms, one is reminded of the distinction between the realms of “necessity” and “freedom.” Where the realm of freedom is only achievable when “labor which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases,” if work is rearranged to incorporate elements of self-realization into the process, then it is imaginable that “the realm of freedom . . . blossom[s] forth only with the realm of necessity as its basis” (Marx 1978, 441).

<sup>15</sup> Hannah Arendt’s famous distinction between the biologically necessary “labor” and productive and creative “work” comes to mind as another version of this argument. Although work, for Arendt, is not the final end of human freedom, it is an important step along the “hierarchy” that constitutes the active life (141).

Although the qualitative distinctions between work as mere drudgery and work as self-development have important philosophical implications for the ways that we understand ourselves and our role in late-modern life, this dissertation is not concerned with work as a philosophical concept. What I am interested in, however, is the practical side of the work as self-development trajectory. Here our conceptualization of work as a category of human experience is rarely elevated to questioning the nature of what we do or how we do it; instead it is restricted to questioning our attitude toward the work that we do. In other words, we still embrace the work ethic, only now we are interested in it more as a reflection of our psyche than our soul.<sup>16</sup>

Judith Shklar has contributed greatly to our understanding of the role work-as-self-development has played in American life. In *American Citizenship* (1991), she explains how the American work ethic in the early republic was reinforced by the republican “anomalies” of slavery and aristocracy (64). Faced with these realities that seem to deny the existence of free and equal citizens, work becomes not evidence of Protestant grace, but evidence of republican social standing and qualification for citizenship. It was also evidence of how important individual and social progress were to the new republic:

The individual citizen may expect to improve his social position by hard work because he lives in a democratic and constantly progressing society, and uninterrupted social progress is in turn assured because Americans are hard working and public spirited democrats. They create the public wealth which each of them may hope to share. (67)

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<sup>16</sup> The history of psychoanalysis has a role to play in this transition as it builds on Freud’s initial understanding that “no other technique for the conduct of life attaches the individual so firmly to reality as laying emphasis on work; for his [sic] work at least gives him a secure place in a portion of reality, in the human community” (1969, 30n5).

In other words, it was not only individual self-development, but the successful development of the republican, democratic experiment itself that was at stake in the issue of one's relationship to the work ethic.<sup>17</sup> The productive citizen ( Shklar's "independent earner") is not only bent on developing his<sup>18</sup> own capacities for self-government, but also on contributing to the development of the social order and the social capacity for progress, political independence, and economic viability for the emerging nation.

The notion of work as self-development, taken up further in the final chapter of this dissertation, does not seem to be the predominant notion of the work ethic operating in contemporary American society. Obviously, religion still plays a fundamental role in how some understand themselves and their role in the world, and without doubt their work ethic comes from their religious convictions.<sup>19</sup> But for many of us our relationship to work works on the level of a concern for our self; it is a reflection of who we are and our place in the world. In short, work as self-development has become work as self-definition. As the philosopher Al Gini (2001) has put it: "Work is our calling card to the rest of the world" (9).

All of this reveals a fundamental problem with most attempts to come to terms with the work ethic, regardless of whether the emphasis is on salvation or self-

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<sup>17</sup> David Rothman (2002) explains how the American version of the asylum grows up around a continuing concern to instill republican values and make good citizens out of the poor. The workhouse is a key institution in this process.

<sup>18</sup> I use the male pronoun intentionally here because this notion of citizenship was limited to men. Shklar claims it is little surprise--given this relationship between work and citizenship in America--that much of American feminism has been preoccupied with middle-class values of work and earning (84). In fact, Shklar focuses on two components of American citizenship, voting and earning. Where the first wave of American feminism focused on the former, the second wave took the latter as its cause.

<sup>19</sup> One has to spend little time in the Pennsylvania Dutch communities of Central Pennsylvania to see this is the case.

actualization. Either way, both the act of working and our attitude towards our work take on ontological and eschatological importance. Whether work is considered a product of God or evidence of our unique capacity for progressive self-development, the prevailing notion is that work is part of who we consider ourselves to be and who we might finally become. As Herbert Applebaum (1998) has put it: “The work ethic is the human ethic; to talk about one is to talk about the other” (viii). While a lot of time and intellectual energy has been spent trying to understand the nature of work, few consider why we readily accept work as part of our nature.<sup>20</sup> In fact, it could be argued that the work ethic has become so much a part of the American psyche that we no longer talk that much about it at all; now that we have embraced the work ethic as part of our self-constitution, we need to preach it no longer.

This dissertation takes a new take on work. Beginning from what I reluctantly call a Foucauldian perspective—one that casts a degree of suspicion on claims to essences or fundamentals of subjectivity and focuses on the regimes of power/knowledge in which such essences are understood—I will challenge the taken-for-granted role of work in modern life. I ask where our attitudes toward work come from and how we come to think of work as essential to our identities: how do we come to think of ourselves as subjects constituted by a particular relationship to work. In order to pursue this line of questioning, I approach work and the work ethic, not as a fundamental part of our human nature, but as what we might call a technique of government. The work ethic, as I

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<sup>20</sup> For one of the most complete “histories” of the work ethic see Applebaum’s (1992) *The Concept of Work: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern*. In David Cherrington’s (1980) analysis of the work ethic, the author states quite explicitly that the notion that the work ethic has declined in the twentieth century “is not in the best interest of the individual, the organization, or society” (119).

understand it, is a technique of government because it produced by a specific set of power relations, power relations that constitute how we understand ourselves as subjects, in this case, working subjects. Put simply, regardless its source, in the end the work ethic governs us; it governs how we relate to ourselves and how we relate to, and pass judgment on others.

### *The Problem of Government I*

Let me preface this section by explaining just what I mean when I say that work or the work ethic is a “technique of government.” Government is a useful term for engaging the phenomenon of the work ethic. This might not be obvious if we consider government only through the lenses supplied by traditional political science or even political theory for that matter. Often government is defined quite narrowly, as the state or a particular set of political institutions that make laws and policies, collect taxes, and provide for the public welfare. This notion of government as *the government* is so self-evident within the discipline that Robert Dahl, in his classic book *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (1961), investigates the nature of government in New Haven, Connecticut without ever finding it necessary to define the concept.<sup>21</sup> In fact, what Dahl is looking for is not so much government but power, and not so much the location of power’s seats (the government?) but who sits in them.

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<sup>21</sup> This is also true of David Truman’s *The Governmental Process* (1951). The “faces of power” debates, of which Dahl (1958; 1961) has been a part, reveal this tension in modern political science. Dahl’s use of the “first face of power” was criticized on the grounds that it focuses too much on how those already in power “exercise” their power in “key” political decisions (Bachrach and Baratz 1962, 948). In their concept of the “second face of power,” Bachrach and Baratz turned their attention to those exercises of power that are not easily observable, for instance, the “*nondecision-making* processes that take place within formal political institutions. Although a vital correction to the pluralist mode of scientific inquiry, the



In contrast to this traditional usage, Michel Foucault understands government much differently. Attempting to capture what he sees as the lost nuance of the word, Foucault defines government as “the conduct of conduct” (Foucault 2000f, 341), i.e., something much more broad and far-reaching than simply the apparatuses and institutions of political power that revolve around the modern state. Foucault understands government as

methods and techniques used in different institutional contexts to act upon the behavior of individuals taken separately or in a group, so as to shape, direct, modify their way of conducting themselves, to impose ends on their inaction or fit it into overall strategies, these being multiple consequently, in their forms and their place of exercise; diverse, too, in the procedures and techniques they bring into play. (Foucault 1998, 463)

In this sense, Foucault’s notion of government plays two different usages of the word conduct. In the first usage, conduct is a mode of behaving oneself, as in practicing the appropriate conduct, self-control or self-restraint. In the second usage, conduct is a mode of showing others how to behave, a way of leading others, as a conductor leads an orchestra (Foucault 2000, 341). Government is not only something that emanates from on high, directing our conduct in one way or another; it is also something we do to ourselves.

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second face of power is still, for the most part, linked to formal processes of governmental institutions. The “third face of power” attempts to move beyond this limitation and applies the concept of power to all sorts of practices, including those that instill a sense of defeat in potential participants who have been consistently denied participation in the process (Gaventa 1980). The notion of government here arguably applies not only to institutions of government, but also varieties of actors and institutions that shape “perceptions, cognitions, and preferences” in ways that make some feel powerless to others that they presume to have power (Lukes 1974, 24). Digeser (1992) and Hayward (2000) take this examination of power even further by applying it less to concrete political actions and more to “a complex of social boundaries to action that, together, define an end or set of standards” (Hayward 2000, 38). The problem is that much of political science and political theory is still focused on the first and second faces of power, and the literature on the third, fourth, and “faceless” is relatively non-existent, especially in application.

In what follows, I will address both the practice of work and the phenomena of the work ethic as a technique of this latter form of government. I explore how the work ethic, as a socio-cultural ethos, governs our conduct as individuals and how it obliges us to engage, judge, and direct the conduct of others. Mitchell Dean has given a name to this kind of analysis. Calling it an "analytics of government," Dean imagines a critical exercise "that takes as its central concern how we govern and are governed within different regimes, and the condition under which such regimes emerge, continue to operate, and are transformed" (1992, 23). In short, using Foucault's approach to questions of government as a starting point, Dean envisages "critical history of the ways in which human beings have sought to direct themselves and others as subjects of various kinds" (1996, 221). The purpose of such a history is to reveal the ways in which humans insist on making themselves and others subjects of specific sorts of power. As an analysis of government, Dean's approach differs from traditional analyses because it

seeks to attend to rather than efface the singularity of ways of governing and conducting ourselves. Thus it does not treat particular practices of government as instances of ideal types and concepts. Neither does it regard them as effects of a law-like necessity or treat them as manifestations of a fundamental contradiction. An analytics of government examines the conditions under which regimes of practices come into being, are maintained and transformed. (1999, 21)

In this respect, an analytics of government constitutes a critical approach to political theorizing. It is critical in the sense that it is "*problematizing*," i.e., it poses both the trajectory of progress and reason as open questions and is "unwilling to accept the taken-for-granted components of our reality and the 'official' accounts of how they came to be the way they are" (Dean 1994, 4). As Graham Burchell explains quite nicely, the critical force of this mode of theorizing comes from two primary effects. First, it has the effect

of “making it more difficult for us to act in accustomed ways;” second, it has the effect of “clearing a space for the possibility of thinking and being otherwise, for the conditions of a real transformation of what we are” (1996, 32-33).

Foucault himself outlines the following three “principles of method” that such an approach to theorizing should follow. First, it should “circumvent the anthropological universals . . . in order to examine them as historical constructs.” Second, it should “reverse the philosophical way of proceeding” that begins with the constituent subject. Instead it should proceed “back down to the study of the concrete practices by which the subject is constituted in the immanence of a domain of knowledge.” Third, its “domain of analysis” should be those practices “understood as a way of acting and thinking at once, that provide the intelligibility key for the correlative constitution of the subject and the object (1998, 462-3).<sup>22</sup> Work and the work ethic, I argue, are nothing if not important keys to the intelligibility of the modern subject. As a definitional practice of the modern self, work lends itself nicely to a critical analytics that challenges the ways in which we embrace the cultural ethos of work, let our work define us, and use it as a standard against which we evaluate and define others. Put simply, this dissertation is a first cut into bettering our understanding of the work that work does on us and through us,

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<sup>22</sup> This approach to method was best demonstrated by Foucault in his “genealogies.” According to Dryfus and Rabinow genealogy is an exercise in what they call “interpretive analytics” that understands there are “no fixed essences, no underlying laws, no metaphysical finalities” that hold together the unfolding of history (1983, 106). Unlike the historical traditions that seek to understand the progress of humankind from one moment to the next, genealogy is a sort of historicism that focuses on the subjugated and erudite knowledges that make the perception of progress possible in the first place. It is not concerned with the elucidation of origins, but with what discursive practices or knowledges interact to make the notion of an origin possible. As Foucault puts it, “genealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species and does not map the destiny of a people;” instead to pursue a genealogical investigation “is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations—or conversely, the complete reversals—the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that give birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us” (1984x, 81).

operating within a specific constellation of power knowledge and toward the ends of particular rationality of government.

### *The Problem of Government II*

The above constitutes what might be called my “theoretical foundations,” an argument for using Foucault’s broadened sense of government to come to terms with the role that work and the work ethic play in late-modern life. There is also a more practical reason for using the concept of government and broadening our understanding of what it means to govern. The concept of government also carries a lot of cultural baggage: It is a fundamental construct of the American political imagination that, although arguably useful, is easily manipulated in the pursuit of particular political ends. Mirroring the traditional political science definitions, the popular conception of government tends to focus on the activities of *The Government*, an ominous force out there in the world completely disconnected from the interests of the people. The liberal tradition, from which we derive much of our understanding of what it means to govern, has always been leery of too much government. As a reaction to the political tyranny of the absolute monarchies, liberalism’s foundations rested on a privileging of human freedom over sovereign power, especially on the rights and freedoms of the individual to be protected from an over-reaching government (Held 1987, 41). Although I do not take issue with the aims of liberalism here, liberalism’s popularization—its translation into a popular ideology—has made it incredibly difficult to link the concepts of government and

freedom in the contemporary political imagination.<sup>23</sup> In fact, the concept of government has become the antithesis of freedom as more popular brands of liberalism have taken more conservative trajectories (e.g. Hayek 1960; Rand 1966; Friedman 1982).

Broadening the theoretical notion of government poses a challenge to the popular version. While liberalism has rightly been distrustful of government, especially in its state-centered definition, it has also regularly posited other domains of human life as free from government. If our understanding of government has a bit more nuance, if we understand government not merely as a set of institutions but as anything that regulates conduct and behavior, then we must cast a wider net of suspicions. We must begin to challenge not only the state's right to govern, but also operations of government as they manifest themselves in religion, culture, and even the economy. Far from getting government off our backs, it could be argued that the brand of liberalism practiced by the likes of Reagan and Thatcher, not to mention the present Republican majority, simply seeks to displace government, to take it out of the hands of the state and relocate it in less obvious places: Revealing the work ethic as a form of government challenges "neo-liberalism" on its own terms.

However, making government visible is a project much broader than this dissertation, and I am well aware of my limitations. In what follows I simply wish to take the important first step in this process. I have not set out to write an all encompassing genealogy of the work ethic, but I hope to lay the groundwork for such a

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<sup>23</sup> I wish to distinguish theories of liberalism from the popular ideology of liberalism here because most thinkers within this tradition have found a government necessary to securing the ends of liberty. Some in this tradition, from John Stuart Mill forward, have even argued that government can have an important role in promoting freedom.

genealogy. While this dissertation remains trapped in the world of theory, I do think I trouble some of the strict divisions between theory and practice. In this sense, what follows might be considered a theory of a particular practice, the practice of work and the ethic that governs it. It is an attempt to get at the role that work and the work ethic plays in our lives by exploring what it means to be governed in late-modern, liberal societies. To do this, however, I have to spend considerable time discussing the problem of government, especially the particular “rationality” of government that comes to be called liberalism,<sup>24</sup> and analyzing how liberalism governs. In Chapter 2, then, I will interpret Foucault’s nuanced conception of government, focusing on how specific techniques of government are made politically useful by particular rationalities of governance, what he calls “governmentality.” This chapter plays a dual role: It addresses some of the key themes used in the balance of the dissertation, to explain what I mean by government, governmentality, liberalism, etc.; at the same time, it also serves as somewhat of an introduction. Foucault’s work on governmentality, and the scholarly tradition it inspired, remain relatively unknown within the confines of American political theory.<sup>25</sup> This is unfortunate, I think, because the Foucauldian tradition provides fertile ground for political theory and for more empirically minded political science.

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<sup>24</sup> My aim here is not to offer yet another critique of liberalism; I hardly see what my contribution could offer at this point, nor do I see the point in continuing the debate. I merely wish to take on a particular rationality of governing that goes by this name. I will discuss the distinction between liberalism as a political theory and as a set of political rationality further in Chapter 2.

<sup>25</sup> Barbara Cruikshank’s *Will to Empower* (1999) is one of the few works published in the US that draws from this literature. Other disciplines have been more receptive, see e.g., Jack Z. Bratich, Jeremy Packer, and Cameron McCarthy eds. *Foucault, Cultural Studies, and Governmentality* (2003). Overall, however, those who engage in this sort of work remain sequestered primarily in Britain, Australia, and New Zealand: see the edited volumes *Foucault and Political Reason*, (Barry et. al. 1996) and *Governing Australia: Studies in Contemporary Rationalities of Government* (Dean and Hindness 1998). See also the seminal *Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Burchell, Gordon, and Miller 1991).

In chapters 3 and 4, I consider Foucault's major works on power through the lens of governmentality discussed in chapter 2. I also focus on how work operates as a technique of power as Foucault understands it. Reflecting on Foucault's oeuvre through the lens of governmentality, I argue, reveals Foucault as a much more consistent and systematic political thinker than he is usually given credit for. Foucault is best considered not a theorist of power or even subjectivity, I suggest, but rather a theorist of government, in the expansive sense in which he used the word. His entire corpus can be understood as an attempt to expose the ways in which modernity governs after the transition, in the West anyway, away from absolute sovereignty.<sup>26</sup> Paying close attention to Foucault's discussion of power in *Discipline and Punish* and the first volume of the *History of Sexuality*, respectively, I explore how liberalism, as the political arm of Western modernity, makes use of disciplinary- and bio-power, to produce a norm or standard of subjectivity, which allows it to imagine both a realm of "freedom from" government while regulating the activities of the subject who exists within this realm. I then consider how to approach the work ethic within the context of these interrelated realms of power and examine both its disciplinary and bio-political roles.

After providing a relatively general description of the work ethic as a technique of liberal government vis-à-vis Foucault's conceptions of power, I will update the story

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<sup>26</sup> *Madness and Civilization*, for instance, could be considered an exploration of the government of reason and unreason in Western modernity and the role played by scientific discourse in the work of liberal government. *The Order of Things* is concerned with just that: the structure given to our lives by language and the knowledge that it engenders. Foucault's focus here is on the discourses that govern us, that allow us to govern ourselves, after we've given up on the divine government. *Discipline and Punish* and *History of Sexuality* Vol. 1 respectively, examine how liberalism governs through a unique engagement with productive sources of power (I discuss each specifically in Chapters 2 and 3). The final two volumes of the *History of Sexuality* consider how we govern ourselves, how it has been done historically—in Greek and Christian life—and how we might do it differently today.

somewhat in chapter 5 and discuss some of the unique aspects of contemporary liberalism—what Foucault and others called “neo-liberalism.” This version of liberalism, I argue, shares many of the attributes of liberal governmentality generally, but is unique in how it sees relationships among the economy, society, freedom, and subjectivity of potentially successful actors in each domain. Put simply, advanced liberalism conflates the historical distinctions among and between these categories of existence, establishing a model of normal subjectivity that looks the same in the social sphere as it does in the economic. The entrepreneur becomes the model of subjectivity *extraordinaire*, and his or her success is rewarded through the ability to engage in the practice of freedom. Contemporary liberalism demarcates the lines of normal subjectivity much more starkly than its predecessors, and those who cannot live up to the assumed standards of normality are more easily marginalized and disqualified.

In chapter 6, I examine how the work ethic functions as a technique of contemporary liberal governmentality and gesture toward a concrete direction that these theoretical foundations might follow. Specifically, I follow Foucault in defining government as the “contact point” between what he calls “techniques of the self” and “techniques of domination,” and I explore how the work ethic has historically operated as each of these techniques and consider how it continues to do so. Arguing that psychiatry plays an important role in this story, I investigate how psychiatric knowledge employs the work ethic in its attempt to construct a scientifically valid model of normality, and how that model is then utilized in political practice. As such a vital part of our lived experience, work has a lot to do with how we understand the normal from the abnormal, and how each is governed within liberal societies. Work plays a vital role in how we



become subjects of various types of power; it determines multiple facets of our social existence; the absence of this ethic might even dictate the terms of our marginalization or exclusion, whether we are disrespected or disqualified. This chapter might best be considered the vital first step in an ongoing project, the jumping off point between the theoretical foundations established in this dissertation and the larger investigation of the work ethic that is to follow.

## Chapter 2

### Liberalism and the Government of Freedom

Before illustrating how liberal techniques of government, such as the work ethic, are used to legitimate and disqualify particular versions of liberal subjectivity, let me briefly outline the three terms that are key to this dissertation—liberalism, government, and governmentality. Liberalism, as many of the debates within contemporary political theory have made clear, is unfortunately a politically charged term that can be used to refer to the thought of theorists as diverse as Locke, Rousseau, Mill, Dewey, Rawls, and Flathman, just to name a few.<sup>27</sup> I do not intend to enter the debate over the meaning of liberalism or challenge the premises of so-called “political liberalism;”<sup>28</sup> sufficient intellectual time and energy have already been spent on this debate.<sup>29</sup> My use of the term liberalism below is inspired strictly by what Foucault calls “liberal governmentality,” i.e., a specific rationality of politics that calls itself liberal. Instead of a specific political

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<sup>27</sup> Will Kymlicka makes a rather persuasive case that even Marx could fall under the banner of liberalism, or at least “was in general agreement with the liberal view of our essential interests” (1989, 100).

<sup>28</sup> For good introductions to that debate see Sandel (1984) and Rosenblum (1989). For the perspective of some of the participants in the debate see Rawls (1971 and 1996), Kymlicka (1989), MacIntyre (1984), Taylor (1984), and Walzer (1983). For a “postmodern” critique of liberalism see Brown (1995).

<sup>29</sup> I was reminded of the futility of this debate at a recent meeting of the American Political Science Association. Attending a panel considering “the agony of being liberal,” Wendy Brown gave a paper critiquing “liberalism’s” capacity to promote economic injustice, while Stephen Macedo celebrated “liberalism” for its concern with justice. Although it became clear that both thinkers shared similar political commitments and normative concerns, their heated argument revolved around an inability to communicate with each other because of how they, respectively, interpreted the tenants of liberalism. What could have been an insightful discussion of the possibility (or impossibility) of justice in late-modernity was, instead, a combination of a broad attack on everything liberal and a rather defensive apology for liberalism.

theory or ideology,<sup>30</sup> liberalism, as I will use it, describes a political rationality that embraces specific conceptions about the role of practices and policies of governing endemic to the modern, liberal state. Liberalism in this sense is a “principle and a method of rationalizing the exercise [and the limits] of government . . . aim[ed] at maximizing its effects while diminishing, as far as possible, its costs” (Foucault 1997a).

### *Government and Governmentality*

Beginning primarily with his 1978 and 1979 lectures at the Collège de France, Foucault turned his attention away from those “several technologies of power” (Foucault 2000b, 300) that dominated his work through the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* and began to direct his interests toward “a fresh domain of research” that he came to define as “governmentality” (Gordon 1991, 1).<sup>31</sup> Foucault’s concern with the question of government attempted to capture what he saw as the lost nuances of the word. Following through on his claim that political theory needed to cut off the king’s head, Foucault hoped to employ this broad sense of government to engage in a specific line of questioning rarely considered by traditional political analysis. Foucault argued that

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<sup>30</sup> Although I am not using the term liberalism to refer to a school of political theorizing, political theories do play a role in how liberal practices of government are understood. Although I wish to focus on specific liberal practices of politics, at times it will be necessary to discuss the role theory plays in understanding these practices.

<sup>31</sup> In his introduction to *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (1991), Gordon suggests that Foucault “shifted his attention away from governmental themes” in the last two volumes of the *History of Sexuality*. However, I would argue that if “techniques of the self” are understood as techniques of government, then, in the end, these two volumes were consistent with Foucault’s later concerns with government. As Foucault himself claims in a pseudonymously penned entry to the *Dictionnaire des Philosophes*: “One sees how the theme of a ‘history of sexuality’ can fit within Michel Foucault’s general project. It is a matter of analyzing “sexuality” as a historically singular mode of experience in which the subject is objectified for himself and for others through certain specific procedures of ‘government’” (Foucault 1998, 463). Likewise, Thomas Lemke (2002) has argued that “government” is the “missing link” that connects Foucault’s two post *Discipline and Punish* research interests (51).

government also operates beyond the bounds of state activity, in ways rarely considered governmental. If the government transcends the state and operates in the minutia of everyday life, it is important to consider what sort of discourses and practices function in a governmental fashion and investigate the various elements of modern life where governmental operations located. Put simply, Foucault obliges us to ask just how we are governed by what some have aptly called “political power beyond the state” (Rose and Miller, 1992).

In modern political science and political theory, the notion of government is interpreted primarily as state activity and concerned with explicit political power. As Colin Gordon points out, Foucault’s complaint with traditional political theory was that its emphasis all too often “attends too much to institutions, and too little to practices” (1991, 4). Practices of government, Foucault explained, could take various forms, and the working definition he provided for government was simply “the conduct of conducts” (Foucault 2000f, 341). Government certainly had to do with regulation of human beings by state institutions and activities, but it was, in effect, much broader than that. In Foucault’s sense what it means to govern, “conduct,” incorporates both definitions of the word. First, conduct means most certainly “to conduct,” as one might conduct an orchestra or “lead others” in specific forms of action. However, conduct also refers to a way of behaving *yourself*, without the direction of others, “within a more or less open field of possibilities” (341).

Government, in this sense, is simply “the management of these possibilities,” the possibilities of conduct. Government operates on multiform levels, participating in multiple facets of human beings’ existence; it deals with “their relations, their links, their

imbrications with those other things which are wealth, resources, means of subsistence,” but also their “customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking . . .” (Foucault 1991, 93). But government in this sense also applies to the various ways we govern ourselves, regulate our own actions, and conduct our own conduct. As Nikolas Rose (2002) puts it, government encompasses “all endeavors to shape, guide, direct, the conduct of others; however, it also embraces the ways in which one might be urged and educated to bridle one’s own passions, to control one’s own actions, to govern oneself” (3).

### *Technologies of Government*

There were two primary “technologies” of power and subjectification that concerned Foucault throughout his lifetime, and he brought both of these together in his lectures on governmentality. First, much of his work from *Madness and Civilization* through the initial volume of the *History of Sexuality* concentrated on what he came to call “*techniques of domination*” (Foucault 1993, 203). These books were concerned with what Foucault called “dividing practices,” i.e., those discursive dividing lines that distinguish the normal from the abject. In *Madness and Civilization*, for instance, his aim was to understand how Western society demarcated the distinct realms of “the mad and the sane;” in *The Birth of the Clinic*, it was “the sick and the healthy;” and in *Discipline and Punish*,” the criminals and the ‘good boys’” (Foucault 2000f, 326). It is easy to see how these techniques of domination function as techniques of government and how they direct conduct: Constituting the limits of acceptable subjectivity they control marginal populations, distinguish the qualified from the unqualified, and protect the normal from the abject.

But these techniques of domination only tell a part of the story of how we are governed. In his later work, Foucault concentrated on yet another set of governmental techniques that might be less obvious but no less important: techniques that make it possible for individuals to participate in their own subjectification. These “*techniques of the self*” constitute a specific approach to governing that obliges

individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, perfection, or immorality. (Foucault 1988a, 180)

Ultimately, Foucault argued, government should be understood as the “contact point” between these two interrelated techniques of subjectification. Government is the overarching technology through that links these two techniques with the objective of directing conduct in a politically useful manner. The management of these techniques is what Foucault comes to call “governmentality.” This concept denotes a specific way of thinking about government, both of the self and of others, within specific social and historical contexts, a bringing together of the various governing technique in ways that correspond to particular political directives. According to Foucault, governmentality consists of:

1. The ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principle form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security.
2. The tendency which, over a long period and throughout the West, has steadily led towards the pre-eminence over all other forms (sovereignty, discipline, etc.) of this type of power which may be termed government, resulting on one hand, in the formation of a whole series of specific governmental apparatuses, and, on the other hand, in the development of a whole complex of *savoirs*.

3. The process, or rather the result of the processes, through which the state of justice of the Middle Ages, transformed into the administrative state during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, gradually becomes 'governmentalized.' (Foucault 1991, 102-3)

In short, governmentality is the interplay between various regimes of government, and Foucault's aim in studying governmentality sought to understand how both techniques of domination and techniques of the self are brought together under a specific regime of power to answer a particular set of questions such as the following: How does one govern? Whom does one govern? What constitutes the boundaries of legitimate government? And, a question that becomes important after the liberal revolutions, how does one know when one governs too much?

To answer these questions, one needs to pursue a historiography of government, revealing its continuities as well as its transformations. Foucault's own historiography begins with a series of questions: When, he wants to ask, did modern government begin to take shape? When did population replace sovereignty as the primary concern of government? What types of knowledge are necessary to govern populations appropriately? How does the modern state change the relationship between governor and governed? Following this line of inquiry, Foucault outlined the history of western governmental rationality, a history that culminated in twentieth-century liberal practices of government. I will provide a brief version of Foucault's history below and then discuss the governmentality of contemporary liberalism.

### *A Brief History of Governmentality*

Foucault makes it clear: we have always been governed. There is no state of nature in his story of governmental rationality, no time “before” government, no state of “perfect” freedom *from* government.<sup>32</sup> Instead, there are merely transitions in the ways that we are governed and govern others. There are transformations in the ways that government reacts to the governed, the problems facing government, and the ideas (and ideologies) that inform government—but government itself seem to be one of the few facts of human existence. The birth of the modern form of government, for Foucault, takes place in couple of stages. First, there is the unique form of individualizing power that emerges with nascent Christianity. Second, there is the disembodiment of sovereignty that takes place sometime in the sixteenth century, laying the foundation for liberalism and raising a series of new questions about government such as: “How to govern oneself, how to be governed, by whom the people will accept being governed, how to become the best possible governor (Foucault 1991, 87)? In other words, governmentality is any particular regime of government best suited to providing answers to these questions.<sup>33</sup>

### **Pastoral Government**

Tracing the various techniques of the self from antiquity through nascent Christianity, Foucault reveals that there is something quite unique about the early

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<sup>32</sup> Even Locke’s state of nature was not imagined as a state free from government: “[T]he *state of nature* has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges everyone: and . . . reason is that law . . .” (Locke, 9).

<sup>33</sup> Mitchell Dean (1999) defines “regimes of government” as those “organized practices through which we are governed and through which we govern ourselves” (18).



Christian form of “pastoral” power. Like its predecessors, to be sure, this is a conception of power ensconced in a specific relationship to authority; however, unlike anything that preceded it, pastoral power represented a distinctive way of looking upon authority.

Authority in this case took on a new role, the role of a pastor who led individual subjects much like a “shepherd followed by a flock of sheep” (2000c, 300). In this relationship, the shepherd’s role was clear; he provided guidance, directing his flock toward salvation. But the individual member of the flock also had an important role to play. Each individual became responsible for the self-knowledge that provided the certainty of being saved. In this respect, the pastoral relationship served as an interaction between pastor and pastorate that provided individuals the tools for knowing themselves and understanding how this self-knowledge corresponded to the will of God.

Pastoral power, as Foucault understands it, is a unique game of self identity: knowing one’s obligations, duties, and failures. It is a game of revealing oneself to God with the hope that God might reveal himself back. Unlike the Stoic tradition, where self-examination was aimed at remembering actions in order to judge them against specific rules of conduct, members of the Christian pastorate wished to know themselves in order to renounce themselves, to sacrifice themselves wholly to God’s will. Part of the uniqueness of Christian asceticism is that it demands “a certain renunciation of the self and of reality” that enables one to transcend reality itself, or obtain another “level of reality” that is salvation (Foucault 1988b, 94). In this sense, it is renunciation as “a kind of everyday death—a death that is supposed to provide life in another world” (2000c, 311).

Pastoral power's uniqueness rests in its individualizing nature, the ways it approaches the individual as a product of government asks individuals to govern themselves. Where self-government had been important to the ancients, especially concerning the appropriate expression of citizenship, in Christianity, self-government was "uncoupled" from political citizenship, and took on new meaning with respect to the individual's willingness to sacrifice him- or herself to the will of God (Dean 1999, 75). Christianity is also unique in this respect because of the role it gives to the pastor as caretaker of the flock. Here, authority and power are understood as very centralized, emanating from God and running through the pastor eventually flowing down to the flock. Just as God is concerned with the welfare of his children, the pastor takes on the responsibility of the entire flock. It is the duty of the pastor to know each one of the flock individually, to guide each and every member down the right path, and to provide for their well being. What results, Foucault believes, is an approach to government that takes as its aim the welfare of populations—a form of authority that not only commands but "must [also] be prepared to sacrifice itself for the life and salvation of the flock" (2000f, 333). This is quite different from pure authoritarian rule, in which the willingness to sacrifice falls solely on those being ruled. In pastoralism, those who claim the authority to govern also claim responsibility for those who are governed, even as it directs those subject to its authority in "continuous and permanent ways" toward their salvation (2000c, 300).

But pastoral power, at least in its earliest forms, was quite distinct from what we would now consider political power. Until the Reformation, the concern of pastoral authorities was life in the hereafter, life beyond the limits of earthly restrictions.

Individuals were asked to sacrifice life in this world for the hope of a better life in the next. Foucault points to the sixteenth century as an important turning point in the nature of pastoral power and the rise of a radical critique of pastoral authority. From Luther forward, the authority of the pastor is challenged as individuals begin to ask important new questions about the nature of government culminating in a refusal to be governed in the traditional way.<sup>34</sup> This refusal engenders the beginning of the end of feudalism, as “[t]he general questioning of government and self-government, of guidance and self-guidance” opens the ground for the “birth of new forms of economic and social relations and political formations” (1997, 68).<sup>35</sup> This transition brings about a new relationship to government as well as new concerns regarding governance. As in the pastoral tradition, this new “art of government” is an individuating form of power concerned with directing the activity of a collective body of individuals. But its concerns are much different: Its ends are secular rather than spiritual and rely on politics rather than piety.

### **State Reason**

For Foucault, the best early example of this new “political” rationality of governing is found in the sixteenth and seventeenth century German and Italian approaches to governing: *raison d'état* and the science of police.<sup>36</sup> According to Colin Gordon, it is this approach to government that allows the political state to “outgrow its

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<sup>34</sup> Foucault seems to suggest that this initial challenge to pastoral authority engenders what we now come to call “critique.” From this “first anchoring point” begins a process where “not wanting to be governed in that way was essentially seeking in Scripture a relationship other than the one that was linked to the operating function of God’s teaching. To not want to be governed was certain way of refusing, challenging, limiting . . . the ecclesiastical magisterium” (1996, 385)

<sup>35</sup> security, territory, population.

<sup>36</sup> Foucault uses the German *Polizeiwissenschaft* which has been translated as “policy science” (Gordon 1991, 10; Dean 1999, 84-92).

Machiavellian limitations” (1991, 10). As Machiavelli saw it, there was no immediate, tangible connection between the prince and the people of the principality, no link that the prince had to his territory other than his ability to protect it.<sup>37</sup> But the late-sixteenth century saw attempts to link the prince with his people, the state with its population. Here the pastoral merges with the secular, and government of a state no longer means manipulating the discontinuity between the prince and the principality, but constitutes an attempt to “establish a continuity” between the government (as a political institution) and the governed as a population (Foucault 1991, 91).

The emergence of “the population,” with its own capacity for self-government, is the real transition that marks the modern “art of government.” This notion of a population initiates a shift in the concerns of administration and invokes a series of new problems for government. Government, now “a sort of complex composed of men and things,” is no longer concerned merely with the protection of territory, but instead:

men in their relations, their links, their imbrications with those other things which are wealth, resources, means of subsistence, the territory with its specific qualities, climate, irrigation, fertility, etc.; men in their relation to that other kind of things, customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking, etc.; lastly, men in their relation to that other kind of things, accidents and misfortunes such as famine, epidemic, death, etc. (1991, 93)

The state now takes on new importance the lives of the governors and the governed alike: It not only governs threats to sovereign authority, but also morality, health, and the production and distribution of resources—what comes to be called the economy. In this new approach to governing Foucault locates the convergence of the Greek “city-state game” of politics with the Christian “Shepard-flock game” of morality and welfare. As

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<sup>37</sup> See Foucault (1991, 90).

Mitchell Dean points out, the modern state might be thought of as the nexus of these two separate trajectories of government as “modern conceptions of politics refer back to the ancient model of the polis,” and “most modern conceptions of government and administration refer back to the model of the pastorate” (1999, 83).

In the context of this new rationality of government, Foucault wants to consider the rise of “the economy” as a specific entity that must be managed by a more centralized form of administration. At first, of course, this rational approach to the management of a population’s economy is not directed at maximizing the wealth of the population. In its initial manifestation in the cameralist and mercantilist state, the management of the economy is aimed at maximizing the wealth of the sovereign; however, it is an attempt to maximize the sovereign’s wealth through governing the interaction between the nation and its individual households, or between the royal family and the families of the nation (Dean 1999, 93; Foucault 1991, 92-101). This is where Foucault sees the limits of these early arts of governing: They remain concerned with the protection of an embodied sovereign. This is where liberalism comes in. Where the population and the economy came into being as a sphere of government to be managed in the interests of a sovereign who wished to “accumulate wealth, build up his treasury and build an army with which he could carry out his policies” (Foucault 1991, 98), by the eighteenth century these spheres of life are reconfigured to “designate a level of reality, a field of intervention, through a series of complex processes . . . absolutely fundamental to our history” (93). Population and economy are no longer considered property of sovereign authority but individual spheres of existence, both distinct and interconnected, and demanding a new approach to government for their successful regulation. The early attempts to regulate

these spheres constitute the foundations on which liberal, democracies are subsequently erected.

### *Liberalism and the Government of Freedom*

With the rise of new fields of reality such as the population and the economy, as entities demanding proper management, the state is faced with a series of new questions regarding how best to govern. For Foucault, it is the management of these new entities—the population and the economy—that comes to define early liberal regimes. The population brings with it a very unique set of problems that must be addressed: The population replaces the family as the primary realm of governmental concern. The family remains a means, but is not longer the final end of government. It no longer defines either the people or economy that government is concerned with. By the eighteenth century, the population is no longer reducible to a collection of familial relationships existing under the umbrella of the sovereign. Instead, the population emerges as an entity with its own set of regularities, predictabilities, needs, and aspirations (Foucault 1991, 100). As such, the population can no longer be regulated through a politics of pure sovereignty; instead, the task of governing populations engenders a new approach to power and a new set of knowledges that allow the population to be governed, at least ostensibly, on its own terms. Primary among these new types of power are “disciplinary-“and “bio-power” (which will be discussed at length in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively), and primary among these new forms of knowledge was a new science of economics, or political economy.

What liberalism adds to this history of governmentality is twofold: First, liberal rationalities of government conceive of the multiple spheres to be governed—the individual, the populations, the economy, etc.— as independent entities with their own regularities that must be managed accordingly, but that also have a natural logic that cannot be interfered with; second, these regulatory practices must be directed toward an the maximization of the security, health, and wealth of the population as a collection of individual interests. On the first of these points, liberalism is unique because it is an approach to government that is rather reluctant to govern. From its earliest variants, the political rationality of liberalism, Foucault points out, “resonates with the principle: ‘One always governs too much’—or, at any rate, one always must suspect that one governs too much” (1997c, 74). Combined with the second point above, this self-suspecting approach to governing, characterizes the unique problematic of liberal governmentality and can be summed up as follows: How do we govern in a world where the ideal is to be free from the government? In other words, the problem for the liberal approach to government was how to limit the legitimate role of state activity in ways that expanded and protected the realm of freedom.

### **The Rise of the Social**

From its inception, of course, liberalism solved the problem of limiting state action quite easily through a system of rights and a known set of laws that must be respected. But guaranteeing individual rights against the power of the state did not necessarily guarantee the individual’s economic freedom. Although these various realms of liberal freedom obviously overlap, they do not constitute a unified entity and

guaranteeing freedom in one does not necessarily correspond to the presence of freedom in another. In much starker terms, Mitchell Dean attributes the rise of this liberal problematic of government to the inconsistency between the formal freedom of the individual as a holder of political rights and the “economic subject of interests” whose rights may or may not be an adequate source of protection. The problem then is how to foster an economic subject that is “cultivated in a manner consistent with the political and legal subject of rights” (1999, 124).

The solution to this problem is found in the development of a new sphere of life that comes to be known as “society.” Society, ironically, comes to be understood as a natural entity, a realm of existence where the freedom of the population can be managed. Society is a sort of totality that encompasses not only individuals, but also the family and the economy; it is a sort of totality that consists of all of these elements of modern existence, but that is not reducible to any of them.<sup>38</sup> “Society,” Foucault explains, becomes “both a precondition and the final end” of liberal governments. Society is not the state itself, and state sovereignty is not the end pursued by the government of the state. Instead, state government is a tool for ensuring the protection and advancement of the society. The society is not a product of the state; at best, is a natural outgrowth of the civil society, an entity meant to protect the rights and wealth of social citizens. In this new liberal form of government, society becomes that space inhabited by individuals, families, interests, and economics. The government’s role is to regulate this space and provide for the successful interaction of these entities; it must provide solutions to social

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<sup>38</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the rise of the social see (Donzelot 1984; Dean 1999, 123-130; Rose 2000, 98-136).



problems and settle social conflicts, promote free competition among economic actors, and create the necessary conditions for a free market. The liberal state must ask just “what relationship must political sovereignty establish with the quasi-natural reality over which it presided but with which it cannot do what it likes” (Burchell 1996, 25).

The social is ultimately the space in which freedom is lived and acted upon, and the role of the state in this space is both specific and limited. The space of the social must be regulated, even when actors within this space must be able to act and have both their rights and personal security protected, but the protection of one person’s rights is often interpreted as a threat to the rights of others. Insofar as the liberal state must manage the above paradox, its role might be characterized as one of reluctant intervention; it knows that at times it must intervene as the guarantor of the liberal subject’s freedom, but it must be reluctant to do so because it is always leery of governing too much. If the political rationality of liberalism comes complete with its own inherent method of self-critique, then the real challenge for liberal governmentality, one of governing effectively without overstepping the bounds of limited government, governing in a way that maximizes a subject’s freedom from government while at the same time guaranteeing their freedom through direct actions by the state.

So how can we imagine a form of government that is suspicious of government or rather, a form of government that is, presumably, content to let free subjects govern themselves? It is here that liberal governmentality once again reveals its uniqueness as a political rationality. Whether pastoral, cameralist, or mercantilist, the political rationalities that preceded liberalism all relied, to some extent, on a sovereign form of government, on centralized control over the lives of political subjects. However,

liberalism derives its critical force from a challenge to this type of rationality.

Characterizing it as “political power beyond the state” (1992), Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller refer to the liberal form of governing as “government at a distance,” a way of governing that attempts to conduct the conduct of political subjects while appearing not to interfere, while appearing to maximize their freedom (1990, 9). If government is considered merely as state activity, an expression of sovereign power over its subjects, then the liberal critique of government is well placed and rather persuasive. Liberalism, in some respects, has solved the problem of an overarching sovereign state; it has allowed free subjects to govern themselves, and it has rewarded those capable of self-government with an extraordinary sense of freedom and efficacy. If seen from a perspective that defines government as state sovereignty liberal political rationality has been highly successful, because it has perfected those practices of governing that limit state power while enabling a definition of free subjectivity that can operate in those realms of freedom off-limits to state activity.

It is in this context that Foucault’s incitement to “cut off the king’s head” in political theory finds special significance. If we employ Foucault’s more nuanced sense of the word government, then it is possible to see how liberalism governs without appearing to do so, how it intervenes in the realm of the social while, ostensibly, maintaining a safe distance. Liberalism, as form of government, is irreducible to state sanctioned political activity. In fact, the liberal political rationality might sometimes be at odds with activities of the state, but this does not mean that liberal political rationality is not intent on governing. Liberalism is defined by its aims and ends, its specific directions and general outcomes, and its key goal is to create a realm of freedom in which

the self-governed might be successful. Regardless of the specific programs or political commitments, these aims are rarely up for contestation: What is open for critique and contest is how best to achieve these ends. Is the proper role of government to protect the individual rights of liberal subjects, or is it to cultivate the freedom of subjects who have yet to realize freedom? Is it best to govern through the logic of the market, or through a complex social safety net? Or, is there a “third way” that attempts to maximize free markets, while recognizing that precautions must be taken to minimize the inherent danger in doing so?

These are the questions up for debate in the liberal political reality. It is this minutia of governmental policy, or “techniques of government,” that have “become the only political issue, the only real space for political struggle and contestation” (Foucault 1991, 103). Liberal governments, then, govern through a collection of policies that are aimed at limiting political activity in the non-political realm of the social. To do this, liberalism (again, conceived of as practices of government) relies on indirect means of governing and assuring its aims, enlisting a host of non-state technologies of government “to administer these ‘private’ realms” of the social, “and to program them and shape them in desired directions” (Rose and Miller 1992, 180).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Explaining these attempts to govern and administer the non-political guides much of Foucault’s work. From his early preoccupations with madness forward, Foucault was concerned with exploring how power might be thought to operate in a way that might not correspond to the overtly political operations of the state or a specific class power. He explored how this more circuitous and insidious power operates in ways that have as much, or more, bearing on the lived experience of modern subjects than the power represented by the sovereign state. He investigated how modern humans are turned into subjects of these invisible and disparate apparatuses of power, how does this power produces as well as dominates the modern subject, and how do these power relations normalize by differentiating between legitimate and illegitimate versions of subjectivity.

### **The Subject of Liberal Governmentality**

If the aim of liberal governmentality is to enhance the freedom of the liberal subject, then it is necessary to consider just who this subject of liberal freedom is. There are two possibilities: First, the free subject represents some embedded human essence, some ontological truth about human nature; second, the free subject of liberalism is a product of liberal governmental practices, a product of the techniques of modern power.<sup>40</sup> It would seem that liberal political rationality assumes the very subject whose freedom it is charged with protecting at the same time that it helps to discursively constitute this very subject. Liberal governmentality, through its concern with governing too much, adopts a set of strategies that “promise to create individuals who do not need to be governed by others, but will govern themselves, master themselves, care for themselves” (Rose 1996, 45). By assuming a preexisting free subject capable of self-government, the political strategies of liberal governments primarily reward those who are already up to the task. In this sense, liberal governmentality depends on a diverse set of techniques of self utilized by the self-governing subject. Those who are fortunate enough to understand what liberal subjectivity demands of them (and are capable of meeting these demands) are legitimized by the liberal technologies of government and are able to live relatively free from direct intervention; however, those unable to meet the same demands find themselves open to the types of intervention Foucault referred to as domination. Here various institutions, which may or may not be directed by the state, are able to intervene

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<sup>40</sup>Wendy Brown (1995) provides a lengthy discussion of how the legal framework in the modern, liberal state constitutes the very subject whose rights it is meant to protect. I will discuss this further in Chapter 3.

in the lives of those who have yet to master the techniques of liberal freedom. The objective here is to transform the misfits into subjects who are capable of this self-mastery, or else to exclude them in ways that pose little threat to the liberal regime. As Foucault puts it, liberal governmentality is a sort of triangulation of productive power that made up of “sovereignty-discipline-government” (Foucault 1991, 102). Sovereignty provides the necessary legal framework and state apparatuses to protect the liberal subject; discipline provides the normalizing force that acts as an “infra-law”<sup>41</sup> legitimating a specific model of subjectivity and marginalizing the abject; and government provides the regulatory processes at the level of population to conduct the conduct of the liberal collective, relying on a series of expert discourses for the observation of its regularities, trends, etc.<sup>42</sup> Notably, from the earliest liberal revolutions forward, liberal subjectivity was founded on the model provided by the emerging bourgeoisie, the first subjects of liberal freedom.

Utilizing Foucault’s governmentality perspective, it quickly becomes clear that the history of liberalism reveals that little has changed when it comes to the constitution of the liberal subject—even though changes have occurred in how the world inhabited by this subject is managed, how government goes about protecting this subject, and how it approaches those who show themselves incapable of self government. That is to say, the claim that liberalism constitutes a continuity that enabled (or was enabled by) market

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<sup>41</sup> The phrase “infra-law” as well as the linkage between the liberal legal framework and the “law of the norm” comes from *Discipline and Punish*. I will discuss them at length in Chapter 3.

<sup>42</sup> For a detailed discussion of the role of statistics in the process of governing see Ian Hacking’s “Biopower and the Avalanche of Printed Numbers (1982); *The Taming of Chance*, (1986); and “How Should We Write a History of Statistics (1991).

economics and industrial and post-industrial capitalism is exaggerated at best. As Foucault points out, there has been a multiplicity of liberal forms of governing, all of which were reactions and adjustments to various problematics of government. In the twentieth century alone, American liberalism has taken at least three distinct forms. First, there was a more “purely” economic liberalism, with a limited government allowing the society and economy to succumb to their natural processes. The reaction to the failures of that approach engendered the welfare-state liberalism of the mid-century, which attempted to enable free subjects through government intervention. Finally, there is the more recent version of liberalism, what some call “neo-liberalism” or “advanced-liberalism” (Rose 1996) that no longer views the economics as a natural process that must be left alone, but rather as a set of variables to be manipulated and managed. This version of liberalism depends less on an essentially free human nature, but rather sees the proper conduct of free and rational individuals as the ultimate result of a properly managed economy (Burchell 1996, 23-24).

Especially in its American variant, this more recent form of liberalism brings together the government of the population, society, and economy in rather unique ways. Where previous forms of liberal governmentality aimed at the maximization of freedom by positing a social and economic domain free from governmental intervention and left to their respective natural tendencies, more recent versions of liberal governmentality consider the economic and the social much a part of the same domain of reality, natural or otherwise, that can be subjected to a singular governmental logic. In this variant of liberal governmentality, governing a society of free individuals is little different from managing an economy of free market actors through the application of a market logic that

assumes the very subject it wants to govern. Where welfare-state liberalism proposed social solutions to market failures, the present political rationality reverses this equation, to provide market solutions to social failures, primarily the inability of some individuals to adopt the characteristics and conduct of the proper liberal subject. While governmental intervention—in the lives of the poor, the mentally ill, the delinquent, etc. — previously came with at least a modicum of public transparency, the defects of the new market-logic society are now left alone to be intervened upon by those agents of disciplinary- and bio-power that Foucault described so vividly in *Discipline and Punish*, including “the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the ‘social-worker’ judge” (1995, 304).<sup>43</sup>

Throughout this dissertation I will discuss the role “the power of the norm” (Foucault 1995) plays in constituting a free, liberal subject of self-government, by considering how the normal attribute of a “work ethic” plays a primary role in modern life. Put simply, work and the work ethic have always played an important role in the constitution of the normal subject of liberalism. As a subject who must understand what it means to be self-governing, the liberal subject, first and foremost, has to be committed to the labor that makes one self-sufficient, gives one the right to property, and qualifies one for citizenship in a liberal democracy. Evidence of a work ethic is one of those normal attributes that reveal the capacity for self-government and allow one to live “free from” government interference. But the work ethic is also something open to judgment, and as the work ethic becomes normalized into the psyche of the liberal subject, the absence of the work ethic becomes proof of abnormality, an excuse for government

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<sup>43</sup> For an excellent collection on Foucault’s utility for the profession of social work see Chambon, Irving, and Epstein (1999), *Reading Foucault for Social Work*.

intervention of various forms. The work ethic thus is a prerequisite to freedom. To not work is to fail to meet this prerequisites and, therefore, to forfeit the benefits of a free society, including the right to be protected from actions of the state. In order to understand how the work ethic acts as a technique of liberal government, it is first necessary to understand how it becomes imbedded in model of normal, liberal subjectivity. I will turn to this question in chapters 3 and 4.



## Chapter 3

### **Disciplinary Power and the Techniques of Governing the Liberal Individual**

Foucault levels his most potent critique of liberal government in his work on disciplinary power, which can be read as an exposé of how liberal regimes govern their subjects in hidden but ubiquitous ways. In a lecture given prior to the publication of *Discipline and Punish* (1995)<sup>44</sup> Foucault even suggests that it is disciplinary power that, ultimately, made the bourgeois revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth century possible by replacing absolute princely power with multiple new technologies of social observation, social control, and social order (1980, 105; 2003, 88). The rise of disciplinary techniques, he argues, correlates quite well with the rise of the liberal regimes of government; in fact, it is the liberal preoccupation with the individual subject of freedom that makes its emphasis on disciplinary power both necessary and possible (2000b, 293). But discipline does much more than that. Within Foucault's specific history of the disciplinary present, which is subtitled "the birth of the prison," he captures the nascent moments of a variety of disciplinary technologies, not the least of which is the factory system of production. In doing so, he provides a way to begin to discuss discipline as a specific technology of liberal governmentality and explore how this rationality of governing relies, among other things, on the instillation of the work ethic into the "soul" of the subject of liberal government.

In this chapter, I consider Foucault's work on disciplinary power as a critique of liberal governmentality: First I consider Foucault's argument regarding the importance of

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<sup>44</sup> Because this chapter relies so heavily on one text, I will use the abbreviation *DP* for all subsequent references to *Discipline and Punish*

disciplinary power focusing, specifically, on how discipline becomes central to the emergence of the Western liberal polity and related practices of governmental rationality. Second, I concentrate on the political implications of this transformation in the workings of power and consider how discipline, as a “technique of domination,” counters the liberal notion of formal, juridical equality and reinforces differentiations and inequalities through the rhetoric of egalitarianism. Finally, I consider how this disciplinary power operates as a technique of the self, through what Foucault calls the “power of the norm”— a power that provides a set of “functional regularities” around which the liberal subject can self-identify. Throughout I consider the role that work and the work ethic play in this disciplinary process, focusing on how they act as techniques of liberal government that interacts with disciplinary power to constitute the governable subject of liberalism.

### *Disciplinary Power: A Brief Overview*

In what has to be one of the most evocative introductions to grace the pages of a philosophical work, Michel Foucault begins *Discipline and Punish* with the story of Damiens, a common man accused of regicide and sentenced to the most horrific of deaths, which Foucault (relying heavily on historical accounts) goes on to describe in vivid detail. In telling such a compelling story, it appears that Foucault’s aim is to grip his readers by turning their attention to a rather stark moment of contrast. A few pages after the rather appalling characterization of Damiens’s execution—an execution that would have been horrific even if carried out without incident—Foucault describes another, quite dissimilar, mode of punishing: the prison with its monotonous time-table,

where structure was applied to every minute of the prisoner's day. The balance of *Discipline and Punish* is dedicated to exploring the metamorphosis of punishment that takes place in the intervening years between the execution of Damians and Léon Faucher's "rules 'for the House of young prisoners in Paris'" (*DP*, 6). What Foucault wants to explore is a change in "penal style" marking a transition that marks the rejection of torture and the rise of "a new power to judge" that utilizes punishment "as a complex social function," and "a political tactic" bound up with the rise of the human sciences (*DP*, 23). Foucault's investigation is quite simply "an analysis of penal leniency as a technique of power" that attempts to "understand both how man, the soul, the normal or the abnormal individual have come to duplicate the crime as objects of penal intervention; and in what way a specific mode of subjection was able to give birth to man as an object of knowledge for a discourse with "scientific" status (*DP*, 24).

Foucault's argument in *Discipline and Punish* is familiar enough to most serious students of political theory; there is little to be gained from a long explication of the text.<sup>45</sup> However, it is helpful to consider the operation of disciplinary power in light of the discussion of governing techniques described in Chapter 2. Before continuing, however, I think it is important to clarify a couple of points often misunderstood by both Foucault's critics and champions alike. First, Foucault's argument, as I understand it, is not that disciplinary power emerges in the classical age as a new form of power distinct from absolute sovereignty. To the contrary, Foucault makes it clear that the

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<sup>45</sup> Although the basic tenets of "disciplinary power" have been thoroughly described in political theory, little attention has been given to the overarching theme of Foucault's work: the work of the norm in modern societies and the political-scientific discrimination between the qualified and disqualified, normal and abnormal. This aspect of Foucault's argument will be emphasized in this chapter.

transformation in power is one of emphasis.<sup>46</sup> In feudal society, discipline operated mostly through ecclesiastical institutions; political power was held in the institutions of sovereign right. However, with the challenges to both ecclesiastical and sovereign authority came a dramatic change of emphasis within the operation punishment. Specifically, discipline takes over as the predominant mode of punishment while the feudal system of sovereign right is more and more deemphasized with each passing challenge to its legitimacy.

Second, I do not think Foucault discounts the concept of domination or suggests that power is something equally distributed.<sup>47</sup> Foucault's point is merely that neither domination nor the ability of resistance is adequately captured in a unilateral analysis of power. Instead of considering domination as a question of power's "appropriation" and absence, he argues, we should consider domination as a strategic effect of a set of "dispositions, maneuvers, tactics, and techniques" that constitute the "exercise" rather than the "possession" of power (*DP*, 26). This approach, I think, takes domination much more seriously than more popular theories of repression. Instead of countering domination with a simple displacement of power or overthrow of authority with the aim of liberation, Foucault asks us to consider that the relations of power that result in

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<sup>46</sup> For instance, in "Truth and Power" (1994x) he characterizes the transformation in power as a "take-off" of pre-existing disciplinary techniques, techniques that were refined in the development of a "new 'economy' of power . . . that allowed the effects of power to circulate in a manner at once continuous, uninterrupted, adapted, and 'individualized' throughout the entire social body (120). In a 1976 lecture, Foucault argues that for a time, the sovereign power and disciplinary power even coexisted, each at various times becoming the carrier for the other (1980x, 107).

<sup>47</sup> Foucault's most forceful statement to this effect comes in an interview conducted with Gilles Deleuze where Foucault states quite clearly that "it is often difficult to say who holds power in a precise sense, but it is easy to see who lacks power" (1977, 213).

domination go “right down into the depths of society,” and to be countered they must first be understood (*DP*, 27).<sup>48</sup>

What Foucault is trying to come to terms with in *Discipline and Punish* is how disciplinary power takes on this new emphasis and how disciplinary rationality becomes the primary rationality operating in some of the most entrenched or defining institutions of liberal government—the prison, the school, the workplace, the hospital, etc—that are often considered politically neutral or socially progressive within liberalism. It is disciplinary power that, ultimately, played a major role in solving the problem of order in liberal society by regulating the movement of both bodies and souls. Disciplinary technology provided the lever by which the sovereign power of right could be successfully overthrown, making the free subject of liberal order possible. In a disciplinary regime, the threat of violence is no longer necessary to the maintenance of order, and sovereignty can be disinvested from the body of an individual sovereign and reinvested into the body politic. It is discipline, in part, that provides the social stability necessary for popular sovereignty: It allows the criminal to be viewed no longer as a direct threat to the body of the king, therefore, subject to the king’s violent revenge à la Damiens.

Disciplinary power, in short, becomes the primary enforcement mechanism for the social contract—marking those who cannot live up to the social obligations that characterize responsible citizens, reforming them if possible, and offering a model of

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<sup>48</sup>In the final chapter I will consider Foucault’s thoughts on how this form of domination is best challenged.

legitimate subjectivity necessary for the full expression of citizenship in the first place.<sup>49</sup>

This is accomplished through a sort of reversal of the relationship between the body and punishment emphasized in the feudal system of social order where the king punishes those who pose a threat to his body or the body of his kingdom. Disciplinary power not only replaces the sovereign body of the king with the metaphor of the sovereign body politic, it also renegotiates the idea of the individual embodied subjects, which is no longer considered a passive body, acted upon by both sovereign and divine will. Instead, the subject comes to be considered an active individual, still embodied, but whose body becomes interpreted as the holder of rights and liberties, an agent with a will of its own with a right to act freely within a determined social field of action. That this subject can be punished rests on the assumption that its body is an “instrument or intermediary; if one intervenes upon it to imprison it . . . it is to deprive the individual of a liberty that is regarded both a right and a property” (*DP*, 11).

The body, Foucault explains, also takes on a set of political investments; it is individual bodies, ultimately, that make up the social body, and the orderly conduct of the individual is necessary for social order. From this perspective, power is exercised, more or less, on the body as the holder of individual right and responsibilities. It is the body that needs to be known and regulated; it is through the body that the individual can be understood and come to understand him- or herself, and it is through the body that we can

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<sup>49</sup> At least this is the hope of the early reformers discussed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of *Discipline and Punish*. As Foucault points out, this attempt at reform wasn't all together successful. Where the hope was for the establishment of the “juridical subject” as the model for the responsible member of the social order, Foucault suggest that what liberal societies all too often end up with is the “obedient subject,” one who is simply disciplined to be an “individual subjected to habits, rules, and orders, an authority that is exercised continually around him [sic] and upon him, and *which he must allow to function automatically in him* (*DP*, 128, emphasis mine).

peer inside the subject and reveal the wants, desires, and needs of the soul.<sup>50</sup> It is on this body that the various techniques of discipline do their work. It is the body subject to the control of the “arts of distribution” and the “control of activity,” those disciplinary techniques for controlling space, time, and activity that Foucault outlines so vividly in *Discipline and Punish*. It is the body that is made docile by these techniques, regulated and trained through multiple institutions of corporeal government, from the obvious example of military training to less obvious examples such as pedagogy and medicine.

***Disciplinary Power as “Infra-Law:” Techniques of Domination in the Liberal Utopia***

So just how does disciplinary power play a vital role in the constitution of the liberal individual? How does this individual come to think of him or herself as a working, producing being? How does disciplinary power produce subjects that consider labor as part of their being? And furthermore, how do the forces that participate in the constitution of this working subject act, at times, as techniques of domination that objectify, marginalize, and exclude?

In the first place, this act of domination, in some respects, can be considered a by-product of the liberal legal framework itself, as the result of a juridical system that recognizes subjects as they stand “before the law.” Wendy Brown has given some consideration to what it means to think about formal equality in a disciplinary society, and her thoughts are instructive here. For Brown, to take Foucault seriously means to

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<sup>50</sup> In this respect, Foucault insists on the connection between the disciplines, as a set of subject-constitutive techniques, and the disciplines understood as “human sciences.” This is where Foucault develops the often cited, but nearly as often misunderstood, concept of an interconnected power/knowledge. Relations of power produce a subject of power, who then contributes to a “corpus of knowledge” about this subject, which in turn allows for the reinforcement or resistance to the original set of power relations, resulting in a feed back loop that constantly reproduces both subjects and knowledge about those subjects (*DP*, 29).

consider the emancipatory potential of the liberal discourse of rights and equal protection against the understanding that *any* notion of human subjectivity—even liberalism’s free subject—is, at least in part, an effect of historically situated power relations. From this perspective, imagining a subject that stands *before* the law seems a practical impossibility because what needs to be considered is how the operation of the law itself, as something that recognizes subjects as such, plays a role in the constitution of the very subjects it claims to recognize.

This paradox of liberalism is especially relevant regarding the question of rights. The language of rights is by necessity a generalized language of universals that defines what legitimate subjectivity must look like. Following Nietzsche, Brown provides an example that reveals the irony that the struggle for rights is only emancipatory until the point that rights are recognized. Therefore, a group whose struggle for rights revolves around a politicized understanding of their identity can only be granted rights as individuals whose politicized (and collective) identity has to be depoliticized if it is to be recognized by the law (1995, 98-99). In other words, it is the liberal discourse of rights itself that partially constitutive of liberal individuality as the generalized and depoliticized conception of subjectivity at the heart of the liberal legal order.

And here’s where the dominating effect takes place. Identity, as Foucault understands it, is always constituted in juxtaposition to what it is not. If we are to understand what it means to be a free liberal subject, then we must know what to define ourselves against, we must know what we are not—“the marginal, deviant, or subhuman.” These are the others that are “constitutive of the centrality and legitimacy of the center” within liberal legal practices (Brown 53). Through positing any manner of



subjectivities that do not comply with the liberal rules of order, the liberal regime provides a definitive set of behaviors that the liberal individual can define *himself* against. Liberal legal discourse appeals to the pre-political, abstract, and neutral nature of humanity at the expense of those who do not meet its standards. Locke was quick to define such a sub-standard human being as that “noxious creature” who has “quit the principles of human nature” (Locke 1980, 11).

Although the liberal legal framework itself might operate in a technique of discipline, from Foucault’s perspective the law’s ability to dominate seems rather innocuous, or at least comparatively so. Here, Foucault seems to take seriously the liberal claim that domination is neither a state function, nor an operation of state institutions. Once again, Foucault wants political theory to dispense with its princely preoccupations and look beyond or beneath the state for the real techniques of domination endemic to liberal society. It is not in practices of interpreting the law, judging rights violations, or defining legal subjects that Foucault finds the dark-underbelly of liberal governmental practices. Instead, it is through the rise of a series of new techniques of judgment that he thinks domination enters into the equation of liberal societies. What makes these new modes of judgment so insidious is that they are not directly linked to operations of state or institutions of government. They seem to operate under their own logic that is increasingly defined by the discourse of scientific certainty and a specific rationality of punishment.<sup>51</sup> In these new forms of judgment, new bodies of knowledge, and new rationalities of discipline, Foucault sees the culmination of

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<sup>51</sup> For Foucault’s most explicit explanation of this form of rationality, see “Questions of Method” (2000c).

disciplinary power's dominating effect: the rise of a new type of power that operates as a regime of normalization. The rise of the norm is itself a product of a society organized around disciplinary institutions and processes, contradictions among the goals of these institutions notwithstanding.

In his detailed description of these disciplinary processes in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault gives special weight to three essential elements of disciplinary power that proliferate in liberal societies. These elements, he argues, are the connecting points between discipline and normalization, a connecting point that establishes disciplinary and normalizing power as a sort of "infra-law," operating below the surface of the egalitarian juridical framework. This infra-law is able to counter liberalism's own appeals to the universal subject, reinstating an asymmetry of power relations (222). Primary among the techniques of discipline is what Foucault calls "hierarchical observation," a subtle form of visual coercion that allows institutional authorities to insist on accepted forms of behavior. Foucault sees hierarchical observation operating in multiple disciplinary institutions, notably the military encampment and the schools. This form of discipline is often built into the architecture of the institution itself, allowing for the presence of the "single gaze that can see everything constantly," that can observe conduct, measure comportment, and direct behavior (173).

Drawing on Jeremy Bentham's detailed outline for constructing the ultimate house of correction, Foucault takes of the concept of "panopticism" to explain just how

observation is able to operate as a subtle form of coercion.<sup>52</sup> The concept of panopticism provides Foucault with a model to explain how disciplinary power is able to operate almost invisibly by virtue of being built into the institution architecture and by inhabiting the spaces where overt power would make itself obvious. Panopticism establishes a “state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (200): it is, however, a power that remains constantly unverifiable for those that are subject to its permanent observation. Unlike overt and explicit power, disciplinary power need not rely on threats of force or outright violence to meet its ends; it does not need to be embodied in an individual that acts as enforcer. The effect of this disciplinary technology is that the “actual exercise” of power should be “render[ed] unnecessary; this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it” (201). In this sense, disciplinary power seems to operate even in the absence of the threat of enforcement. It is because disciplinary power is unverifiable that it is effective.

The usefulness of this observation is made explicit in another component of disciplinary power, what Foucault refers to as “normalizing judgment.” It is at this moment in *Discipline and Punish* that Foucault begins to reveal the political implications of the practical applications of disciplinary technologies, especially as they are taken up

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<sup>52</sup> Of course, Bentham’s vision of the Panopticon was never realized; however, this does not mean the usefulness of the theory went unrecognized. The technology of panopticism, Foucault explains, merely allowed for the various forms of disciplinary power to be abstracted from any specific functionality and transcend their erstwhile institutional limitations. This generalized disciplinary schema could be adjusted and adapted depending on context. The disciplinary power of panoptic observation can now be utilized by state and local government institutions, religious groups and charity organization, hospitals and humanitarian causes, all with their own *raison d’etre*, which often had little or nothing in common (*DP*, 209-211).

by liberal regimes. It is here that the now generalized disciplinary technologies “enjoy a kind of judicial privilege with its own laws, its specific offenses, its particular forms of judgment.” In short, the infra-law of discipline administers “infra-penalties” (178) through the normalizing power of disciplinary technology that operates in the crevices beneath and in between those spaces reachable by the liberal judicial apparatuses. Rather than handing down penalties for failing to observe the law or upholding responsibilities of the contract, disciplinary power focuses on those instances of contravention of the infra-law of the norm, directly affecting those who do not meet up the standard or conform to the rule. In a disciplinary society, the scope of conduct open to these new technologies of judgment is grander than the most draconian jurist could hope to imagine: In the infra-legal realm of discipline “the whole indefinite domain of non-conforming is punishable” (DP, 179).

In much the same way that the liberal experiment of penal reform was founded on a hope of correction, the disciplinary technique of normalizing judgment also has, at its heart, a corrective function. It is here, Foucault explains, that discipline aims at “eliminating defects” that deviate from the standards of normality. Through methods such as the examination, disciplinary procedures of judgment are able to quantitatively measure both the norm and its deviations, allowing the conduct of individuals measured against a:

whole that is at once a field of comparison, a space of differentiation and the principle of rule to be followed. It differentiates individuals from one another, in terms of the following and overall rule: that the rule to be made to function as a minimal threshold, as an average to be respected or as an optimum towards which one must move. It measures in quantitative terms and hierarchizes in terms of value the abilities, the level, the ‘nature’ of individuals. It introduces through this ‘value-giving’ measure, the constraint of conformity that must be achieved.

Lastly, it traces the limit that will define the difference in relation to all other differences, the external frontier of the abnormal . . . . The perpetual penalty that transverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it *normalizes*. (DP 182-183)

While this juridical framework of liberalism constitutes and recognizes individuals according to a set of universals and generalized principles, the disciplinary framework differentiates and discriminates. The power of the norm simultaneously individualizes and homogenize, measuring each individual against the established norm, while constantly re-establishing the norm based on individual measurements. In effect, the egalitarian promise of the liberal social contract is always and already countered by a power that over time becomes much more effective than its juridical counterpart. This power allows this “system of rights that were egalitarian in principle” to be “supported by these tiny, everyday, physical mechanisms, by all those systems of micro-power that are essentially non-egalitarian and asymmetrical” (DP, 222). While the production of the normal is prioritized over the repression of the abnormal within this disciplinary schema Foucault is explicit that repression is often the by-product of normalization; it is a “secondary effect” of a process that insists on conformity—a combined effort of “discipline-normalization” (2003b).

Unfortunately, Foucault’s insistence on a detailed genealogy of the rise of disciplinary power often veils his rather unique understanding of these rather important implications. Buried at the very end of *Discipline and Punish*, after his discussion of more “intriguing” concepts such as panopticism and delinquency, is Foucault’s last word on the dark, underbelly of liberal-disciplinary regimes. What Foucault makes clear at this point is that the domains of the juridical and the disciplinary reinforce, inform, and

empower each another, one picking up where the other leaves off. The result is something that might be considered a juridical-disciplinary continuum. I have already mentioned how disciplinary power inhabits those multiple spaces “that the law leaves vacant” (*DP*, 178); however, it is important to point out that it is often the law itself that empowers it to do so. It is often the official sanction of the law that gives disciplinary power its real authority; the unwieldy mechanisms of discipline are now backed up by the full-force of the law.

At the same time, by attaching itself to the law in this way, disciplinary power allows the law to discover those spaces that were once beyond its scope. This disciplinary power of normalization, Foucault concludes, often informs the operation of judicial processes and dictates not only the normality, but also, and far too often, the legality of specific sets of conduct. In time, what was once considered a violation of the norm comes to be interpreted by liberal jurisprudence as an outright violation of the law. The legal mandate to judge is now surrendered by the court as the real power to pass judgment is given to those new “judges of normality” who are present everywhere (304).

In his 1975 lecture at the Collège de France, Foucault makes these concerns quite clear. In fact, many of Foucault’s lectures that year were dedicated, specifically, to the important connections forged between the juridical and disciplinary-normalization systems of judgment. Alluding to the history of disciplinary practices detailed in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault explains how the modern punishment develops quite a unique relationship with the notion of spectacle. Unlike the horrific public acts of torture that preceded the rise of the prison system, in modern penal practices the act of punishing, itself, is often hidden from public view, absolving the body politic of their

responsibility for punishing. Instead, the trial itself becomes the spectacle, and it is here the real “truth” of the crime is revealed and the public is satisfied that justice is done. To reveal this truth, however, means staring into the soul of the accused, isolating the motivating moments of the crime, and determining the individual defendant’s responsibility for his or her actions, and it is here that the forces of discipline-normalization are allowed to enter into the sacred court of the law. This, Foucault explains, is the ultimate purpose of the trial: to assess the soul of the offender.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the guise of the “expert witness,” an extra-legal specialist empowered by the court to participate in the legal procedure. Expert psychiatric opinion is especially effective in connecting the force of the law with the forces of normalization. As Foucault explains, “expert psychiatric opinion allows the offence, as defined by the law, to be doubled with a whole series of other” actions that, ostensibly, has little to do with the crime itself (2003a, 15). In this equation, the psychiatric expert judges not only the crime, but the offender’s potential to have committed such an act. This is not a legal opinion, but the opinion of one of the modern era’s great arbiters of conduct who must determine, ultimately, if there is something a priori inside the individual— something like a “series of misdeeds that do not break the law, or faults that are not illegal” (19)—that “resembles” the crime. Legal judgment, in these cases, is a secondary act of assessment that legitimizes the normalizing judgment of the psychiatric expert. More than an action’s discordance with the law, what is ultimately judged here “is precisely these irregular forms of conduct that were put forward as the crime’s cause and point of origin and the site at which it took shape, and which were only its psychological and moral double” (17). Psychiatry takes a privileged position in the

halls of justice because it provides objective medico-scientific knowledge to the rather subjective fields of jurisprudence. Much before biogenetic invention could provide the glamorous forensic certainty that dominates prime-time television, psychiatry was the predominant form of medical knowledge in the courtroom.

Foucault explains that it is not only the legal opinion of the judiciary that comes to rest on the scientific discourse of psychiatry—not only was the language of rights propped up by the language of discipline-normalization—but the discourse of psychiatry, as a representative of the regime of discipline-normalization, had a far greater role to play than its quasi-judicial one. Psychiatry, through its ability to distinguish the normal and qualified from the pathological and disqualified, found an important role in protecting the national security. Through its methods, psychiatry could predict dangers; it could legitimate appropriate conduct and condemn the inappropriate. Psychiatry played this predictive role because it brought together multiple sources of knowledge and linked them together with instruments of disciplinary power. Psychiatry was, and continues to be, important to the criminal justice system, but its influence transcends the courtroom and shows up in all facets of modern life, governing our conduct from infancy through adolescence and into adulthood. Through the important role it plays in multiple disciplinary practices and institutions, psychiatric discourse helps to allow the egalitarian nature of liberal justice to be countered by a potentially more powerful discriminating force. Through discipline, the normal are distinguished from the abject, and the qualified are differentiated from the unqualified. Through disciplinary power, psychiatry finds an important social function. Psychiatric knowledge becomes an important instrument of government, which leads Nikolas Rose (1998) to label its operations as vital “*techniques*



*for the disciplining of human difference*” that has the effect of “individualizing humans through classifying them, calibrating their capacities and conducts, inscribing and recording their attributes and deficiencies, managing and utilizing their individuality and variability” (105).

### ***Discipline, Domination, and the Work Ethic***

As Foucault points out in *Madness and Civilization*, the connection between psychiatry and the legal-institutional apparatuses were there from the beginning, and interestingly, their interaction had everything to do with the emergence of the industrial mode of production and the embrace of the work ethic as a fundamental attribute of normal subjectivity. Foucault is quite clear that confinement is proposed, first and foremost, not as punishment or correction, but as a reaction to poverty, especially poverty caused by idleness. What is unique about the early disciplinary institutions is that they were not easily distinguishable from each other: Whether the almshouse or the asylum, these institutions seemed to “assign the same homeland to the poor, the unemployed . . . and the insane (Foucault 1988a, 39).

This disciplinary form of confinement played a fundamental role in establishing the necessary new world economic order in much the same way that the prison helped establish the new political order, and this new world order was rested on a specifically bourgeois work ethic. The justification for confinement was characteristic of this new order; it was an approach meant to address the most unproductive members of society. First, it marked “a new sensibility to poverty,” specifically, the relatively new notion that poverty was an individual failure and could be resolved politically. In this respect, it also

marked “new forms of reaction to the economic problem of unemployment and idleness;” and finally, it announced the arrival of “a new ethic of work” that had to be embraced at the socio-cultural level. This was not merely an economic ethic, but an ethic of liberal self-understanding, one that relied on these institutions of confinement to instill the “imperative of labor” (46).

The dominating power of disciplinary technology comes precisely from this function, its role in differentiating and classifying species and sub-species of human beings, empowering some while excluding others—the very process that the promise of liberalism was meant to counter. As Foucault shows, this mode of power is, on one hand, productive of these differentiations—it produces both the normal and the pathological and all the grey matter in between; on the other hand it also participates in rather general acts of domination, of marginalization, exclusion, and worse. Disciplinary power acts as a governmental technique of domination in the very fact that it seeks to categorize the normal and the average; those fortunate to fall into these categories can only realize their promised freedom in a society that protects them from their dangerous, discursive counterparts. The deviant, the delinquent, the criminal, and the antisocial are all the unfortunate human subspecies whose fate has been sealed by their very role in the production of the normal; they exist in order to be dominated and “normal society” is often eager to comply.

This provides an important point of departure from which the disciplinary nature of the work and the work ethic can be considered. Throughout *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault amends his discussion of penal and pedagogical institutions with a discussion of the disciplinary nature of the emerging factory system and the rise of the industrial

economy. The factory, it seems, is exemplary as a disciplinary institution. Like its penal and pedagogical cousins, the factory is a solution to host of previously unimaginable problems. Fundamentally, the problem the factory was designed to solve was how to take a mass of humanity and turn it into a productive workforce. “In fact,” Foucault explains:

the accumulation of men and the accumulation of capital cannot be separated; it would not have been possible to solve the problem of the accumulation of men without the growth of an apparatus of production capable of both sustaining them and using them; conversely, the techniques that made the cumulative multiplicity of men useful accelerated the accumulation of capital. (DP 221)

However, to be successful, the factory system had to teach new workers the skills necessary for this new form of production and train them to comprehend a new set of expectations. To do this, Foucault explains, the factory relied on the disciplinary gaze so important to the military camp, the prison, and the classroom; it embraced a form of surveillance “that ran right through the labor process,” taking

into account the activity of the men, their skill, the way they set about their tasks, their promptness, their zeal, their behavior, . . . as the machinery of production became larger and more complex, as the number of workers and the division of labor increased, supervision became even more necessary and more difficult. (DP 174)

To overcome this difficulty, the factory relied on all of the major elements of disciplinary architecture. The factory enclosed workers within a virtual “fortress” of production, thereby eliminating the disadvantages of a force of mass labor, e.g., “thefts, interruptions of work, disturbances, [and] ‘cabals’” (DP 142); it also partitioned individuals within this enclosure allowing for individuals to be supervised independent of each other in order to “establish presences and absences, to know were to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others” (DP 143). It incorporated the time-table to make work regular and systematic. Intending to increase

production through the maximization of efficiency, the factory system brought together the organization of both space and time. Through its use of these mechanisms, the factory became an instrument that allowed disciplinary power to meet its “new demand to construct a machine whose effect will be maximized by the concerted articulation of the elementary parts of which it is composed” (*DP* 164).

It is not surprising that Foucault cites Marx here: The processes of discipline that Foucault describes had already been spelled out in the first volume of *Capital*. As Marx describes it, the need to extract surplus value from the industrial workforce took much more than merely accumulating the bodies that would provide the labor. Marx recognized that “the mode of production itself must be revolutionized” (1977, 433). In order to maximize the productive activity available to him, the capitalist must rely on disciplinary techniques that transform the erstwhile model of the small manufacturer into the large-scale cooperative workplace; imposing this form of unnaturally exploitative cooperation necessitated adopting a new model of supervision.

But Marx, by focusing on the new division of industrial labor, had taken the discussion of the disciplinary nature of the factory much deeper than Foucault. In Marx’s view, it is not only the body of the worker, but also his labor power that is fed into the disciplinary machinery. Through its insistence on specialization as a technique of extracting the maximum value from accumulated labor, the capitalist mode of production rearranges the relationship of the worker to his labor-power, the very force that provides life. No longer does a worker experience the productive process from start to finish, but instead each worker performs a part of the process, picking up where the other leaves off so that “one worker therefore directly sets the other to work” (464). In this way, the very

nature of the worker is being disciplined in way that no longer encourage individuals to think themselves as a productive beings, but only as cogs in a productive machine—or as Marx puts it, “one of the constituent organs of the total mechanism” (466). The disciplinary language of Foucault is apt to put new weight on Marx’s discussion of specialization. For Foucault, an individual’s productive activity is no longer treated “*en masse*, ‘wholesale,’ as if it were an indissociable unity; instead, it is approached in a much more “retail” manner that concentrates on “exercising on it a subtle coercion” and “obtaining holds upon it at the level of the mechanism itself” (*DP* 137). The very process of laboring is disciplined into something quite different than “the free, conscious activity that is man’s species character” (Marx 1978, 76). Labor was entered into “machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it” (*DP* 138) in a way that leaves the body of the laborer no choice but to “work with the regularity of a machine” (Marx 1977, 469).

Of course, Foucault and Marx, while describing a similar set of processes and interrelated concerns, do not reach the same conclusions. For Marx the process of disciplining the worker and his or her labor results in the worker’s eventual alienation from both the product of that labor and, ultimately, conscious, productive life itself. Notably, Marx predicates his notion of alienated labor on some sort of remainder, some sort of human essence that could be recaptured or rescued from this industrial production process. Marx already assumes that labor is part of life, that it is the form of consciousness that distinguishes humans from animals. This assumption provides the force behind Marx’s legendary comparison of capitalists to vampires rather forceful. Labor is the life-blood of the human species; it is what is dead in the capitalist and what

must be extracted from the living worker (1977 342). But this is not the case for Foucault; his reluctance to rely on such remainder makes it possible to interpret the industrial labor process as not only productive of surplus-value but also productive of the very subject who recognizes himself as an industrial worker. In other words, the nineteenth century world of factory work is merely another step in the process that produces the notion that humans are working beings. As Foucault puts it, along with prisons, hospitals, and schools, the newly reconfigured factory system became vital disciplinary “apparatuses such that any mechanism of objectification could be used in them as an instrument of subjection.” Furthermore, “it was this link, proper to the technological systems that made possible within the disciplinary element . . . the rationality of labor” (DP 224).

If that is the case, then the rise of the disciplinary institution had an instrumental role to play when it came to instilling the work ethic into the liberal subject. For instance, Bentham’s model prison falls somewhere between Marx’s and Foucault’s understanding of how the human relationship to work should be understood. Yes, the extraction of labor and the turning of profit were important elements in Bentham’s rationale. But Bentham saw the role of work in the institution as much more important than a general form of punishment that could, by the way, result in a profit. Building from the basic nineteenth-century belief that idleness, after all, was the fundamental cause of crime and vice, Bentham built work into his prison’s planning offering it as “the great engine of reformation in the Panopticon” (Semple 1993, 155). In other words, Bentham understood this new institution not only as a way of getting labor-power out of the idle, but as potentially productive of laboring beings. Arguing against the use of hard

labor as a form of punishment, Bentham sees neither “great danger nor the great harm of a man’s liking his work too well.” If the prisoner is employed in a pleasurable form of work then he would certainly be inclined to become preoccupied by it, and this might increase the likelihood of both reformation and higher profit. On the former, Bentham adds: “I know of no test of reformation so plain or so sure as the improved quantity and value of. . . work” (Bentham 1995, 57). So for Bentham, the working self is constitutive of the normal self, the early liberal individual with the capacity for freedom. What was lacking in the criminal and otherwise idle, it seems, were the appropriate moral capacities. The well-designed disciplinary institution would reform the criminal and the idle, yes, but it would do so by confining them, breaking them apart, and starting from scratch. The forced instillation of the work ethic was fundamental to this process of reformation.

***Governing the Ways of Being Free: Techniques of the Self in the Disciplinary Society***

Reading *Discipline and Punish* on its own, it is easy to see how even the sympathetic reader might come away with quite a totalizing picture of discipline and domination in modern society and a rather draconian notion of the role of the work ethic in the early, liberal worldview. However, if we consider through the lens of his writings on governmentality, a more complex picture of disciplinary power emerges, one that recognizes the role of discipline in the government of the self, not merely through disciplinary institutions, but through the regulation of individual actions by the individual him-or herself. The abnormal other whose purpose is to be dominated is merely the unfortunate by-product of the production of “useful” or normal individual, in this case,

the free, liberal individual (*DP*, 211). Once the spaces of freedom have been defined they must be occupied, and only a specific type of subject is qualified to occupy them.

Disciplinary power is an important element in directing the conduct of individuals in the proper direction, of developing and enabling their capacity for freedom in the first place. If liberal governmental practices are best thought of as practices delimiting the operation of government in the lives of free citizens, then discipline is a fundamental part of ensuring that freedom, because it ultimately arms the free individual with the capacity for self-government.<sup>53</sup>

Again, Foucault's best example of discipline as a self-technology comes from his discussion of Bentham's Panopticon writings. Although it is easy to read this discussion in a purely negative light, Foucault's aim in recalling Bentham is to reveal the positive aspects of discipline. Bentham's model prison, after all, was an attempt at prison reform, a matter of moral progress both for the convict and for the larger society. What this constant but unverified system of optics did was introduce prisoners to a machinery of power the aim of which was to discipline them "correctly," rewarding them for regulating their own behavior punishing for failing to so. The beauty of the panoptic system,

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<sup>53</sup> In *The Civilizing Process* (2000), Norbert Elias describes just how important self-government is to the process of civilization itself. In an argument that shares much with Foucault, Elias explains the great movement of civilization seems to happen, not as a rational process driven by the will of an individual or a particular group of individuals, but as more as a series of happy accidents or incidents that give the process itself its own kind of rationality, or at least its own sort of order. Primary among the more "modern" versions of civilization, Elias claims, is the expansion of those social spaces in which order depends on the self-restraint of individuals. The rise and orderly functioning of the market economy, for instance, is dependent on individual self-restraint on multiple levels. The very nature of "interdependence" is governed by this faith in individuals governing their own conduct: Because the proper functioning of the economy is dependent as much on the workers as the entrepreneurs, Elias sees an important civilizing moment taking place when the "active attunement of individual conduct to some larger entity remote in time and space, spreads to ever-broader sections of society" (380). What civilization produces, as it transcend both class and national boundaries are individuals who share a commitment to the same type of regular, ordered conduct—one that rewards those who can best impose the regulation of this conduct on themselves.



Foucault explains, is that it transfers accountability to the individual who is subject to it. It is the person under the watchful eye of this “field of visibility, and who knows it, [who] assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself . . . he becomes the principle of his own subjection” (203), eliminating the need for violent punishment, constant observation, or regular supervision. It is no longer necessary to employ an army of guards able to overpower the most violent of convicts; a simple system of panoptic management is all it takes to manage an entire deviant population.

More than merely a disciplinary apparatus (it certainly was that), the panoptic machine that Bentham describes is a machine built for transforming morals and guiding behavior, one that, quite simply, reproduces God in the indistinguishable guise of the inspector who, in the mind of the prisoner, demonstrates an “apparent omnipresence” (Bentham 1995, 45).<sup>54</sup> Bentham is convinced that the brilliance of his invention is its ability to guide and direct the behavior of those populations who need such tutelage, even on their release from these various institutions. In fact, Bentham even suggests that those poor souls subjected to forced labor while they are incarcerated might be happy to be employed by the same institution upon their release—why should they want to do otherwise?

Foucault implies this role when he cites the opening passage of Bentham’s text: *“morals reformed—health preserved—public burthens lightened—Economy seated, as it were, on a rock—the gordian knot to the Poor Laws are not cut but untied—all by a*

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<sup>54</sup> For a detailed discussion of how the God-producing function of the Panopticism relates to Bentham’s greater theory of “fictions” see Božovič (1995).

*simple idea in Architecture!*” (in *DP*, 207; Bentham 1995, 31). What Foucault fails to mention is that this very phrase appears multiple times in Bentham’s Panopticon letters; it opens the first paragraph and closes the last. Clearly, Bentham’s version of panopticism is a transformative one. A panoptic society is not a society of surveillance and discipline, but one of progress and prosperity, of educated masses, and conscientious workers who set an example for the rest to follow. “What would you say,” he asks his readers, “if by the gradual application of this single principle, you should see a new scene of things spread itself over the face of civilized society” (1995, 95)? Panoptic discipline is ultimately good for society, and its goodness comes from its utilitarian advantages—the ability to maximize the happiness of the many in the most efficient and least forceful way. The end behind the design of The Panopticon is human freedom. Obviously those on the outside are guaranteed those social spaces in which they can operate as free individuals without threat of harm from the dangerous classes; however, those on the inside are also granted freedom within their confinement. As Bentham points out, no more will the houses of detention be forced to rely on such inhuman and coercive elements such as shackles. There is no reason, he concludes, to not offer the full benefit of “perfect liberty” to the incarcerated, albeit “within the space allotted to him” (49).

If Foucault is right that panoptic technology, far from disappearing after the failure of Bentham’s prison design, becomes the predominant form of social discipline, then it is easy to imagine how disciplinary power results in the sort of self-restraint and self-government necessary for the realization of freedom within liberal society. Even within the panoptic institution itself, Bentham explains, freedom is possible, albeit within limits. There is no reason that the inmate should not be granted “perfect liberty within

the space allotted” that individual within the institution (49). The person subject to the panoptic gaze will know how to behave within his or her individual realm of activity. This is why Bentham finds it unnecessary to rely on such brutal instruments of punishment such as shackles and irons. Within the disciplinary society, things operate much the same way. Spaces defined for free activity are available only to those who show the proper self-discipline—and those very disciplinary institutions heralded by Bentham and examined by Foucault are necessary to instilling this awareness in the liberal individual. Technologies of discipline help constitute free individuals and allow them to realize their capacity for freedom. Individuals are free solely in the fact that they “do not need to be governed by others, but will govern themselves, master themselves, care for themselves” (1996, 45).

Once again, the role of the norm is important here. The production of the norm, as has been argued above, is not in the first instance a technology for dominating others, but it is a technology for imagining a self, providing a measure of comparison or a standard by which one’s own conduct and attitude might be judged. As William Connolly puts it, a normalizing society is one that “treats the small set of identities that it endorses as if they were intrinsically true,” and it is within this relatively small field of possibilities for being that an individual seeking social legitimacy must find recognition (1995, 89); those on the outside are by definition marginalized or excluded. Disciplinary power is fundamental to the construction of the normal/abnormal binary. Through self-directed and self-producing forms of discipline, individuals can mold themselves into something that conforms, as closely as possible, to the scale of variance allowable by the law of the norm.

The multiple social networks of discipline-normalization contain two important instruments for facilitating this process. On one hand, the norm provides important “rules of conduct” or appropriate sets of comportment that are “opposed to irregularity, disorder, eccentricity, unevenness and deviation.” On the other hand, the norm determines the “functional regularities” that designate “the normal as opposed to the pathological” (Foucault 2003b, 162-3).<sup>55</sup> In both of these roles, within social panopticism, the norm replaces God and provides the standards of judgment that individuals now use to judge *themselves*. Like Bentham’s prison inspector, whose power was always present but never verifiable, the norm operates with the same “apparent omnipresence:” It is everywhere all of the time and it determines “that which is socially worthy, statistically average, scientifically healthy *and* personally desirable.” And, like the inmates caught up in Bentham’s great disciplinary machine, the liberal individual is expected to regulate his or her own conduct in spaces specifically set aside for freedom; those who wish to enjoy the benefits of the free society are expected to achieve “normality through working on themselves, controlling their impulses in their everyday conduct and habits . . . under the guidance of others (Rose 2002, 76).

### *Discipline, Self-Technologies, and the Work Ethic*

The notion of controlling one’s own impulses and modifying one’s own behavior was also a vital part of Bentham’s prison design, and work played an important role in this process of self-reformation. Work was more than merely a component of Bentham’s

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<sup>55</sup> Foucault again finds psychiatric discourse essential to the rise of these two interrelated aspects of the norm claiming that it is “within the field organized by the new psychiatry” armed with the certainty of medical science that these “two realities of the norm are joined together.” (2002b, 162).

scheme of punishment. In fact, Semple (1993) suggests that if confinement played the role of punishment within the Panopticon, work constituted a reward.<sup>56</sup> When it came to the corrupted souls who found their way into the institution of correction, Bentham concluded, ““habits of industry . . . are perhaps the only criterion of their again becoming proper members of the society”” (Bentham, in Semple, 155). To accomplish the ends of reformation, Bentham embraced an approach to institutional labor that departed from the established notion that hard labor was the best form of punishment available. In fact, Bentham took the rather radical view that labor, inside the houses of correction, should as pleasurable as possible and that it was quality not quantity of work that mattered. The lesson taught by hard labor, Bentham believed, was that labor was to be avoided at all cost, and this was not a lesson that liberal individuals should be taught. Instead, he argued that “it would be so much the better, if a man could be taught to love labor” (Bentham 1963, 144). If the prisoner was to learn this lesson, he needed to be inculcated with the required skills and modes of conduct necessary for his reformation and eventual release. Bentham even went so far as to recommend “allowing the convicts some of the profit” from their labor so they could purchase better conditions inside the prison, while at the same time contributing a portion into savings for use after their release (1963, 13). Combined with sufficient food and tolerable living conditions, Bentham argued, rewarding prisoners for their work would instill the important ethos of work and

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<sup>56</sup> In the Panopticon letters Bentham makes this case quite clearly, arguing that work would be viewed as reward merely because it would be preferable to the alternative, which was the prisoner having nothing to do “from morning to night, but eat his bread and drink his water without a soul speak to” (1995, 66).

responsibility in the prisoners, teaching them important lessons that they could use inside the walls of the prison and after their eventual release back into society.

Notably, like the violent form of torture embraced in an earlier age, institutionalization of the sort Bentham advocated did send a message to the larger society, and in many cases it was a message about the proper conduct of the self. What led to crime was idleness; what kept one on the straight and narrow was good, honest work, and the values that were being taught in the houses of confinement were the values the normal citizen/subject was supposed to already possess. The work ethic was fundamental to this new value system that “taught people to see work as a moral duty, and later, as a generally valid social necessity” (Doerner 1981, 16). Expert discourses such as psychiatry, so important to the liberal techniques of domination, reappear to guide the liberal individual in those vital techniques of the self. The science of statistics made every aspect of the norm calculable and open to assessment by the new experts. The emerging schools of biological and psychiatric medicine focused on the differences between the normal and the pathological and contributed important scientific knowledge to the preexisting definitions of normality “dictat[ing] the standards for physical and moral relations and of the society in which” that individual lives (Foucault 1994, 34). Psychiatry played a vital role in diagnosing the mentally ill, as well as giving the non-sick the standards of conduct against which they might judge their won normality—those standards of conduct that they were expected to meet.<sup>57</sup> In the modern world, disciplinary institutions, as disparate as they might seem, are aligned in the pursuit of the

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<sup>57</sup> For a full account of the role psychiatry and the “psy” discipline play in the construction of the self see Nikolas Rose, *Inventing Ourselves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood*, (1998).

norm. They share their findings with the general public through means as diverse as popular manifestos, newspapers, and academic journals, they share that information with the rest of us, giving us an understanding of the standards of normality that we are expected to live up to, outlining ways that we might live up, and detailing what might happen to us if we fail to do so.

Again, Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* provides a point of departure for discussing the linkage between psychiatric discourse and the politics of work as they relate to the production of the normal, liberal self. The second great transformation in the history of madness, as Foucault discusses it, is the "discovery" of the mad as a category of existence distinct from the idle. This transformation, it seems, also marks a change in governmentality in early liberal regimes. At the same time that madness was coming into its own, the new discourse of political economy was challenging the notion that the idle should be confined, especially since political economy had not yet solved the problem of poverty. What the new economic rationality needed was a free labor market, which could only be achieved by "restor[ing] this entire population to the circuit of production" (Foucault 1988a, 232). What this meant was that madness was now a special case of idleness, one that did not respond to the logic of political economy and free markets. The mad, Foucault explains, confounds the emerging liberal-bourgeois logic of individualism and citizenship because the madman alone "crosses the frontiers of bourgeois order" and "alienates himself outside the sacred limits of its ethic" (58).

While that would seem to disconnect the ethic of work from the institutionalization of the insane, this is not the case. Two figures in psychiatry's early history reinstall work as a characteristic of the normal subject, one considered important

enough to continue to be maintained throughout the history of psychiatric discourse. In the “moral treatment” of Tuke and Pinel, work becomes a vital element in treating the irrational mind and helping the insane return to society. Although each differs in approach to treatment, it is clear that each embraces work as a cure because each thinks work is fundamental to the normally functioning individual. In the case of Tuke, in particular, madness was considered primarily a moral problem; and as I have already made clear in my discussion of Bentham, work was widely considered to be the ultimate cure for immorality.<sup>58</sup> This was primarily the result of the role work played in governing the lives of those early liberal societies considered normal and rational. Since there was little doubt that “hard work and self-discipline were the keys to the success of the urban bourgeoisie, from whose ranks Tuke came,” it is no surprise that “his moral treatment propounded these same qualities as the means of reclaiming the insane” (Scull 1989, 94).

This was a rather simple solution to the problem of madness: There is something immoral about madness, and the way to return the afflicted to a proper moral condition was to reorient them to the conditions necessary for morality. In Tuke and Pinel, Foucault finds a new connection between madness and moral life, between work and reason. In their work even the insane were thought to be capable of the responsibility necessary for a free, moral existence. The insane, these reformers believed, could be liberated from the constraints of confinement, through the proper treatment, and the effects of madness could be countered if it were recognized that these were human beings

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<sup>58</sup> E.P. Thompson (1964) also talks of the need of early liberal regimes to rely on the quasi-pastoral relationship of work with morality to accomplish the “transformation of human nature” demanded by the factory system (362).



not monsters. Tuke and Pinel saw hope for the insane; they believed that the mad “generally posses a degree of control over their wayward propensities. Their intellectual, active, and moral powers are usually perverted rather than obliterated (Tuke 1996, 133). All of this however, was founded on the important recognition that “the immediate world of the laborer is thus a world suffuse with wisdom and measure, which cures madness insofar as it renders desire useless . . . and insofar as it reduces along with the imaginary all the possibilities of delirium” (Foucault 1988, 194). Resistance to work still marks unreasonableness, but now even the worst offenders can be reasoned with. In the new world of liberal governmentality—and the new institutions that are empowered by it—“resistance to work is inexcusable, even by madness” (268).

Foucault’s concept of disciplinary power, when combined with his later work on governmentality, reveals that the spaces of liberal freedom—family, society, the market—are not exactly as free as once thought. Indeed, these spaces might be designated spheres of life activity free from governmental interference; however to imagine a social space “free from” those multiple disciplinary pressures that govern the conduct of free individuals seems, in retrospect, a practical impossibility. In fact, taking responsibility for his or her own government appears to be a pre-requisite for a life free from state interference. This seems to be the operational definition of freedom in liberal societies, and it is expressed in liberal governmental practices. Freedom, in the end, depends on order. Contrary to the liberal rhetoric, the ability to enjoy the benefits of a

liberal society come with a host of governmental strings attached.<sup>59</sup> Liberal citizens are not immune from government; they are addicted to it. As John Stuart Mill pointed out, it is the liberal society itself that often poses the biggest threat to liberty in modern society, and it is often in social spaces considered outside the bounds of the state that liberal individuals insist on continually governing each other's conduct.

In feudal society, the manifestos of proper conduct were written primarily for the courtly class, but in liberal society they are democratized and directed, first at the middle class, and then at the masses. When Foucault speaks of the positive, productive nature of disciplinary power, we need only think of those multiple institutions of training so imperative and endemic to the liberal polity. The noble idea of a liberal education for all engenders the need to educate the masses, and the need to educate the masses engenders the need for a new technology of discipline, to impose the appropriate way of being in the world on those whose world never depended on the recommended norms of propriety.<sup>60</sup> The promise of freedom for all meant that all were expected to behave like free individuals, despite sometimes obvious material constraints.<sup>61</sup> Insofar as liberal

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<sup>59</sup> Contrary to popular opinion, even John Locke's pre-political state of nature was governed. "The state of nature," he tells us, "has a law of nature to govern it," and it is our rational ability to interpret that law that provides that conditions our conduct in ways necessary to the enjoyment of "perfect" freedom (Locke, 9). Mitchell Dean (1999) argues that Bentham has an important role to play here. Looking beyond Bentham's *Panopticon Writings*, Dean argues that in his more explicitly political writings make it clear that Bentham saw the liberty of the market taking precedence over the liberty of the masses, especially those ill equipped to enjoy liberal society. Liberal freedom, from Bentham's perspective, is dependent on a number of illiberal practices such as the prison and the house of forced labor.

<sup>60</sup> Of course, education here needs to be considered in its broader context. A variety of elements, from popular culture to high art all have an educative function. For a concise collection of the articles on the governing function of popular culture see Bratich, Jack Z., Jeremy Packer, and Cameron McCarthy eds. *Foucault, Cultural Studies, and Governmentality* (2003).

<sup>61</sup> For a description of the important role that the sumptuary laws of early modern cities played in governing multiple aspects of the emerging liberal polity and market economy see Alan Hunt's "Governing the City: Liberalism and Early Modern Modes of Governance," (1996).

governance depends on the development of what Foucault called “useful” individuals—individuals produced by specific modes of discipline—the liberal society ensures constant proliferation of disciplinary techniques of government. In this new world of free subjects, it is essential that individuals are educated properly, are physically and psychically fit, are inculcated with the proper manners and forms of conduct, and are instilled with the appropriate capacity for self-discipline and self-government necessary for becoming responsible citizens in a free society.

Of course, *Discipline and Punish* was not Foucault’s final statement on what it means to be governed in late-modern life. In fact, disciplinary power was only a part of a much larger process, the concern of which was not merely the discipline of the individual subject but also the management of populations and multiplicities. In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault called this form of power “bio-power.” In Chapter 4 I turn my attention to Foucault’s conception of bio-power and the role that it plays in governing the modern liberal polity. I also discuss how bio-power, like disciplinary power, incorporates the work ethic as a technique of governing and builds it into the assumptions bio-political technology continually makes about what it means to be a legitimate subject of liberal government.

## Chapter 4

### **Bio-Power and the Reproduction of Liberal Subjects**

In chapter 3, I discussed how disciplinary power plays a vital role in governing the subject of liberalism, especially his or her relation to work as a technique of subjectification. But disciplinary power is not the only form of power made useful by liberal rationalities of government; in fact, it might not be the most important. Discipline certainly begins to solve some of the many problems facing early liberal governments through its regulation of bodies and minds in space and time, directing their desires, dreams, and potential in particular ways. But discipline is inadequate at governing a mass of bodies, at least on its own. The problem of governing without appearing to govern too much has to be met with an additional solution that can pick up where the disciplining of bodies leaves off. In this chapter I turn to the unique form of power that Foucault called “bio-power.” I consider how bio-power, in concert with the disciplinary techniques of government discussed in chapter 3, is incorporated into the management not only of liberal individuals but also the entire population made up by these individuals. Building on the relationship between disciplinary power and the work ethic, laid out in Chapter 3, in this chapter I consider the role of the work ethic in the process of governing populations, emphasizing the importance of the working subject to bio-power’s regulative schema.

#### ***Bio-Power and the Problem of Population***

Above, I alluded to the fact that disciplining individual bodies and behaviors only offered a partial solution to the problems faced by liberal regimes of government. The

great masses that these individuals made up also had to be administered and regulated according to the aims and hopes of liberal polities. Surely, in order to establish an orderly society with the potential to maximize freedom, it was necessary to discipline individuals by inculcating them with the appropriate behaviors and norms of conduct; however, it is important to realize that both the liberal society as well as the individuals who make it up constituted a more complex social organism that also had to be known and governed if freedom was going to be maximized and enjoyed by as many as possible.

A characteristic of late-eighteenth and nineteenth century liberal political rationality was the growing concern with a new form of social organism that encompassed both individuals and the larger entity that they made up. What emerged in this period was the concept of “a population,” no longer understood merely as the number of people under the protection of the state, but as an entity with its own regularities that had to be managed and administered (Foucault 1991, 99). If disciplinary power produced the docile and useful subject of freedom, then the proper regulation of the population, a concern with its nature and its welfare, produced the appropriate conditions under which this subject can act freely and be protected from interference by both government and other citizens. For liberal governments, the relationship between the individual and the population constituted one of the most pressing political problems: How to regulate the great popular mass in such a way that the rights of individuals to be free from government interference were not only guaranteed but maximized? In order to address this problem, the state took on a new role and assumed a new rationality of politics that gave it the responsibility to protect the population while staying out of the lives of its individual members.

To claim that this new entity, the population, was increasingly being understood as a “social organism” is not an overstatement. The population was viewed as something akin to a natural phenomenon that, like any natural phenomenon, could be observed, known, and regulated. As Paul Veyne explains, in early liberal regimes of government, authorities conceived of the population as sort of a natural resource that needed to be intervened upon and managed effectively in order to maximize its utility. In much the same way that forestry officials are seldom content to “leave nature to its own devices,” choosing instead to intervene “in order to leave nature in better shape than before,” officials charged with managing the natural phenomenon of liberal populations are prone to intervention in the hope of administering some improvements (Veyne 1997, 150-151). The need to govern populations meant that governing authorities must gain adequate knowledge of exactly how this organism worked, and a variety of institutional actors and experts were called upon to pursue this objective and provide the appropriate information. Data was collected on everything from a population’s gross product to its per capita wealth, its birth rate, its mortality rate, its rate of suicide, and its average age of death. A multitude of economic and social factors were considered in the overall attempt to understand the features and functions of the population, determining its regularities and discontinuities.

Of course, this information was useless unless it was collected with some certainty and delivered with scientific authority. The concept of a population is not only an important because it marks the birth of a unique form of power, but also because it engenders a great proliferation of human or social sciences, the grand methodologies necessary for studying the mass of society and providing a logic through which

informational and scientific certainty can be provided. Political economy, hereafter, comes into its own as a “principle form of knowledge” as it becomes necessary to provide a constant snapshot of the population’s economy, calculate its wealth, and outline ways that this wealth might be enhanced (Foucault 1991, 102; See also Gordon 1991, 16-17). Demography begins to reveal the population’s expansions and contractions; it is concerned with counting heads, measuring trends, and detailing and managing immigration. Intent on managing any biomedical threats before they can become outbreaks, public health and hygiene concern themselves with the general welfare of the population’s people. If liberal regimes of government were going to govern their populations successfully then they had to have the most up-to-date and comprehensive knowledge of the liberal population’s behavior; meanwhile regulative agencies were happy to oblige with constantly expanding body of statistical indicators and the methods for analyzing them. Put simply, the increasing need to assess and administer the inner workings of a population leads, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to what Ian Hacking has aptly referred to as “an avalanche of printed numbers” (1990, 2)<sup>62</sup>.

Faced with the need to govern their populations, liberal regimes of government soon realized that what they were really governing, in the simplest terms, was life itself:<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> It is no accident that the lasting works of all of these emergent disciplines are, in fact, quite general in nature, violating everything we would now consider as hard and fast disciplinary boundaries. Compare, for instance, the early political economy of Adam Smith with Comte’s nascent sociology; these works have as more similarities than differences and share a moral commitment to social improvement. Or Malthus, does he follow in the political economic footsteps of Smith and Ricardo, or the sociological footsteps of Comte? One might consider his *Essay on the Principle of Population* merely an early ancestor of present day demography, but couldn’t we also broadly consider this work an important moment in the birth of policy studies or public health?

<sup>63</sup> The form of absolute sovereignty replaced by liberalism had a simple approach to the problem of life. It controlled it pure and simple. Absolute sovereign authority was, by definition a form of political power

It was the life of the species that they were charged with administering, managing, and maintaining. Because of its concern with life, Foucault calls this life-affirming approach to power *bio-power*, and *bio-politics* is the term he used to define the approach to governing the liberal polity aimed at enhancing the population's life and livelihood.<sup>64</sup>

This is not to say that the liberal regime does not retain the right to destroy life; it certainly does. The liberal state has its own way of dealing in death (the death penalties for those who do evil and perpetual wars aimed at destroying enemies are surely a part of the liberal cultural vocabulary). However, even the necessity of killing is aimed at maximizing the welfare of the liberal state's domestic population; it is an approach to death meant to ensure life and to extinguish potential threats before they are able to be carried out.<sup>65</sup> The liberal state has no interest in executing the criminal and crushing the enemy simply for the sake of displaying its awesome power. The liberal state does what it

that is manifest through its power over the life and death of its subjects. As Foucault explains it, the sovereign version of right could be accurately described as "the right to *take* life or *let* live. Its symbol, after all, was the sword" (VS, 136). But the liberal revolutions that spread across Europe were aimed at overthrowing and replacing this absolute form of sovereignty with something quite different, something that respected the life and autonomy of each individual member of the body politic and approached life as something that should be enhanced rather than subject to the constant threat of destruction.

<sup>64</sup> Foucault sometimes uses the terms "bio-power" and "bio-politics" synonymously. However, I think there is something to be gained by making a distinction. By the former, I will refer to the particular type of power in question. By the latter, I will refer to the specific approach to governing enabled by this type of power.

<sup>65</sup> There is a moment in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* where Foucault discusses the role of death in the bio-politics of the living. It is surprising because our intuition might tell us that wars would be the exception rather than the rule in the bio-political world where the focus is on the maximization of life. Instead, as we know, wars are more common now than ever, and they are more destructive as well. It is only in the bio-political reality, Foucault explains, that we can justify world wars and atomic bombs as a way to preserve life instead of a way to destroy it. Wars are fought and bombs are dropped for the protection of *our* population against the dreadful enemy who is out to destroy. Through this lens, even the contradictions of the current war on terror can find their justification. Ostensibly, it is senseless to kill tens of thousands of Afghan and Iraqi civilians in return for fewer than three thousand of our own; however, if it our population is deemed at risk then it the task of the state to protect it, through whatever means necessary. And what are the civil rights of a few Americans compared with the general welfare of this nebulous thing we call a population? Certainly we have nothing to be concerned about!



does with sincere purpose. The state in a free society has one job and one job only: to protect its population from threats internal and external. When faced with threats, the modern, liberal state is the only political actor that can act on behalf of the population and the polity.

To govern the liberal polity, then, is to do more than merely discipline or regulate individual bodies; it is also to coordinate the movements of these bodies in political space and to manage them both individually and collectively. Bio-politics does not replace discipline; in fact, it depends on it. Foucault explains that both disciplinary and bio-power are fundamental elements of liberal governmentality, working off and reinforcing one another:

From the eighteenth century onward (or at least the end of the eighteenth century onward) we have, then, two technologies of power which were established at different times and which were superimposed. One technique is disciplinary; it centers on the body, produces individualizing effects, and manipulates the body as a source of forces that have to be rendered both useful and docile. And we also have a second technology which is centered not upon the body, but on life: a technology which brings together the mass effects characteristic of a population, which tries to control the series of random events that can occur in a living mass, a technology which tries to predict the probability of those events (by modifying it, if necessary), or at least compensate for their effects. This is a technology which aims to establish a sort of homeostasis, not by training individuals, but by achieving an overall equilibrium that protects the security of the whole from internal [and external] dangers. (2003b, 249)

In other words, disciplinary- and bio-power form a sort of governmental axis, each relying on a different set of “instruments” to be operational (242). Like its disciplinary relative, bio-power also acts as both a technique of self and one of domination and is an important foundation stone in the production of the norm and the normalizing society. Through the bio-politics of normalization, power has taken control of both the individual

and mass or, if you will, has “taken control of life in general—with the body as one pole and the population as the other” (253).

### *Bio-politics, Population, and the Working Subject*

In his work on bio-power, Foucault focuses most of his attention on the sexuality and the discourses that surrounded it, arguing that, far from being repressed in the “Victorian age,” bio-political necessity meant that talk of sex proliferated and has continued to proliferate throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, sexuality was not the only thing naturalized by liberal bio-political technology. As the emergent discourses of medicine, pedagogy, and psychology were concentrating on the bio-regularities of the normal liberal subject—calculating, among other things, rates of birth, death, and disease—other expert knowledges were looking at other supposedly natural attributes of the human being. For instance, this new science of economics, political economy played a primary role in liberal mode of government. Instead of concentrating on the explicit biological life of the species, it focused on the population’s economic life, which was also thought to have an important bio-political component. Determining the natural economic processes of the social organism also demanded a proliferation of discourses that were heretofore unimagined or, at least, unnecessary. In the same way that the demographics of birth rates and population flows had to be known in order to maintain the population’s health of and security, the information provided by political economy was also important to the objective of expanding the population’s wealth. In fact, in the world of the political economist, wealth, security, and health were often inseparable.

In Foucault's view, bio-power and economics cannot be separated. Indeed, when it comes to the progress of capitalist economics, bio-power is "indispensable," because it allows the "controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes (VS, 141).<sup>66</sup> Malthus illustrates this point well in his *Essay on the Principle of Population* which is, first and foremost, a work of political economy, but within the pages of the text one finds maybe the grandest bio-political statement of its time. Malthus's concern in this text is not just explaining the phenomena of population, but also to point out the correlation between the expansion and decline of modern populations and the expansion and decline of modern economies. The economy is the point here, especially as it relates to the happiness of the population itself. To maximize the happiness of the population, Malthus points out, authorities need to understand how the population as works and also how interacts with other forces (such as labor markets and economic expansion), in order to reproduce itself and expand. Expanding economic markets and growing the economy are not solutions to society's problems, Malthus explains, unless the growth of the population is also regulated (or regulates itself). The problem with English society, a problem that Malthus thought the Poor Laws seemed to make worse, was population growth that outpaced the economic means to support it. Accordingly, Malthus offered bio-political solution, one

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<sup>66</sup> I use the French title of the first volume of the *History of Sexuality-- La Volenté de Savoir*— because the title change that accompanied the English translation betrays some of Foucault's intentions, both in this volume and those that followed in the series. The original title, interpreted as *The Will to Know*, emphasizes the fact that the book is as much about truth as it is a "history" of sexuality. Foucault sees sexuality as one of the important ways that modern individuals come to know themselves, sexuality tells a truth about the human being both as individual and species. Obviously, the "will to know" is a vital part of our self-constitution and self-government. To maintain this emphasis, I will use the abbreviation VS to refer to this text throughout this chapter.

that is at its heart biological: He insisted that the laboring populations be educated about the benefits synchronizing both marriage and children with the availability of sufficient economic means to provide for a family (1995, 325-7).

But this knowledge about the natural workings of the population was not political economy's only contribution to humanity's bio-political understanding. From at least Smith forward, there was the recognition of labor's importance to the definition of humanity's very "species-body" (VS, 139). It is not my intention to here provide a genealogy of the concept of labor<sup>67</sup>, but Foucault's own insights are helpful to understanding just when and how the laboring subject arrives on the modern scene. In *The Order of Things* (1994b) Foucault claims that labor is one of those naturalized characteristics attributed to modern "man" since his birth (xxiv). Like biology and philology, the form of knowledge that comes to be called political economy is the product of a specific relationship of human being to world characteristic of the modern episteme. To understand the economy scientifically meant coming to terms with its natural processes and constituent parts, among which the laboring subject was considered primary. Of course, liberal practices of government and the theories that enabled them had always rested on a foundation built by labor. For Locke, "the *labor* of [our] body, and the *work* of [our] hands" are the natural form of property found in rational human being, and it is only through the use of this labor that we come to call something our own and have our right to it protected by, first natural, and then civil law (Locke 1980, 19). Famously, it is the practice of mixing labor with nature and the need to protect the

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<sup>67</sup> Heiner Ganßmann (1994) provides an important first step in this process.

resulting property that bring about one of the greatest inconveniences in the state of nature, eventually culminating in the decision to enter into the social contract.

Furthermore, Locke understands labor (and its product) to be the primary evidence we have of the reasonable individual; therefore, the property cultivated by one's labor becomes the primary basis for citizenship upon entry into the civil state (21).

Foucault credits not Locke but those who made his labor theory of property into a theory of value for naturalizing labor and making it part of human's essential being (Foucault 1994b, 221). Originating with the French physiocrats and expanded upon by Adam Smith, the inclusion of labor's essential function into the modern science of political economy was made definitive by Ricardo, famously claimed that labor was the "original sources of all exchangeable value" (Ricardo 1977, 5). In their attempt to imagine the economy and its natural regularities as an "organic structure" (Foucault 1994, 226), political economists relied on labor as the constant, natural attribute of the human being that made him (or her) an economic being able to excel in meeting the demands of economic life. Interestingly, in his criticism of the bourgeoisie political economists, Marx integrated labor even more deeply into his analysis of the human species-existence. Although Marx opposed the political economist's attitude toward labor, he embraced their notion that labor was essential to the human being. Labor-power, after all, was the essential activity of the worker that was bought and then exploited within the capitalist mode of production; it was this very force that had to be liberated, as far as possible, from the "realm of necessity" if human freedom was going to be realized (1978, 439). As Foucault points out, Marx's relationship to the bourgeois political economists was more a "radical reversal" than a complete overthrow of their

own principles. “Marxism,” Foucault famously explains, “exists in nineteenth century thought like a fish in water: that is, it is unable to breath anywhere else” (1984a, 262).

Like the discovery of “sex” that preoccupies much of Foucault’s work on bio-power, labor comes into being as yet another bio-force that makes the human subject intelligible. Disciplined by the manufactory, labor gives the body a social and economic purpose, allowing it to contribute to the wealth and welfare of population. The success or failure of the organic structure of the economy and its ability to provide for the well-being of the population thus depend on both the disciplinary and bio-political government of the working subject.

### *Bio-political Techniques of the Self*

It is relatively easy to understand how disciplinary power, which seems ostensibly geared toward domination, could be easily translated into a self-directed technology of government. In fact, one might argue that the earliest forms of self-technology were disciplinary in nature. As Foucault’s later studies suggest, self-discipline has been around, at least, since antiquity (Foucault 1988x; 1990).<sup>68</sup> Those who have wished to govern politically, spiritually, or ethically in nature have historically realized that the simplest way to accomplish this is to inculcate individuals with the discipline to govern themselves. Bio-power is quite different; it operates on a much different scale directing its instruments from above the level of the specific individual. Bio-power is not concerned with regulating the individual body, at least in a disciplinary vacuum, but instead it is aimed at regulating how those individuals are brought into the great social

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<sup>68</sup> *Care of the Self* and *Use of Pleasure* respectively

body that constitutes the population. In this role bio-power also becomes an important technology for the individual's own self-government.

Foucault gives his most detailed explanation of this term bio-power in *La Volonté de Savoir*<sup>69</sup> and the lectures that led up to that book's publication. Foucault sees sexuality as one of the most effective and "concrete arrangements of bio-power" (VS, 140).<sup>70</sup> Put simply, knowledge of human sexuality becomes a fundamental element in the growing concern with population. I have already mentioned the rise of birth and mortality rates as important social statistics, but to really govern according to such measures means knowing the reproductive practices that are prevalent within the population. The

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<sup>69</sup> I use the French because the title change that accompanied the English translation betrays some of Foucault's intentions, both in this volume and those that followed in the series. The original title, interpreted as *The Will to Know*, emphasizes the fact that the book is as much about truth as it is a "history" of sexuality. Foucault sees sexuality as one of the important ways that modern individuals come to know themselves, sexuality tells a truth about the human being both as individual and species. Obviously, the "will to know" is a vital part of our self-constitution and self-government. To maintain this emphasis, I will use the abbreviation VS to refer to this text throughout this chapter.

<sup>70</sup> Feminist critiques of Foucault are important here, and usually progress along two trajectories. First, this literature has often explicitly challenged Foucault on his ignorance of the gendered nature of power, especially disciplinary power. Best articulated by Sandra Lee Bartky (1988, 1990; see also Butler 1990), this argument claims that Foucault's "analysis as a whole, reproduces that sexism which is endemic throughout Western political theory (1988, 64). The second of these lines of criticism often counters the first, but calls Foucault on an overbearing theory of power that implies that individual bodies (including those of women) are too passive and docile to have political-theoretical usefulness. Lois McNay (1993) subscribes to this view, building her criticism on the assumption that Foucault provides a theory of power that is both "undifferentiated and unidirectional" that allows very little (or no) hope of resistance or liberation (47). McNay, herself, helps counter the first criticism, pointing out that although Foucault is guilty of a sort of gender blindness, Foucault's work has inspired much recent feminist scholarship intent on filling in the gaps. Interestingly, Bartky's (1990) *Feminism and Domination* provides an insightful discussion of discipline and gender that counters her own critique of Foucault's theoretical utility. As far as the criticism that Foucault's theory of power is both undifferentiated and unidirectional, I have attempted thus far in this dissertation to point out that this is not the case. As the governmentality literature reveals, both disciplinary power and bio-politics rely as much on a differentiated and active self as they do a docile body. It is the subject's willingness to put him or herself into the machinery power that gets at the heart of his or her usefulness. Margaret McLaren counters this criticism rather well in her *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity* (2002). I tend to agree with McLaren that viewed through the governmentality lens, these critiques of Foucault are less forceful; however, I also think to the extent that Foucault is assuming a masculine subject, it is this very subject that he wants to reveal as historically constituted and contingent. If this is the case, then Foucault's very blind spots reveal important avenues for productive critique of modern constructions of gender.

widespread use or refusal to use birth control is an important factor to consider in that calculation. The average age of marriage and consummation of that marriage, as well as the average number of children expected, are also important elements to consider. This concern with population means an overarching concern with how that population reproduces itself, i.e., how they engage in reproductive practices? How often? When, and with whom? These are all important factors that have to be taken into consideration before the population can be successfully managed.

Malthus, who thought the regulation of population rates was a process best left to nature, focused his early analysis of the problem of populations and poverty on the importance of procreation. For him, the real predictors of population growth or decline were a complicated set of checks that, at any given time, naturally dictate the possibility of sustaining procreation. Among the primary checks that Malthus mentions, the “preventative” or moral check revolved exclusively around the human capacity to rationalize the results of sexual activity and to recognize, in a time of scarcity, its negative effects. The most important factor that governed this check, at least for Malthus, was the age of marriage and the frequency of reproductive sexual activity within the marriage. In fact, the only prescription offered by Malthus revolves around the importance of calculating the age and amount of sexual intercourse through education and the imposition of “moral restraint.” Although suspicious of the government’s ability to regulate population in any real way, Malthus concluded, in the second edition of his essay, that it was better that these checks “should arise from foresight . . . than actual presence of war and sickness” (1992, 208).



Malthus left few regulatory prescriptions for dealing with the problem of governing populations; however, we do encounter these prescriptions in the work of his intellectual progeny. In fact, one of Foucault's central claims in *The History of Sexuality* is that the liberal regimes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries embraced, rather than repressed, the discourses that revolve around the sexuality of its citizens. The state concern with population enabled a number of non-state forms of governmental authority, whose task was to investigate and understand the sexual practices of the population, to establish the boundaries of the normal from the abnormal, and to govern sexuality in ways that maximize the happiness of the population. Not coincidentally, the authorities empowered to come to terms with human sexuality were the very same authorities charged with acquiring the disciplinary knowledge discussed in Chapter 3. Disciplines such as medicine and psychiatry embraced the new discourse of sexuality and set out to understand its biological and psychological operations.

Foucault discusses multiple forms that this new approach to governing the sexuality of the population took, all of which revolved around the newly empowered bourgeois family as the most practical agent of bio-political techniques of the self. The bourgeois family served a unique role in reproducing power and regulating sexuality; it assumed a strategic role in the web of social relations and, in doing so, became an important agent of demographic inquiry. The family, of course, had always been an important instrument in what Foucault calls "the arts of government," and many early state-centered politics were based on the family as the foundation-stone of government. After the rise of the concept of population, and the obvious need to govern it, the family becomes less important as a model for government. However, the family still plays a

fundamental role because, although the “population appears absolutely irreducible to the family,” it is nonetheless a “privileged segment” of the population’s life; when governmental administration needs salient information regarding the population, the family is the obvious instrument to which it can turn (Foucault 1991, 99-100).

Although the family was no longer the model on which governments interpreted their own authority, it was still a primary instrument through which the authority of government could operate. Within this new rationality of government, where the health and maintenance of the population became a pressing problem, the family was the obvious place for authorities to turn in order to gain vital information on how the sexuality of the population functioned:

[I]t was the first to be alerted to the potential pathology of sex, the urgent need to keep it under close watch and to devise a rational technology of correction. It was this family that first became a locus for the psychiatrization of sex. Surrendering to fears, creating remedies, appealing for rescue by learned techniques, generating countless discourses, it was the first to commit itself to sexual erethism. (VS, 120)

The family played a fundamental role when it came to regulating the dangerous sexual potential that posed the ultimate threat to a stable and secure population. Women were an early and obvious target. The role that women played in their individual families was quite significant as such, but even more significant was their necessary reproductive contribution to the social fabric in which each family was weaved. For their individual families, women maintained the household and cared for the children from conception to adulthood; to society in general, women’s “regulated fecundity” was vital, especially from the perspective of demographic administration and regulation (VS, 104). At the same time, women’s sexuality was considered highly suspicious and, perhaps, precarious. As a body thought to be “thoroughly saturated” with sexuality, women were always at

risk of the sort of hysteria or unregulated affect that is anything but synonymous with appropriate self-government.

Likewise, the lives of children were also brought into relation with this new regime of power/knowledge and self-technology. The “*pedagogization of children’s sex*” brought the entirety of human sexuality under the watchful eye of surveillance. The sexual activity of children came to be viewed as the most dangerous, because within the latent sexuality of the child was an entire lifetime of “sexual potential” that must be properly directed for the sake of stability and security of the population. A variety of experts were happy to intrude into the domain of children’s sexuality. Educators, for instance, took account of sexual potential in every dimension of the pedagogical apparatus, from the school design to curriculum articulation. As Foucault points out, in eighteenth century secondary schools sex, far from being repressed, was discussed quite frequently across expert discourses as ostensibly disparate as architecture, pedagogy, and medicine.

The regulation of children’s lives through the regulation of their sexuality became one of the primary preoccupations of the new authorities of liberal governance. There was specific notion of liberal individuality at work beneath this particular approach to educating children, and liberal regimes of government approached the potential corruptibility of children’s sexuality as a “public problem:”

Doctors counseled the directors and professors of educational establishments, but they also gave their opinions to families; educators designed projects which they submitted to authorities; schoolmasters turned to students, made recommendations to them, and drafted for their benefit books of exhortation, full of moral and medical examples. Around the schoolboy and his sex there

proliferated a whole literature of precepts, opinions, observations, medical advice, clinical cases, outlines for reform, and plans for ideal institutions (VS , 28).<sup>71</sup>

What the authorities realized was that the proper education of children was necessary if the stability of liberal regimes was to be assured. Children's ability to govern themselves in a free society had to be assured even against the most forceful of adolescent desires, and it is probably no accident that the sexual practices so common among children—masturbation, homosexual experimentation, and even incest—become the very same practices associated with perversity among adults.

Basically, the entire sexual life of humanity was to be governed. Women's and children's latent capacity for sexual excessiveness was examined within the context of Malthusian discourse that "socialized" procreative behavior in relation to the role of the family in maintaining social stability. The family under consideration here was not just any family, the family per se. The family under consideration was the newly empowered bourgeois family, the family of the liberal society and the liberal subject. The important lessons learned in the bourgeois family were lessons that could then be generalized on the level of the population. The family was the place where liberal society could define and reproduce itself; it was the place where it could distinguish itself from its various others and establish the model of normality around which it could recognize its existence.

This is why the will to sexual knowledge was so significant for liberal society. If the family was the fundamental domain of cultural reproduction and government, then the family's self-knowledge of its own sexuality was of fundamental importance; it was

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<sup>71</sup> The fact that it was the "schoolboy" who was educated and whose sexual life was deemed so important to political authorities reveals one of the earliest and most obvious contradictions in liberal political discourse.

“a fragile treasure, a secret that had to be discovered at all costs” (VS, 120). The incitement to talk about sex, it seems, was about much more than sexuality. It was a bio-political method of knowing the makeup of the population, knowing its regularities and its discontinuities. When liberal governments set out to establish the identities of their population, they turned to the families of their most vital members, the bourgeoisie, and this newly acquired knowledge about bourgeois sexuality became the standard for the entire population. The body of the bourgeois subject came to represent the normal body, and the bourgeois family became the model for normal family. Like the normalizing power of discipline, the bio-political concern with the administration of the life of the population provides an important standard by which the individual’s relationship with his or her own subjectivity can be measured, and as the most important life-affirming elements of the human existence, sexuality becomes fundamental to the subject’s self-understanding. Liberal societies begin, especially in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to see themselves primarily in bourgeois terms. The affirmation of the bourgeois body becomes, in Foucault’s words, “one of the primordial forms of class consciousness,” and the basis on which concerns for the life of the population were expressed (VS, 126).

In other words, this bio-politics of sexual regulation, like disciplinary power, plays an essential role in establishing the normalizing society: the statistical measures and means that are collected from population studies provide important information about what it means to be normal. Foucault takes the claim further claiming “a normalizing society is the historical outcome of a technology of power centered on life” (VS, 144). Out of its concern with the administration of life, bio-power connects the governmental

technology of the self with the disciplinary and bio-political technologies of power. By empowering the “action of the norm” at the bio-political level, governmental authorities realign the politics of regulation with the power of discipline, once again establishing the need to “qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize” in its attempt at “distributing the living [the population, the family, the individual] in the domain of value and utility” (VS,144).

In fact, the modern idea of the norm derives its meaning from the medical preoccupation with the biology of the human species (Foucault, 1994). What began as a simple medical designation between the normal and pathological, was then transferred into the social sphere, chiefly through the rise of the human sciences discussed above. Ian Hacking uses Comte as one of the key moments in this transition. In an analysis that reveals Comte’s intellectual debt to the biological works of Broussais, Hacking explains that when the sociologist employed the term he moved the term out of the domain of medicine and into the realm of politics and society: “The normal ceased to be the ordinary healthy state; it became the purified state to which we should strive, and, to which our energies are tending” (1990, 168).

In the hands of the bio-political authorities—sociologist, health officials, and public administrators—the normal/abnormal distinction could now refer to “almost everything” including “people, behavior, states of affairs, diplomatic relations” (160).<sup>72</sup> The distinction can be used in both an objective and a subjective sense, both of which

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<sup>72</sup> Hacking goes on to say that “the benign and sterile-sounding word ‘normal’ has become one of the most powerful ideological tools of the twentieth century” (169). I will turn my attention to this claim in Chapter 4.

betray its operation as a technique of the self. In its objective sense, the distinction provides a snapshot of liberal society, determining the qualities of the normal subject, the quintessential liberal individual. At the same time, this standard bearer of normality provides the model around which all other subjects can differentiate themselves, the subjective yardstick to which they must measure up. The norm provides a goal for the liberal individual to meet if he or she wishes to enjoy the benefits of liberal society.

To illustrate the above discussion of bio-power, liberal politics, and technologies of the self, it is helpful to turn back to Foucault's discussion of sexuality in *La Volenté de Savoir*. Put in the most basic terms, the emerging problem of population constitutes, for the liberal regimes of government, a political problem, a need to know the make up of the population, its number, its habits, and its capacity for growth or risk of contraction. This is not a mere curiosity; the regularities of the population are important elements to the vitality of liberal society. The state of the population plays a key role in determining the distribution of the nation's wealth and capacity for security, the availability of resources and labor, and the size and scope of the state itself. To get these vital statistics, the state and other authorities turn to the only agent capable of providing this information, the family. Through analyzing the procreative capacity of the family unit, the authorities can determine a population's procreative behavior and predict where these trends are heading. From this assessment, of course, a definition of the norm could be established by which all sorts of measures, habits, practices, etc. could be judged and differentiated.

With this information in hand, a multitude of authorities could set about the task of regulating and managing the inner-workings of the population organism. They could encourage procreative conduct that maximized the hopes and aims of the liberal regime

that enhanced the nation's capacity for maximizing its wealth, minimizing its poverty and vice, and, ultimately, enlarging the freedom of its model citizens. The result of this process, of course, is the rise of a new set of relationships individual subjects and the greater society and between the individual subject and his- or herself. Through the edicts and prescriptions handed down by the bio-political authorities, individuals are given a set of guidelines with which each can assess and regulate his or her behavior. Each individual is brought into the bio-political field of regulation; each is provided with the important tools for self government; and each is empowered to consult a host of experts (doctors, psychiatrists, etc.) if his or her behavior is cause of concern.

Of primary importance is the scientific resurrection of the confession, one of the oldest forms of self-technology—what Foucault calls “one of the main rituals we [in Western modernity] rely on for the production of truth,” about ourselves as a species and as individual subjects of our own knowledge (*VS*, 58). In the modern episteme, the confession becomes transformed into an important quasi-scientific device used to produce knowledge about a number of important relationships— patient to doctor, student to educator, accused to judge, children to parent, etc. The confessing subject is always responsible for telling his or her deepest secrets that can only be found through a continuous process of self-revelation, a form of “self-examination” that “yields . . . the basic certainties of consciousness” (*VS*, 60). The responsibility for confessing about one's sexuality plays a vital role in determining one's status within the population



determining how one is marked by government, and how one governs oneself.<sup>73</sup> The population can be regulated most effectively if each member takes responsibility for his or her self-government, whereby the individual concern with sex becomes “a matter that required the social body as a whole, and virtually all of its individuals, to place themselves under surveillance” (VS, 116)

### *Bio-Political Techniques of Domination*

As outlined in Chapter 3, any attempt to establish the acceptable boundaries of normal conduct and inculcate the appropriate forms of self-government, even within an otherwise free society, comes at the expense of a host of others—those marginal subjects who define the “abnormal.” In fact, normative limits of conduct reveal the interrelation between regimes of bio- and disciplinary power, unraveling how each builds off the assumptions and utilizes the instruments of the other in order to maximize its dominating effects. There are three specific ways that bio-politics fits into this process of domination, each relying to different degrees on the operation of bio- and disciplinary power respectively: 1) Production: The binary logic of bio-political normalization produces not only the population of normal subjects, but also the various sub-populations or sub-species considered abnormal or abject. 2) Normalization: Bio-political normalization subtly pressures those just within the bounds of normality to come closer

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<sup>73</sup> As Foucault explains, the work of Krafft-Ebbing is important in this respect. Not only is it an important text in the linkage of sexuality, science, and psychiatry, it is also important because it reveals just how powerful this confessional technology could be. Glancing through the cases discussed in Ebbing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* it is striking just how many of his patients brought their own cases to the doctor’s attention. In many of these cases, the patient under consideration is an otherwise normal member of the bourgeois who is concerned about his or her inability to participate in normal sexual behavior. Often, what these people want is to be cured of their affliction, homosexuality, fetishism, etc. so that they can engage in normal reproductive habits--get married, have heirs, satisfy their families, etc.

to the bio-political standard. 3) Exclusion: Bio-political concern with protecting the life and welfare of the population incubates subtle and overt forms of exclusion that Foucault reveals often play out on the biological terrain of racism.

1.

The first bio-political technique of domination is perhaps the most obvious. Like disciplinary power, which is productive of the delinquent, bio-power is also productive of a host of sub-species against which normal subject can use to define his or her normality. Again, if the discourses that revolve around sexuality—e.g., public health and reproduction—are taken as the ultimate expression of bio-political concerns, it is quite easy to see why. If the bourgeois post-Malthusian family is taken as the model of sexual normality, then it has to be defined against something. Enter the bastard, the orphan, and the various other by-products of abnormal sexual relationships. If monogamy is mandated within this family, then there are the various vices associated with promiscuity. If women are a fundamental link in the chain of normal sexuality, then there is the hysterical woman, psychologically incapable of playing this vital role. If children's sexuality is to be constantly supervised and regulated, there is the masturbator to provide important lessons about inappropriate behavior.

Here, one is reminded of Foucault's famous depiction of the "village halfwit" Charles Jouy, whose sexual experimentation with a young farm girl, once accepted as part of the "social landscape" of the time, becomes a real concern for psychiatric

authorities (VS, 31-32).<sup>74</sup> For Foucault, the Jouy case marks an important moment in the “*psychiatrization of perverse pleasure*,” that links the disciplinary technology of psychiatry with the bio-medical discourse of public health producing a new spectrum of normal and pathological behaviors.<sup>75</sup> From this point forward, there is no real distinction that can be made between disciplinary power and bio-political processes: Both are incorporated into the productive network of psychiatric power/knowledge, and both are productive of various versions of “the delinquent” across the constraints of formal legality. In the bio-political register, delinquent sexualities take multiple forms, all of which are guilty of violating the law of the norm. The population, held so sacred at the level of government, can now be divided into multiple sub-groups and sub-populations (Dean 1999, 100; Dryfus and Rabinow 1983, 172-173). This process is productive of a host of new, mutated versions of subjectivity, and a new sub-species of human being to correspond to each mutation. As Foucault puts it, “it was time for all these figures [perverts, predators, homosexuals, etc.] scarcely noticed in the past, to come forward and speak” (VS, 39), and by speaking they were introduced into the disciplinary regimes of domination that allowed them to be observed, and, judged, and corrected, or if that was not possible, institutionalized. In any case, they no longer posed a threat to the normal population.

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<sup>74</sup> Foucault provides a much fuller account of the Jouy case in a March 1974 lecture at the Collège de France (2003a, 291-308).

<sup>75</sup> Foucault explains that this linkage also marks an important transition in the history of psychiatry. Previous to it being called into the service of bio-politics, psychiatry was relatively indistinguishable from other medical sciences in its ultimate concern with illness. More than the other medical sciences, however, psychiatry offers up its services as the ultimate “science of normality” and charges its self with monitoring a variety of conducts once firmly out of the bounds of medical science (2003a, 309)

## 2.

In addition to this rather overt attempt at labeling threats for the sake of their subjugation, bio-politics also incorporates much more subtle forms of domination, that are sometimes hard to distinguish from rather benign techniques of the self. The most striking example of this subtle form of domination is the nineteenth-century expansion of the domain of normal sexuality beyond the confines of the bourgeoisie family. This expansion constituted a bio-political attempt to inculcate bourgeois values into the lower classes of liberal society. Again, Foucault's discussion of the bio-political discourses of sexuality is instructive. As mentioned in the above section, the bio-political deployment of sexuality (to use Foucault's phrase) was, at least initially, a technology of government that the bourgeoisie imposed on themselves; there was no real concern with the lives, sexual or otherwise, of the lower classes of society.<sup>76</sup> However, as economic and social conditions changed, so did conceptions of just who constituted the vital population.

Quite quickly, the administrators of public welfare realized that they could not be content to concern themselves solely with the welfare of the bourgeoisie while ignoring a host of potential threats. Economic development and industrialization meant the rise of the factory system, mass unemployment, and pollution—all of which posed their own unique threat to the population's security. The rise of the industrial economy brought with it the need to guarantee a productive work force; the spread of disease among the unhygienic classes, ultimately, brought with it the need to protect the healthy from the

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<sup>76</sup> Foucault argues that this willingness to ignore the biological and life-affirming needs of the proletariat explains, as much as outright exploitation, the conditions in which the early-modern working class were forced to live and work and the conclusion that "it was of little importance whether *those* people lived or died" (VS, 126).

threat of disease; and a growing population brought with it the need to instill appropriate morals and proper conduct if the nation's resources were going to be protected and its wealth maximized (the Malthusian hangover). In short, a more general concern with welfare had to be administered, and those who had thus far escaped the bio-political techniques of government had to be brought under the big tent of bourgeois values.

Proper sexual conduct, in other words, eventually became something that everyone should be concerned with: the bourgeoisie, the working classes, and the poor. Foucault suggests that this "deployment of sexuality" to the poorer classes happened in "three successive stages:"

The first involved the problems of birth control, when it was discovered, at the end of the eighteenth century, that the art of fooling nature was not the exclusive privilege of city dwellers and libertines. . . . Next, the organization of the "conventional" family came to be regarded, sometime around the eighteenth-thirties, as an indispensable instrument of political control and economic regulation for the subjugation of the urban proletariat: there was a great campaign for the "moralization of the poorer classes." The last stage came at the end of the nineteenth century with the juridical and medical control of perversions, for the sake of a general protection of the society and the race. It can be said that this was the moment when the deployment of "sexuality," elaborated in its more complex and intense forms, by and for the privileged classes, spread throughout the social body. (*VS*, 122)

At the level of bio-political administration, each of these stages engendered "a whole technology of control" and subtle domination that brought the sexuality of the lower classes into the field of sexual surveillance, evaluation, and regulation (*VS*, 126). The result, Foucault explains, is "what could be called an interclass family model" (2003, 270) that all individuals, from the wealthy to the impoverished, were pressured to embrace.

The previous discussion of Malthus points out how important the working class family became to the liberal order, and reveals an alternative rationality behind the attempt to introduce the lower classes to bourgeois standards of sexual normality. Even Malthus, who found nature as the real solution to the problem of an overextended population, later came to see social solutions to the problem of overpopulation; and for a generation of political economists and moral theorists influenced by Malthus, the immorality that led to overpopulating could be eradicated by providing the working classes with the same educational opportunities offered the bourgeoisie, at least when it came to a moral education. By the end of the nineteenth-century and the beginning of the twentieth, the idea of the Malthusian family is solidified, with the responsibility for family planning lying solely on the properly educated individual. Foucault himself takes a rather Marxist aim at this fact, arguing in one lecture that the sexual immorality of the laboring class constituted a real problem for factory owners and private industry. It was necessary, Foucault thinks, for the bio-political economic structure to take hold of workers bodies, behaviors, and conduct (i.e., discipline them). The factory owners, Foucault explains, “couldn’t bear the idea of working class debauchery,” and entering the working class subject into the bio-political regime of normalized sexuality was an important first step in assuring the transformation of “living time, into labor time” (2000g, 82). Of course, the bourgeoisie did not always care about working class debauchery—capital often benefited from both the expansion of the labor force and the mobility of a laborer who does not feel responsible for a family. However, in the mid-nineteenth century, Foucault explains, the governing class took renewed interest in

working class health and fecundity, especially as it related to the married couple (2003a, 270-271).

This is not to say that there were not dramatic differences in class reality when it came to living sexuality and family life. There were. In this respect, the model family serves less as an archetype than as a definition of normality around which every member of the population could seek recognition. Obviously, some groups within the population came closer to realizing this model than others, and that is precisely the point. The further individuals deviated from the mean, the more likely they were to be brought back into the bio-politics of normalization through a host of disciplinary interventions. Public health, education, social welfare, and charitable organizations all had their disciplinary arms ready to reach into the “dangerous” populations in an attempt to bring each member, each family, back into the fold.

As Mitchell Dean has pointed out, the workhouse of the nineteenth century provides a convincing example of those “non-liberal forms of thought and practice that gain a certain legitimacy within liberal democracies” and that justify subjecting a host of disqualified subjects to “all sorts of disciplinary, bio-political, and even sovereign interventions” (1999, 134),<sup>77</sup> many of which were empowered by liberal bio-politics. Again, turning back to Bentham reveals just how the bio-political and disciplinary can reform each other. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, Bentham’s idealized “Panopticon” was indeed a disciplinary technology, but it was premised on a group of bio-political concerns. Why does society need a model prison? Why does it need an effective

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<sup>77</sup> For a full account of these practices see Dean, 1999.

workhouse? Why should these institutions be aimed at reintroducing productive members back into society? Ultimately, it is the threat these groups pose to the rest of the population that makes their disciplinary regulation so important. Bentham's "industry houses" are exemplary of this technology, serving as "multi-functional institutions, employing techniques of disciplinary normalization, but also combining elements of the quarantine station, prison, school, hospital, manufactory, and research institute. They are like menageries for the semi-humanized, hyper-natural, paupers," for all intents and purposes, considered "domesticated livestock" (Dean 1992, 238).

The end of the eighteenth century brought with it a new concern with the health of the population that made it increasingly difficult for the working classes to escape the reach of the newly empowered bio-political authorities.<sup>78</sup> According to Foucault, the rise of public health followed roughly two overlapping trajectories. On one hand, there was an outright concern with the "conservation of the labor force" (1980a, 171). This constituted recognition of the need to maintain a healthy labor-force in order to maintain a healthy economy. Again, the success of the new productive apparatus demanded more than just disciplined workers; it "required both docile bodies *and* healthy bodies" (Marsh 1998, 296 emphasis mine). Along these lines, working class housing developments were established in order to improve and maintain sanitary living conditions and to stop the spread of disease. Likewise worker's saving accounts were established to maintain the

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<sup>78</sup> E.P Thompson (1964) argues that these interventions into working class life did little to improve their health; however, the fact that Thompson is able to draw from a rather wide body of data from the time suggests that bio-political regimes were, at least, collecting the data necessary to provide a picture of the population's health.



working family even through slow periods of employment (Foucault 2000g, 81).<sup>79</sup> This “labor force medicine,” Foucault’s term for this form of intervention, was “not the first but the last objective of social medicine” (2000a, 150). This form of medical and hygienic intervention yielded the following benefits: First, it provided better assurance of the work-force’s fitness; second, it provided better assurances that the poor and dangerous classes did not spread their diseases to the middle class (155).

The second trajectory was broader, consisting of the concern with public health and the welfare of the population more generally. What this trajectory reveals is that bio-political authorities intervened in the lives of the working classes because they were beginning to intervene in the lives of all members of the social organism. The difference, of course, is that the bourgeoisie could, for the most part, look after themselves when it came to sanitation. These were, after all, the people inculcated with sanitary values since childhood and who had received the proper education, and understood the proper moral conduct.<sup>80</sup> But this was often merely just another form of intervention into the lives of the working class, because they were the important buffer between the bourgeoisie and the diseased world of poverty. On the whole, this public health initiative was an important first step, along with the “deployment of sexuality,” toward bringing the working-classes into the bourgeois world of biological normality and distancing the working poor populations from the otherwise idle. Idleness was considered a cause of all

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<sup>79</sup> For a genealogy of “unemployment” see William Walters’ (1994) “The Discovery of ‘Unemployment’: New Forms for the Government of Poverty.”

<sup>80</sup> Foucault points to Krafft-Ebbing as an example of the proliferation of sexual discourse. If one actually looks at Ebbing’s work, one quickly realizes that a substantial majority of cases that he took on were representatives of the emergent bourgeoisie, and a disproportional number of those cases were self-selected, i.e., they were good, middle-class men and women who recognized they suffered some sexual malady and wanted to find a cure before they suffered social sanction (See Krafft-Ebbing 1931)

forms of vice and disease, and improving the lives of the working population often meant attempting to remove them from the influence of pauperism. The public health authorities were yet another agent in the attempt to separate the deserving from the non-deserving poor and revealing, once again, the value of work to society. As Mitchell Dean points out, this process was at its core a bio-political one, one that reinforced the value of work and an “ethic of personal and familial responsibility” (1992, 243).

### 3.

The production of abject subjects “distinct” from the population and the intervention into the lives of “risky” or “dangerous” subgroups within the population come together in the ultimate bio-political technique of exclusion, racism. It is important to highlight a distinction here. When Foucault discussed racism in the context of the emerging politics of bio-power, his concern is not merely the kind of ethnic racism that came to define the term in the twentieth century and beyond. Racism and the discourse about race referred to a set of more general concerns about the self-constitution, health, purity, and continuing vitality of the population. As Hardt and Negri point out, one of the pressing problems of modern nation-state is that in order to be successful, it “must make a multitude into a people”—it must take the collection of self-governing liberal individuals and transform them into a nation with a deeper common and a way of distinguishing themselves from what they are not (2000, 103). In much the same way that the liberal individual needs an identity by which he or she might be defined, the

liberal state too needs a conception of what it is, something to give it its definition.<sup>81</sup>

Racism is the by-product of this process of this self-definition. Race, in this sense, becomes associated with the population or nation as that thing which must be protected at all cost if society is to remain free (Rose 2000, 115). In the bio-politically normalizing society, to be a member of a race or a people is to be part of a unique species, distinct from those internal and external others that are believed to pose a threat.<sup>82</sup>

It is easy to see why sexuality becomes such an important technology of bio-power. If the purity of the race is to be maintained, it is important to manage every aspect of the reproductive capacity of the species. As a primary technology of bourgeois self-production, procreative behavior was an important element in determining what the bourgeoisie were not. Unlike the aristocratic society they had challenged, the bourgeoisie did not concern themselves with their past, their genealogy or their bloodline. Instead, the bourgeois were concerned with their future, with their progeny and the protection of the society that this progeny would inherit. It was the bourgeoisie's fascination with their own race, with the purity of the liberal individual, which allowed them to transform the "blue blood of the nobles into a sound organism and a healthy sexuality" (VS, 126) and allowed them to consider themselves as a distinct species with distinct possibilities. Realizing the dream of a society of free and equal individuals meant de-legitimizing a society that connected political legitimacy to blood history, and that often meant posing

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<sup>81</sup> Could we expect the self-interested individual to fight foreign wars simply for the abstract concept freedom?

<sup>82</sup> For a comprehensive examination of the bio-politics of race with respect to the other of European colonialism see Ann Laura Stoler's *Race and the Education of Desire* (1995).

the struggle over the legitimate right to power in terms racial conflict—the pure vs. the impure.

But the struggle over the purity of the race was not only fought against the aristocracy and former nobility, in time, it was also fought against the lower classes as well, and it was here that bio-political racism had its most abhorrent impact. Racism plays an important role in a normalizing society, establishing the norm as biological fact, and providing administrators with the authority of scientific discourse. In this role, racism becomes bound up with the operations of the liberal state as the body charged with protecting the population and securing its health (biological, social, reproductive, productive, etc.) against any and all threats. As Foucault puts it, what might be called modern racism transforms the discourse of racial struggle—a struggle between races—into a discourse of battle waged “by the race that is portrayed as the one true race, the race that holds power and is able to define the norm . . . against those who deviate from that norm” (2003b, 61).

This, however, is hardly a fair fight. In his consideration of the bio-politics of racism, Foucault gives his most focused attention to the role of the state in liberal societies, because it is the state that is charged with protecting the race from all sorts of threats through what he calls the “internal racism of permanent purification” (2003b, 62). Here is where bio-power shows its darker side. Although it is a form of power concerned with enhancing life, bio-power also sometimes justifies taking lives in order that the livelihood of the population can be enhanced. In the most obvious cases this means invoking a sort of racism to wage wars against the nation’s enemies, usually after a direct threat; however, the state also has to recognize that there are enemies within and these too

have to be eradicated in the attempt to “distinguish the superior from the inferior, the fit from the unfit.” Although liberal states are usually reluctant to unleash their most lethal forms of power on those sub-populations that they are charged with protecting, what states can do is refuse to enhance or completely disallow this abject population’s right to life. The state could “identify those who are degenerate, abnormal, feeble-minded . . . and subject them to forced sterilization” and to “encourage those who are superior, fit, and intelligent to propagate” (Dean 1999, 140).

Long before its most famous manifestation in Nazism, several nations had undertaken a number of projects to rid their populations of degenerates. As the bourgeois body, bourgeois conduct, and bourgeois values came to define the human race there was an attempt in almost every Western society to engage in racist schemes meant to protect the middle-class population.<sup>83</sup> On the more benign side of the spectrum, there was the post-Malthusian attempt to encourage birth control and moral responsibility among the poorer classes. On the more insidious side, there were various attempts to define “the dangerous classes in terms of alien races within the body politic” (Rose 2000, 47; see also Dean 1999, 136), and to systematically rid society of the internal threat posed by these classes of degenerates through forced sterilization, which was often accompanied by

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<sup>83</sup> The United States was not immune from this will to purify the race. Although gaining momentum a bit later than in Europe, the early twentieth century was full of arguments for selectively breeding the degenerate classes and “the morons” out of the American identity. These too ran the gamut, from the “fitter families” contest held at state fairs, to more pronounced institutionalization and sterilization programs, some of which were still in operation well into the nineteen seventies. In *Buck vs. Bell* (274 US 200, 1927), even the respected jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes concluded: “It is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind.” For a general overview of the history of American eugenics see Paul, 1994 and Black, 2003. For a more pointed story of one attempt at controlling the degeneration of the American race at the Fernald State School in Massachusetts as well as the patients attempted resistance against it, see D’Antonio, 2004.

institutionalization. From Galton's arguments for selective breeding to late nineteenth century "social Darwinism" and "ethnic hygiene," safeguarding of the race from genetic degeneration was directed not only at the ethnic other or the mentally ill, but also and often at those whose only claim to abnormality was abject poverty.<sup>84</sup>

### *Race, Gender, and the Bio-politics of Class*

It is important to restate here that when Foucault discusses race he does not limit himself to the black/white dichotomy that has characterized the language of race for much of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Instead, the race, in its earliest modern forms was less about skin color and more about being a legitimate member of the bio-political species-body of the population and about helping to preserve the legitimate members of the populations from those multiform others that pose a threat to it. In the realm of sexuality, the argument for racial purity meant shoring up the population's defenses against all of the lurking forms of sexual malfeasance through proper education and adherence to strict codes of conduct so that abject sexualities might be discovered, marked off, marginalized, and perhaps, excluded. But if sexuality was the most obvious example of this bio-political process of legitimizing "the race," it is far from the only one. Here is where the intervention into the lives of working subject does its real work to bring them into the fold and allow them to discover their kinship with the middle-classes. Through a concern with working class health and hygiene, the bio-political experts

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<sup>84</sup> For a discussion of the role social Darwinism and the various "hygiene" movements in the US, see Robert Castels, et al, *The Psychiatric Society* (1982).

engaged in an early attempt to rally workers in the fight against the threats to the well-being of the population—the poor and indigent, the real carriers of disease and disorder.

Again a variety of apparatuses of bio-power contribute to this attempt to desegregate the working poor from the rest of the impoverished population. As both Malthus and Bentham make clear in their reactions to the British Poor Laws, it is those who can provide for themselves and accept personal responsibility for their own economic and moral well-being who are deserving of the benefits of liberal citizenship; both agree that all previous attempts to combat poverty extended rewards to the idle and proliferated immorality (Dean 1992, 239-240). Throughout the history of nineteenth century liberalism, this type of intervention was extended even further into the lives of the poor and had the effect of marking off those with the proper morality from the utterly hopeless. In short, the “liberal mode of government” draws greater numbers of people into the non-political, primarily economic, spheres of life where they are expected to take responsibility for maximizing their own freedom (Dean 1991). The earliest conception of “unemployment” follows this same political rationality, extending relief to only a small segment of the unemployed and further demarcating the world of work from the world of pauperism. As Williams (1994) explains, as the concept of unemployment entered the modern political imagination, especially in the mid to late nineteenth century, the idle were classified into the following three categories: the unemployable; the casually employed; and workers who “are otherwise regularly employed, but become unemployed through industrial change, whether mechanization or trade depression” (267). Put in political economic terms, the emergence of concept of unemployment recognizes that, like all natural phenomena, the economy is bound to have both ebbs and flows, and it is

necessary to guarantee the population some sort of protection against the serious hardships that might be felt in the low periods. But it is only the latter class of unemployed that qualify for any relief because “their distress can be related to ‘exceptional’ economic circumstances . . . rather than ‘personal failure’ (267).

This extension of unemployment to the deserving part of the non-working population is telling because this temporary relief for the otherwise working went primarily to the male population, thus gendering the concept of work in ways that are still with us.<sup>85</sup> In his discussion of unemployment, William Walters quotes a long passage from William Beveridge that makes this point forcefully:

Society is built upon labor; it lays upon its members responsibilities which in the vast majority of cases can be met only from the reward of labor . . . [I]ts ideal unit is the household of a man, wife and children maintained by the earnings of the first alone. The household should have at all times sufficient room and air according to its size—but how if the income is always too irregular to pay the rent? The children, till they themselves can work, should be supported by their parents—but how, unless the father has employment? The wife, so long as she is bearing and bringing up children, should have no other task—but how if the husband’s earnings fail and she has to go to work? Everywhere the same difficulty reoccurs. Every reasonable security of employment for the breadwinner is the basis of all private duties and all sound action. (Beveridge 1909, 1 cited in Williams 1995, 265)

As Joan Wallach Scott (1988) points out, this liberal narrative was always more of a dream than a reality; as important as women’s work was to the maintenance of liberal society, it was often written out of the official histories (66-67), and this ignorance had an

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<sup>85</sup> Nancy Fraser (1989) persuasively argues that this gendered division of social support still exists, or at least continued to exist under the AFDC system of welfare and unemployment insurance. She point out that men’s social welfare programs have historically fallen under the banner of “social insurance schemes” designed to “position recipients primarily as *rights bearers*” (152). On the other hand, the forms of welfare schemes most applicable to women focus attention not on women as holders of right but as “‘chiselers,’ ‘deviants,’ and ‘individual failures’” (153). Put most simply, this system treats men as active members of the society and women as “dependent clients” (153)



important cultural impact. As work takes on biological meaning in the lives of the nineteenth-century liberal population, the kind of work one does is what provides social and cultural recognition. The demeaning of women's work, especially domestic labor, is not only a sociological but also a bio-political phenomenon that begins in the household of the bourgeoisie and is slowly integrated into the lives of the proletariat as they are inculcated with the proper family values that allow them to become part of the legitimate population. The world of work, it seems, is also a world of stark gendered divisions of labor, where the worker/breadwinner is the only member of the family thought to have the capacity to engage in public life. Combined with the bio-political deployment of sexuality, the concerns with public health and political economy working class men became engaged with a strict deployment of gender that "presupposes that [as a worker] he is a man who has a woman, a (house) wife, to take care of his daily needs (Pateman 1988, 131).

Laura Anne Stoler reveals how the languages of class, race, and gender are interrelated in the nineteenth century, especially in the discourse of colonialism. Of course, there was always a naturalized theory of labor working informing colonialism; as early as Locke it was clear that what separates Europeans from the savage other is the presence of a strong ethos of work and responsibility.<sup>86</sup> But, as Stoler points out, much of the discourse of the time also equated the condition of the worst of the European population—the lowest classes of indigent—with the racialized other that they discovered

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<sup>86</sup> Consider Locke's comparison between the indigenous American population and the poorest day laborer in England. The seemingly inhospitable lives of the former, he argues, could not "be a clearer demonstration" of the value of labor to the process of civilization (Locke, 25-6).

in the colonies (1995, 127). In fact, although race and class were not necessarily interchangeable categories, they often corresponded in defining that which was not a vital part of the bourgeoisie population and the national identity. Both other classes and other races posed the same sort of threat to the health of the liberal population, and both had to be dealt with.<sup>87</sup> This makes the attempts to desegregate the working classes from the deserving poor even more important. Poverty and laziness were equivocal to vice, promiscuity, sickness, and disease, whether in the poor at home or the savage abroad. The bio-politics of public health and welfare, then, can be viewed as an early attempt to disconnect the fate of workers from the fate of those other races of sick and diseased that threatened the population. With respect to the work ethic, what all of this did was to instill further, in the hearts and mind of the lower classes, the notion that work was the key to social acceptance and social mobility, an important component in becoming part of the legitimate bio-political species. Work was not the only thing that mattered, of course; in fact, it is impossible to separate the work ethic from other modes of conduct constitutive of normal subjectivity.

In the following two chapters I will provide a more explicit link between the work ethic and the government of contemporary liberal conduct. To do this, in Chapter 5 I consider the similarities and differences between traditional and contemporary liberal government, exploring the continuities and discontinuities that culminate in what Nikolas Rose has called “advanced liberalism.” In doing so I explore how this contemporary manifestation of liberal government places a renewed emphasis on the links between

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<sup>87</sup> Lorimer (1978) relates the English reception of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on this point, explaining the conditions of slaves in the US and paupers in England were often considered the same.

normal subjectivity and personal responsibility. In short, more than any other brands of liberalism, contemporary liberalism governs by placing the responsibility for government on the liberal subject him or herself. As in earlier forms, the disciplines of psychiatry and psychology play an important role in defining the boundaries of normal subjectivity; however, now we rely on a highly democratized practical psychiatry of self-help and empowerment to reveal the proper modes of behavior and allow us to conduct our own conduct appropriately. In the final chapter, I utilize this analysis of contemporary liberal techniques of government to consider the role the work ethic plays in governing the lives and livelihood of Americans throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

## Chapter 5

### The Subject of Recent Liberalism

Thus far I have provided a rather general description of liberal governmentality and considered how this general rationality of government utilizes the work ethic as a technique of government that contributes both to the liberal individual's self-understanding and the production of the others against which these individuals define themselves. At times, I have suggested this process of "othering" has even resulted in the use of both subtle and overt forms of domination. In the remainder of this dissertation I would like to take aim in a more specific direction, exploring the ways that the work ethic operates as a technique of contemporary liberal government, particularly in the United States. In this chapter I provide a brief overview of contemporary liberalism, focusing specifically on how its techniques of government are both continuous with traditional liberal political rationality and unique in how it offers a new rationality to produce and activate the contemporary liberal subjectivity. In doing so, I first take up Foucault's own thoughts on "neo-liberalism."<sup>88</sup> By "neo-liberalism" I mean the recent liberal rationality

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<sup>88</sup> In a series of lectures delivered in 1978 and 1979 at the Collège de France Foucault makes his most overt statement on "neo-liberal" governmentality. Unfortunately, because of stipulations in Foucault's will (the will expressly forbade publishing unpublished written material) these lectures have remained unpublished. Recently, however, a handful of scholars have been granted permission by the estate to transcribe these lectures from existing audiotapes and check them against Foucault's written notes, and they are slowly becoming available in both French and English. The full text of these particular lectures on liberal governmentality ("la naissance de la biopolitique" ["the birth of Biopolitics"]) will not be available in French until later this year. It will be published under the title: *Naissance de la biopolitique: Cours au collège de France (1978-1979)*. In the following discussion I will rely heavily on the few pieces of these lectures that have been published, as well as the course summary. I will also use explications of the texts provided by a few of the scholars who have had access to them.

of politics that maintains many of the values of the liberal tradition while at the same time offering rather unique solutions to contemporary political problems. The continuation of the liberal tradition comes in the form of a renewed critique of state activity, especially the middle twentieth century welfare state and “its features such as bureaucracy, rigidity, and dependency formation” (Dean 1999, 210). From this perspective the welfare state is considered an absolute failure in that it only reproduces and intensifies social problems, creating a “culture of dependence” out of which the welfare state’s clients can never escape. Neo-liberalism has little patience with government assistance; it instead posits the market as the cure-all for social ills. Here, neo-liberalism is unique from most other version of liberal governmentality. Although the tradition of liberal government has often turned to the market for lessons about freedom, neo-liberalism sees the market as the realm of freedom par excellence. For neo-liberalism, providing real solutions to social problems (at least those that can be solved) means replicating the logic of the market in all spheres of government and civil society and working to “establish a culture of enterprise and autonomy” (Dean, 210) in these spheres of existence.

### *How to Define Contemporary Liberalism*

In a series of lectures given in 1978 and 1979 Foucault traces the modern trajectory of liberal forms of government as they arose in Western Europe as a critique of absolute sovereignty and an overreaching state. According to Colin Gordon, the liberalism that interests Foucault in these studies might be understood as “real liberalism” (meant to contrast with “actually existing socialism”), i.e. liberalism implemented through actual governmental that is conscious of the danger of governing too much and

whose “constituent elements are far less mutually cohesive than ideology-critics have been apt to suppose” (Gordon 1991, 19). Beginning with the form of governing best characterized as “reason of state” (Foucault 1991, 95-97; 2000e, 406-9; Gordon 1991, 9), Foucault explores the rise of liberalism as an “art” of governing, one that is at its essence critical of state reason primarily because it understands the state to be the biggest threat to individual liberty (1997c75).

Of course, liberalism is not a uniform set of governmental practices; it takes different shapes in different contexts. Generally, Foucault’s discussion of liberalism revolves around three primary movements: Early liberalism—that critique of excess government that came out of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Welfare liberalism—the variant of liberalism that originated in nineteenth century and extended into the twentieth century, and “neo-liberalism”—the form of liberalism best characterized by the *Ordoliberals* in Germany and the Chicago School in the United States. What is unique about neo-liberalism, especially the American version, is its preoccupation with the logic of the market and its belief that the same logic might be applied to society. The Chicago School liberals in the US, for example, took the traditional liberal concern with market freedom to astonishing new heights. Like most variants of liberal theory, the neo-liberals thought that the market could provide a sort of “test” for freedom, “a locus of privileged experience where one can identify the effects of excessive governmentality, and even weigh their significance” (1997c, 76). But neo-liberalism imagined the market as providing *the test*. American neo-liberalism wishes to enlarge freedom by “extend[ing] the rationality of the market . . . to areas that are not exclusively or primarily economic” (79).

As Thomas Lemke characterizes it, neo-liberalism seeks the “extension of the economic form to apply to the social sphere, eliding any difference between the economic and the social” (Lemke 2001, 197). In this way, the market plays the role of a “permanent economic tribunal” (Foucault, Lecture March 21, 1979, cited in Lemke, 198), or as Gordon (1991) interprets it:

Now it is proposed that that economics concerns all purposive conduct entailing strategic choices between alternative paths, means and instruments; or, yet, more broadly, *all rational conduct* (including rational thought as a variety of rational conduct); or again, finally, all conduct, rational or irrational, which responds to its environment in a non-random fashion . . . .

Economics thus become an “approach” capable in principle of addressing the totality of human behavior, and consequently, of envisaging a coherent, purely economic, programming the totality of governmental action. (43)

If political economy has always been a major form of liberal governmental expertise that interprets the economy as a natural entity with its own cycles and regularities, in neo-liberalism political economy becomes the expert-knowledge *extraordinaire* providing a form of expert knowledge that encompasses all aspects of political, social, and even at biological existence. Where traditional liberalism, from at least Smith forward, imagined the state to function as the ultimate arbiter and regulator of market freedom (e.g. Smith 2000, 779), American neo-liberalism reverses this relationship between state and market and offers the organizing principle of free market as “the organizing principle for the state *and* society” (Lemke, 200, emphasis mine; e.g., Friedman 1982, 22-35).

In sum, this transformation in the relationship between the economy and society results in the assumptions of rational choice economic theory being writ large on the entirety of society. Utilizing the economic theory of rational actors who prioritize their preferences, consider the most efficient means of satisfaction, assign appropriate risks

and payoffs, and choose accordingly (Lane 1991, 42),<sup>89</sup> this approach to social theory (which Foucault sees best characterized by the work of Gary Becker) posits a view of society that mirrors the very assumptions that the theory rests upon—a society made up of entirely of economically rational actors whose lives are dedicated to maximizing utility. In this respect, the title of Becker’s influential work, *An Economic Approach to Human Behavior* (1976), says it all.

Nikolas Rose (1996) sees this extension of market logic and expertise as one of three primary characteristics of what he calls “advanced liberalism,” the form of liberal governmentality that now dominates the US, UK, Australia, New Zealand. Describing a “*new relationship between expertise and politics*,” Rose suggests that the relationship between government and expertise, always important to liberal regimes, was transformed over the course of the twentieth century: Through its extension of market logic into the greater society, advanced liberalism relies heavily on an expertise of marketization. From this perspective, there is little difference between the logic governing that market and the logic governing society; therefore, if the market and society are understood in similar terms, then the experts who claim to understand the rationality of the market should be able to provide comprehensive knowledge about the social world. Where once the governing role for economists and business professionals was restricted to expanding the wealth of the nation, under this new regime of liberalism these experts can provide the knowledge that helps solve a variety of social ills, from saving social security, to health care, to education reform—after all the knowledge that makes someone a

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<sup>89</sup> Lane’s book is an excellent reference because he also considers the costs of this transition with respect to happiness and human development.



successful CEO must have the same knowledge needed for effective government (54). In this new relationship, the logic of the market completely infiltrates governmental activities and brings about multiple phases of de-regulation; even government's rule-making capacity is called into question. This transformation became clear during the Reagan administration, and has continued through every administration since. From Bill Clinton's confessional "it's the economy, stupid" to "CEO-in-chief" George W. Bush's campaign to introduce a competitive system of market inducements to a "failing" education system, the American version of advanced liberalism has embraced this economic rationality of government and has slowly redefined all aspects of social life with market definitions.<sup>90</sup>

Rose also thinks advanced liberalism is unique because of a "new pluralization of social technologies" (136). Related to expertise, this characteristic of contemporary liberalism rests on the assumption that the state is ill-equipped to govern effectively and efficiently and attempts to move the responsibility for governing away from the state and toward a number of disparate social institutions such as the community, the family, and the church. This approach came to the surface during the Reagan/Thatcher years as an attempt to "disassemble" state apparatuses of welfare, relocating those services in multiple "privatized" spaces and empowering a diverse set of actors to perform these services once thought to be the sole domain of the state. In both the US and Britain,

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<sup>90</sup> For instance, in Bush's "No Child Left Behind" proposals for education reform, children and their families were defined, basically, as consumers operating in a monopolized marketplace. To solve this problem, the Bush administration's proposals sought to first, free the market, allowing for the competition of charter schools and private schools, and second, to free individual children from being "forced to attend persistently failing schools, . . . they must at some point be freed to attend adequate schools" ([http://www.ed.gov/nclb/overview/intro/presidentplan/page\\_pg4.html](http://www.ed.gov/nclb/overview/intro/presidentplan/page_pg4.html)); Educational Resource Services 2001, 8).

deregulation became the political aim of the army of neo-liberal Reagan- and Thatcherites whose mantra was “getting government off our backs.” One of the defining proposals of the Bush administration takes this pluralization of social technologies one step further. The “faith based initiatives” programs not only take the responsibility for welfare out of the hands of the state, but they empower religious organizations to take over these functions, overturning years of regulative and legal decisions historically separating church and state.

But this individuation of social responsibility does not mean that the state is without purpose; it is simply a reconceptualization of what it means to govern through the liberal state. As Thomas Lemke (2001) has rightly pointed out, even the “withdrawal of the state” from social life and the subsequent opening of society up to the logic of the market “can be deciphered as a technique of governing” (201). In this case, the state’s role is to make sure that the market sphere of freedom remains “free.” The subject of advanced liberalism, the thinking goes, will act appropriately if proper conditions exist and if the state gets out of the way (Barry, Osborne, and Rose 1996, 10). Most recently, this new “philosophy of governing” has been outlined by David Brooks (2004) in an attempt to promote what he calls a “progressive conservatism” (32-33). According to Brooks, the success of Republicans in the United States is dependent on a sort of sea-change in some of their core values. Sure, they must continue to be suspicious of “big government” (this is true to their liberal roots), but they also have to understand that the state can play a “positive” role in the government of citizens’ lives under the right circumstances: This means having the political wisdom to strike the difficult balance between state action that empowers citizens and state action that inhibits them. This

might mean moving away from the pervasive concern with the size of government,<sup>91</sup> and moving towards a rationality of governing that focuses on “the habits [appropriate government] encourages in its citizens” (34). In other words, this form of advanced liberal governmentality embraces what Rose and Miller (1992) call government “beyond the state.” The state is there, of course, but it is there to encourage the qualified subjects of advanced liberalism to govern themselves, to provide the tools that enable them to activate their capacities for self-determination and reliance. Government should be about “empowering individuals,” and the most effective way to empower individuals is through empowering non-state institutions to do the work of empowerment. And by empowering Brooks quite clearly means producing individuals “instilled with Bourgeois values” (Brooks 2004, 37).

Put simply, advanced liberal governmentality is a rationality of governing that is productive of a model of subjectivity and a sphere of free activity that it assumes already exists (see Lemke 2002). In doing so, this art of governing is constitutive of both the domain of social and economic freedom that it wants to defend, and the subject that it is capable of operating in this free domain. As Lane (1999) explains, human beings learn their behaviors from the social world that they inhabit. If economic rationality is emphasized, humans learn from this “market experience.” If market logic is extended in to the social world, then the same market rationality governs social learning and produces liberal individuals who recognize their social existence primarily through economic terms. In other words, this market-based approach to governing is productive of subjects

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<sup>91</sup> In fact, the cover of the *New York Time Magazine* that contained Brooks’ manifesto declared “the death of small government conservatism.”

who are increasingly “passionately attached,” to use Judith Butler’s term, to the logic of the market, because the logic of the market increasingly provides the only language through which subjects can gain a sense of social understanding and existence (see Butler 1997, 6-10). The question that remains, of course, is just who is this subject to advanced liberalism, or, as Nikolas Rose (1996) asks it, what is this “new specification of the subject of government” (57)?

### *Techniques of the Contemporary Liberal Self*

Like the early forms of liberalism advanced liberal political reason also relies heavily on techniques of the self and techniques of domination, although in theory it would claim to emphasize the former much more than the latter. Advanced liberalism assumes the presence of an active, engaged subject empowered from within to act within the realms of freedom administered from upon high. Gordon (1991) puts it nicely: the subject of advanced liberalism is assumed to be capable of being an “entrepreneur out of himself or herself,” i.e., a subject with the capabilities that allow for meeting the demands of the market-logic society (44). In Foucault’s terminology, the free subject of advanced liberalism is one who has the capacity to “work on the self” in a way that takes advantage of the conditions of freedom in which this particular self operates. The responsibility for governing is now up to the subject him- or herself; each individual must take responsibility for his or her own actions; each individual should strive to see him- or herself “actualized” by these actions; and, more importantly, each individual should be willing to take the blame and suffer the consequences for his- or her own failures. C.B.

Macpherson's (1973) prediction that freedom, in modern, capitalist societies would soon be understood merely as "freedom of choice" seems to be bearing fruit (4-23).

From a disciplinary perspective, this puts considerable pressure on the subject to turn him- or herself into the right kind of person. If the subject is understood as an entrepreneur, the extent of that subject's freedom is measured by how well the subject can perform in the market-logic society. Those who succeed are held up as an example for those who are underperforming. Individuals who fall short of the mark are encouraged to have a long, hard talk with the board of directors in their heads—maybe do some downsizing or outsourcing if necessary. Of course, consultants are always available if needed, but unlike welfare liberalism that dominated much of the twentieth century, it is no longer the state who steps in to help those in need. Instead, there is a new army of experts, counselors, therapists, life-coaches, and tele-psychologists whose job is not to empower us, but to provide the tools and methods through which we can empower ourselves. Psychiatric discourse, once a primary player in early liberal techniques of domination (see Foucault, 1988a), has become democratized.<sup>92</sup> Forms of expertise once considered the sole domain of professional practitioners are now available at your local Border's or Barnes and Noble booksellers. Yes, freedom is measured by each individual's ability to choose freely and intelligently among the available options, but titles like *Get Out of Your Own Way: Overcoming Self-Defeating Behavior* and *The*

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<sup>92</sup> I will discuss this at length in Chapter 6.

*Self-Esteem Workbook* are there to help guide us through the difficult terrain of late-modern life.<sup>93</sup>

There are multiple characteristics that make up this advanced liberal mode of self-government: First, there is the aforementioned culture of therapeutics, best characterized by Rose (2002) as a set of “complex emotional, interpersonal, and organizational techniques by which the practices of everyday life can be organized according to the ethic of autonomous self-hood (90). These techniques now play a role in an increasingly large portion of modern life, constituting the parameters of the normal individual and influencing that individual’s decision making. Late-modern individuality is expressed not through one’s originality or individual pursuits, but by the fruits of one’s self-labor. What defines the subject of advanced liberalism, what qualifies it for this active sort of freedom, is his or her capacity to live up to the standards of conduct becoming the rational, autonomous, and entrepreneurial individual. Put simply, like all forms of liberal governmentality, advanced liberalism also depends on the process of normalization to govern the spaces of freedom, and these spaces can only be actively enjoyed by those who embrace the normalized ideal of what it means to be an individual. This does not mean that the norm is ever obtainable; it simply means that normality should be pursued if one is going to be considered a qualified subject of freedom. In advanced liberal society, success is the evidence that proves one’s qualification—failure, by definition, disqualifies.

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<sup>93</sup> I do not mean to claim that this “therapeutic” approach is bad, or even unhelpful. After all, it is the success stories that drive the market. The point is merely, like psychiatry and psychology generally, focusing on the individual as the ultimate source of his or her problems, ignores a wider set of social ills and basically accepts the condition of late modern society as is. For an overview of psychiatry’s role in individualizing social problems see Scheff (1975), Conrad (1992) and U’Ren (1997).

Barbara Cruikshank (1999) points out that the social therapeutics of empowerment also finds its way into political life enabling new “techniques of citizenship,” motivated by the “will to empower,” and aimed at “making individuals politically [or economically] active and capable of self-government (1-3). In this sense, the Jeffersonian roots of American democracy have been infiltrated by the language of psychiatric knowledge, and pop-psychology has replaced politics as the means through which a free society is realized. The qualified citizen is one who makes his or her way in the world and who masters those techniques of self. However, unlike its predecessors, this version of citizenship is not driven by a concern for common good or for democratic self-rule, but by a concern for the maximization of individual interests, the individual’s capacity to choose. This means that accepting one’s civic duty or social obligations no longer serves as the test for citizenship qualifications; instead, fitness for citizenship is revealed by demonstrating one’s worth in the market-logic-society. The successful entrepreneur of his- or herself, this logic goes, must be a responsible and qualified citizen: they have done all of the right things, made all of the wise choices, and used their own abilities to maximize their freedom.

This is the new normalized standard by which legitimate citizenship is judged. In a society defined in market terms, the successful are those who adopt those terms readily and demonstrate the capacity to act on this economic rationality. In this sense, the fact that the norms are not realizable means that pressure to govern oneself responsibly is always palpable; there is always something for even the most successful subjects to strive for. On this new field of socio-economic freedom, we all have the ability to become better players: we can always work harder to understand just who we are and what we

want to become. In a process that parallels the market belief that those truly cut out to be successful entrepreneurs will do everything they must to take advantage of their circumstances, advanced liberal social order perceives those most qualified for freedom to be evidenced by their ability to act on that freedom—those who are successful entrepreneurs of themselves must have earned it, and those who haven't earned it are evidenced by their lack of success.

### *Contemporary Liberal Techniques of Domination*

Advanced liberalism also uses this normalization process as a dividing practice aimed at differentiating qualified and legitimate subjects of freedom from the unqualified and illegitimate. The norm of active, entrepreneurial subjectivity makes it quite easy to differentiate the normal from abnormal and the norm of empowered citizenship enables a host of political practices that serve to reward the worthy while punishing the rest. Put simply, the normal subject of advanced liberal freedom has done his or her part, they have practiced self-empowerment and self-government; they have accepted the ethos of work and responsibility; and they have lived up to their obligations and active citizens. What they need now is to be protected from those who threaten that freedom.

The governmentality literature has given a lot of attention to the notion of risk in neo-liberal political orders, and it has given lengthy treatment to “insurance technology” as one of the ways of coming to terms with the risky nature of modern life. Insurance is a testament to the liberal faith that all facets of modern life are calculable, and that calculability means that they are manageable through what some have called “socialized actuarialism” or “welfarism” (O'Malley 1996, 1996), or those calculated acts of state



government, arising in the mid-twentieth century, that attempted to displace risk through government action, specifically social insurance technologies. The main sources of risk abatement were, of course, social welfare programs, unemployment insurance, social security insurance, etc. But growing old or losing our jobs is not the only thing that we moderns find risky. Other individuals sometime constitute a risk, and it is these “risky individuals” that pose a major threat to the orderly domain of liberal freedom (Rose, 1998b).

As my discussion of disciplinary technology in chapter 3 made clear, risky individuals have always been a problem for the liberal polity, and liberal governments have always developed rather brilliant ways of solving this problem; however, the advanced liberal approach to risk depends less on marking those delinquent identities and introducing them to the disciplinary machinery of punishment than it does attempting to calculate the possibility of risk and understanding a “combination of abstract *factors* which render more or less probable the occurrence of undesirable modes of behavior” (Castell 1991, 287). To engage in such calculations, it is necessary to start with assumptions about what constitutes the normal subject and understand what sorts of behaviors constitute its normality. By assuming an active, entrepreneurial model of normal subjectivity, advanced liberal rationalities of government can employ this model to figure out who is incapable of the sorts of self-government necessary to enjoy the freedoms available in late-modern societies. Another set of calculations can be used to determine what to do about these people. Advanced liberal calculations borrow from economics and behaviorism to assume a subject open to behavioral manipulation. It assumes the right transformation of the individual’s environment leads to right choices on

the part of the individual (Lemke, 2001; Gordon 1991, 43). In other words, using small acts of government, the conditions that lead to negative choices on the part of individuals can be altered and calculating individuals can then choose among a set of better choices, choices that will empower them rather than hold them back.

In other words, within the context of advanced liberalism, market based assumptions counter governmental attempts to control the “risk society.” As Pat O’Malley argues, neo- or advanced liberal governmentality uses a much different approach to risk than the welfare state version of liberalism that preceded it. Advanced liberalism’s approach to risk might be understood less as an “actuarialism” and more as a form “prudentialism;” it claims that individuals “should be prudent rather than rely on social securities” (196). Again, the entrepreneurial subject is one that accepts the reality of risk, in fact understands that taking risks is an important part of success, but the individual him or herself is responsible for managing that risk, for taking out the necessary private insurances, or for making the good decisions that subject him or her to the least amount of risk possible (197).

Again, the variant of advanced liberal governmentality advocated by David Brooks (and to a lesser extent George Bush) is instructive in understanding how these processes operate and what assumptions they operate under. If Brooks is taken seriously, the connection between the so called “culture war” and liberal political rationality becomes quite clear. The reason that culture has taken on such political importance for conservatives comes from the recognition (of which the left arguably remains ignorant) that “culture matters most;” this is where the real work of government is done: If government can influence the make-up of culture it can influence what forms of cultural

conduct become normalized. What conservatives realize is that “government can alter culture. It has done it in bad ways, and it can do it in good ways” (Brooks 2004, 37). Advanced liberal state action should be attempts at the former. It should provide the conditions under which individuals can be instilled with the proper values and make the proper choices—government should create a cultural environment where self-government is not only possible, but desirable.

But this mode of government also differentiates, marginalizes, and excludes; although it does so in a much more nuanced fashion. By assuming a self-sufficient and self-activating subject, advanced liberalism places the responsibility for self-government solely on the back of each individual. If the conditions for the appropriate practice of freedom are in place, there is only one place to lay the blame for failure to choose appropriately: the subject him or herself. In making this assumption, advanced liberal governmentality makes the ultimate distinction between “*active citizens* (capable of governing their own actions) and *targeted populations* (disadvantaged groups [and individuals] who require intervention)” (Dean 1999, 167). This approach extends the disciplinary gaze deeper into the government of conduct: It is no longer the abnormal action, delinquent transgression, or abject conduct that opens one up to constant surveillance. Instead, it is a political and mathematical calculation that defines one as risky. Concepts are operationalized, data is collected, numbers are run, and calculations are made regarding what groups and individuals are “at risk” of engaging in such behaviors so that preventative measures might be taken.

And what about those who refuse to accept such responsibilities, those deemed incapable of self-government? Advanced liberal governmentality, at least as it has

unfolded in the United States, is content to re-introduce them to the institutions of discipline, but it does so without the hope of Bentham and the eighteenth century prison reformers. The American variant of contemporary liberal governmentality has little tolerance for theories of reform when the undisciplined walk the streets constantly engaging in conduct that prove them incapable of self-government. The advanced liberal approach to those who remain undisciplined has thus far been to write them off, to build more prisons, to enforce stiffer penalties. Now more than ever, the majority of the incarcerated in the United States are there for what might be called “crimes of conduct,” crimes that certainly violate laws, but those laws that are derived from the law of the norm. By using the technologies for calculating risk discussed above, more recent rationalities of criminology turn their attention away from any attempt at reformation and correction and focus exclusively on “identifying and managing unruly groups” (Feeley and Simon 1992, 455). In doing so, the focus of the criminal justice system is aimed at behaviors and conduct thought to increase the potential for turning to a life of crime. Drug use, for instance, constitutes such a risky form of behavior, so much so that the American government has seen it fit to declare a war against them. Put simply, drug use becomes an important marker of risky populations, and by cracking down on drug offenses officials are able to get a handle on the extent of those risks, first through incarcerating offenders and then through paroling them into a world where their conduct is strictly regulated.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Feeley and Simon point out that in this new rationality of crime and punishment, parole no longer serves as an attempt to reintegrate the reformed convict into society but as a “cost effective way of managing”

Once again, market assumptions are emphasized in this approach to governing violators of liberal standards of conduct. Like all subjects of liberal governmentality, criminals are thought to be, at heart, rational actors who have the capacity to choose appropriately from the available options. Through an assessment of the criminal's tendency to continually make decisions that are detrimental to the rest of us, we can get a sense of the risk that a particular individual poses. This is not a theory of criminology aimed at rehabilitation or reformation; it does not embrace the behaviorist assumptions that suggest an individual's comportment might be altered. Instead, this approach to crime and punishment is aimed at protecting those who have demonstrated the ability to conduct themselves properly from those who have continually failed to do so and, therefore, pose a risk to the rest of us. Culminating in the late-twentieth century, advanced liberal criminal justice has been marked by the strict enforcement of severe sentences—those deemed the biggest threat are told, “three strikes and you’re out.” The aim here is to reach the inner-rational actor that exists within even the most hardened criminal. By taking the “just deserts” to sentencing, authorities assume that when “confronted by a clear punitive cost of committing a crime” and “unmuddied by the idea that sanction will somehow be softened by therapy or retraining” those with a tendency toward disruptive conduct “will be more likely to come down on the side of conformity” (O'Malley 1996, 198).

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individuals who can no longer be imprisoned but still pose a threat (457). For an overview of this transition in American punishment see Jonathan Simon (1993).

*Differentiated Freedom: Power and Subjectivity in Contemporary Liberalism*

So what does all this mean for freedom? After all, isn't the contemporary liberal preoccupation with creating conditions necessary for self-government a worthy one? Sure, if we accept freedom as a pre-given space absent relations of power. But as the disparate critics of liberal political theory have shown (Macpherson 1973 can serve as a representative), the purely negative definition of freedom as "freedom from" fails to hold up under close scrutiny. Faith alone cannot solidify the neutrality of Berlin's free "frontier." Fundamentally, what proponents of the negative conception of liberty fail to consider is the very thing that Foucault helps us understand: that the very activity of being free itself is dependent on specific sets of power relations. If power is considered as not merely repressive but also productive, then power, far from restricting freedom, seems play a vital role in empowering subjects with the capacity to act freely. Foucault understands freedom not as a space or a frontier, but as a socially and historically constituted practice or a specific action within a relationship of power (1984b, 245). In other words, freedom is the ability to act within "a field of possibilities in which several kinds of conduct, several ways of reacting and modes of behavior are available" (2000f, 342). By insisting primarily on the negative conception of freedom, practitioners of advanced liberal governmentality are ignorant (or choose to be ignorant) of the role power plays in enabling a subject's freedom to act in the world and to become an entrepreneur of his or herself. As Thomas Dumm (1995) points out, "our style [the late-modern liberal style] of being human hides the very fact that it is a style;" it claims to be ignorant of power's role in our capacity to call ourselves free, and it glosses over the role that politics plays in defining what it means to be free within any given socio-cultural

context. In doing so, it “essentializes freedom by de-emphasizing it as a practice;” it assumes that the space of freedom is apolitical, free from all relations of power and abstracted from the socio-historical forces that constitute it (15; see also Brown 1996, 6).

Of course, to think of freedom as a specific set of practices possible only within a given set of power relations does not mean that freedom cannot be restricted by power. Relations of power can always be asymmetrical, and the power of one can often be restricted by the actions of another. Foucault makes it clear that there are always attempts to “fix” power relations, to limit a subject’s capacity for acting by restricting the field of available possibilities, and these are rightfully called “states of domination” (1997d, 292). A Foucauldian conception of freedom as a practice suggests the possibility that practices of freedom, while enabling the entrepreneurial spirit of some subjects, can also produce dominating effects in the lives of others? Can one person’s ability to act freely, in effect, restrict another’s possible field of action? If so, how are advanced liberal practices of freedom structured in ways that are productive of dominating effects? Clarissa Rile Hayward explains how such relations of power and freedom play themselves out. Embracing Foucault’s conception of power and showing its usefulness in a more empirical context, she too takes on the negative conception of liberty and reveals that it is often “blind to the effects of power” (2000, 161).<sup>95</sup> In her attempt to

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<sup>95</sup> Hayward would probably challenge my claim that she is embracing Foucault’s conception of power. Hayward argues that she is actually pushing an investigation of power beyond Foucault, overcoming some of Foucault’s limitations. This illustrates my point, made in the introduction, that American political theory has been thus far ignorant of the governmentality literature. If I am right in interpreting Foucault’s later works, then Hayward is merely embracing Foucault. With that said, I think the language she gives us for discussing power and freedom is incredibly helpful, and in many ways, her investigation into the role of pedagogy in empowering some while marginalizing others is exactly the kind of political theory that I am attempting to endorse in this dissertation.

challenge the power-with-a-face approach to political theory, Hayward argues that the traditional power/freedom dichotomy is better thought of as a sort of continuum: At one extreme point there are actions that result in the “promotion of political freedom;” at the other actions that result in “a state of domination” (166). Here, a subject’s ability to adopt, embrace, or live up to a given set of social standards or boundaries has everything to do with where he or she falls along the continuous plane of political possibilities because each point along this continuum comes with its own set of barriers that the subject must overcome.

In more Foucauldian terms, it would seem, a particular subject’s abilities to maximize his or her freedom are often dependent on the barriers that stand between that subject and the ability to adopt any given standard of normality—the law of the norm seems to govern the possibility for liberal freedom as much as the Law itself. Berlin (2002) is helpful here, not because he somehow thinks his way out of the bind of negative freedom, but because he gives us an honest account of the role of norms of action have in providing for the possibility of freedom. Berlin recognizes that norms play a vital role in the liberal account of power/freedom, and he states quite explicitly that one’s ability to enjoy the protections offered by “invisible frontiers” rely on a normalized, socially constituted “conception of what it means to be a human being” (211). Specifically, advanced modern liberal political practices not only assume this norm to be operative, they play a vital role both constituting and enabling it. As Thomas Dumm has put it, both theories and practices that derive from a negative sense of freedom depend on the operation of the norm and rely on:



an operation that depends on separating majorities from minorities. It establishes heterotopias of deviance as a primary device for establishing neutrality as the norm, as the governing principle for all in a liberal social order. The work of the normal gives a solidity to agents that they otherwise would not have by distributing in them in space around a predefined norm. The ideal of the normal enables its agents not to question the ground of their self-existence as political beings. Normalcy . . . enables all sorts of practical exercises of power that will shape and discipline selves into inviolable human beings (1996, 56).

Dumm seems to be saying that the assumption of the normal is productive of the naturalized space of political neutrality so important to liberal freedom, and if Foucault has persuaded us of anything, it is that the norm itself *is* a political construction, the product of various regimes of disciplinary and bio-political power/knowledge, not the least of which have been the psychiatric norms that are so influential in the therapeutics of empowerment discussed above.

So if freedom is dependent on a set of norms that define qualified subjectivity, citizenship, etc., taking Foucault's discussion seriously would imply that the very possibility of freedom itself is dependent on the process of normalization. Put more bluntly: A subject's ability to live his or her life freely rests entirely on how well that subject able to adopt the specific set of norms that govern the way freedom is practiced. But there is a catch here of course. As I've attempted to show throughout this dissertation, the production of the norm of liberal individuality also produces its byproduct—the abnormal or abject identity. If this is the case, then it seems one individual's qualification for freedom is dependent on the disqualification of a host of others. Freedom is an act of practicing normality, an approximation of the norm. However, in order for a subject to demonstrate his or her qualifications for practicing

freedom, it is necessary to produce another, disqualified version of subjectivity, that he or she might be measured against.

If we return to Hayward's (200) freedom/domination continuum, the picture begins to become clear. She is right to suggest that traditional theories of power are mistaken by their "definitional requirement that, to count as a mechanism of power, a social boundary be determined, chosen, or directed by an agent" who has something to gain or extract through the relationship (2000, 176). However, this does not mean that social boundaries are not predetermined, nor does it mean that actions aren't shaped by specific regimes of power/knowledge. What it means is that it is just difficult to point to specific actors or institutions responsible for shaping them predetermining boundaries and shaping actions. In this sense, domination is not the act of one specific group or class seeking to destroy, hold down, or marginalize another (although this certainly can happen). This also means that domination should be considered much more insidious than a simple power/freedom dichotomy might imply. Specific relations of domination, it seems, emanate from a source that is difficult to put our fingers on, a source that eludes many forms of social analysis. Because the effects of domination so often escape the language of blame or responsibility (could we actually locate the capitalist responsible for the extraction of my surplus labor?), those who benefit from current relation of freedom/power often are able to evade a sustained critique. And more insidiously, those techniques of government that work to sustain the present arrangement of power go unchallenged and remain depoliticized.

In the following chapter I will turn my attention to exactly how the ethos of work and responsibility operates as an important element of recent liberal government in the

United States, especially in the mid- to late-twentieth century. In doing so, I will consider how the work ethic has become normalized into the operational definitions of normality, freedom, and citizenship. The work ethic, it seems, remains one of the key practices that qualifies us for freedom in our contemporary liberal society; however, I argue, it now gets its power more from psychiatric knowledge than Protestant faith.

## Chapter 6

### **Techniques of American Governmentality: Toward a Genealogy of the Work Ethic**

In the introduction to this dissertation I claimed that what followed represented an important first step toward a genealogy of the American work ethic; the dissertation would establish the theoretical foundation on which a richer genealogy could be built. So far I have argued that Michel Foucault's notion of government, and the related concept of governmentality, can provide a useful heuristic for understanding how work governs both the self and others in late-modern, liberal societies. But to talk about the work ethic as a technique of government in this relatively abstract sense serves only a limited good. To understand the full-force of Foucault's critical ontology of liberal governmentality, it is necessary to show its utility. To quote Chuck Dyke's twist on Marx's thesis: "the philosophers have merely interpreted Foucault in various ways; the point is to use him" (1993, 101). In this chapter I would like to make an initial gesture in that direction, to move away from an abstract and erudite discussion of work in the history of liberal governmentality and consider how Foucault's "*boîtes à outils*" (1994, 720) might be useful for assessing our present condition. In this respect, this chapter provides an initial snapshot of what a genealogy of the American work ethic might look like. First I consider where such a project might begin as a way of introducing the dual nature of the American work ethic by focusing on its role in both the protestant and secular governmental origins the uniquely American identity. I then turn my attention to more recent history as a way of providing what might be considered a snapshot of my proposed genealogy. Considering the role of the work ethic in contemporary American

governmentality allows me to reveal how work still manages to operate as an important technique of government, both of ourselves and of others, especially through a psychiatric discourse that links disciplinary power with modern bio-politics.

***Where to Begin a Genealogy of the Work Ethic in America: A Brief Overview of a Work in Progress***

It would be hard to begin a genealogy of the American work ethic at an arbitrary starting point, although the scope of the project certainly makes that an attractive proposition. The truth is that by the time Bill Clinton and the Republican congress set out to scale back the welfare safety net in the middle nineteen-nineties the relationship between “personal responsibility and work opportunity” had been thoroughly solidified in the American psyche. In fact, it takes only a brief consideration of the role of the work ethic in the storied history of American governmentality to wonder how the Aid to Families with Dependent Children programs persisted for over a half a century. The ethos of work and responsibility, it seems, is a unique product of American liberal governmentality and derives from our embrace of secular-liberalism and Christian perfectionism. To do justice to the work ethic as a technique of American governmentality, then, would mean calling attention to both of these foundational moments, paying as much attention to our Protestant founding as to our constitutional one.

**The Protestant Founding**

As I explained in chapter 1, the salvation narrative has always been an important element in the affirmation of the American work ethic. It would be hard to ignore the

importance of the preaching of the early Protestant ministers and colonial leaders. In the words and acts of early “Americans” such as John Winthrop, John Cotton and Cotton Mather, it is easy to locate the same Protestant ethic in the form of “a calling” that Max Weber (1958) saw necessary to the evolution of capitalist economics. In Weber’s analysis the rise of the form of Puritanism embraced by the early colonists represents a quintessential moment in the rationalization of the Protestant ethic. Lutheranism and Calvinism laid the necessary groundwork; they provided the “psychological sanction” necessary for the rationalization of worldly activity to take place, but these traditions did not link this activity to rationality in any serious way. Puritanism made this connection by emphasizing a methodological orientation to worldly activity. It is not just labor, but specialized calculated labor that is important. For Luther, human beings are subject to divine will; their social station is the work of God, and “religious duty” is characterized by the “perseverance of the individual in the place and within the limits which God had assigned to him . . .” (160). However, for the Puritans, a much more “pragmatic” interpretation of this ethic appears where “the providential purpose of the division of labor is to be known by its fruits.” In Weber’s reading of this Puritan doctrine, there is little doubt that irregular work and unorganized living are ethically reprehensible. God judges the idle unfavorably, and irregular work too often results in an ethos of idleness. Idleness is unacceptable to the Puritans who believe that “a man without a calling . . . lacks the systematic, methodological character” necessary to be the true “worldly ascetic” (161). A “man without a calling”, it seems, is incapable of truly knowing God; “unwillingness to work is symptomatic of a lack of grace” (159).

The work of Cotton Mather is exemplary in this respect. Mather believed that it was the duty of every Christian to have a calling that would serve the glory of God, and he thought that prolonged idleness would bring about the “chains of death and of darkness” (Mather 1966, 9). In fact, he was quite specific on the fact that curing others of idleness is one of the good works that good Christians should embark on. Speaking of the duty of the good neighbor, he explains:

if there be any idle persons among [your neighbors], I beseech you, cure them of their *idleness*. Don't nourish 'em, and harden 'em in that; but find employment for them; but find employment for them. Find 'em work; set 'em to work; keep 'em to work. (60)

As Bernstein (1997) points out, Mather's Christian ethic of work and responsibility was unique because it arose in a time of increasing commercialization, especially in the urban centers of the new world (91). In Mather's writings there is increasing evidence of the “rationalization” process that Weber was trying to come to terms with. Throughout Mather's work, the ethos of work and responsibility—for so long preached from the pulpit—becomes more and more amenable to the growing culture of business and trade.<sup>96</sup> In his discussion of “rich men” in *Boifacius* Mather demonstrates little of the previous Protestant concern with wealth for wealth's sake. He merely stresses that those rich believers should be aware that those riches are, in fact, a gift from God to the deserving, and it is part of Christian duty to give a portion of these gifts back in charity (107).

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<sup>96</sup> As Bernstein point out, the earlier Cottons and other Protestant leaders, although they embraced the work ethic, were quite suspicious of business and financial success (88-90).

## The Liberal Founding

There is little doubt that the Protestant tradition plays an important role in the evolution of the American work ethic; however, the liberal tradition is equally important to understanding the work ethic as a technique of government in American life. As Herbert Applebaum has argued, work was the “universal badge of honor” among revolutionary era Americans (1992, 51). In fact, the American dependence on the work of the “common man” was one of the features that distinguished the colonists from the British and their leisure class of aristocrats, and after the revolution the “republican ideology extolled the virtues of an honest, hardworking citizenry (55). Benjamin Franklin, of course, is exemplary of this attitude among the American revolutionaries. Again as Weber (1958) pointed out, Franklin was among the first secular preachers of the work ethic, arguing that hard work was not only the key to a virtuous life but also to a successful business (50). He was, in short, “the consummate philosopher of the work ethic” (Applebaum, 398). Whether in the maxims published in his *Poor Richard’s Almanac*, his *Autobiography*, or his many other publications and correspondence, Franklin made his feelings about the value of work quite clear. In one of his early “plans of conduct,” Franklin saw the clever wisdom in “apply[ing] myself industriously to whatever business I take in hand . . . for industry and patience are the surest means of plenty” (Isaacson 2003, 37). Furthermore, in his advice to young tradesmen in the *Philadelphia Gazette*, first on his list of recommendations was: “endeavor to be perfect in whatever calling you are engaged in; and be assiduous in every part thereof; INDUSTRY being the natural means of acquiring wealth” (147). These few lines of Franklinian counsel reveal both the Protestant notion of a calling as well as the social contract theory



of property through labor. In fact, although he preceded both Bentham and Malthus by quite some time, Franklin reacted to the earliest English Poor Laws in a very similar fashion (217). Franklin had little sympathy for the poor if their poverty appeared to be of their own making. “Support of the poor,” he argued, should only be provided for if it comes as reward for work (158).<sup>97</sup>

Regardless of where we begin a discussion of the work ethic in “American” history, it is clear that the work ethic is a vital component of the values held sacred in the new nation, and the work ethic is also vital to the means of governing it. In the balance of this chapter, however, I wish to turn my attention to more recent American history and consider how the work ethic operates in *our* America—the America that has solidified both its pastoral and liberal traditions, while often forgetting the origins of both. The contemporary American work ethic grew up in a much different world than that of either Mather or Franklin, a world that emphasizes both scientific knowledge and global capitalism. Both the Protestant suspicion of wealth and the republican suspicion of scale have long since faded into the dark recesses of history. The modern work ethic is one that is all too often simply taken for granted; it is built into the normalized American identity. In the remainder of this chapter I take aim at a more specific moment in the history of American governmentality and concentrate on how the work ethic operates as a technique of government in the latter half of the twentieth-century and well into the twenty-first.

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<sup>97</sup> In fact, the notion that social welfare programs somehow increase the misery and length of poverty is a recurring theme throughout the history of liberal governmentality both in Europe and America. I will point out later in this chapter that it returns again in the twentieth century debates over “welfare,” especially Aid to Families with Dependent Children.

*Psychiatric Knowledge and Economic Freedom: Smuggling the Work Ethic into Scientific Discourse*

Lately, it seems easy to conclude that America is turning back to its pastoral roots as a large segment of the American people return to religion to give their lives definition. However, most of the twentieth century witnessed an America governed, not by the oft mentioned “moral values,” but rather by scientific knowledge and capitalist economic development. The contemporary American work ethic, it seems, is more a product of these two factors than a Protestant fundamentalism. For most of the twentieth-century America has been the technological and economic envy of the rest of the world; it represented the culmination of the modern project. As Foucault (1984b) saw it, the source of modern government, the truth about who we are, comes more from “scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it” (73) than from a set of spiritual beliefs. But that does not mean that modern American government has lost all of its pastoral characteristics or that it no longer governs through subtle technologies such as the work ethic; it only means that these pastoral roots of government are manifest differently.

If considered merely as the operation of ecclesiastical authorities and institutions, there is little doubt that pastoral power has lost much of its relevance in contemporary life; however, by the eighteenth century the individualizing characteristics of the pastoral regime transcended their religious foundations and engendered a “new distribution” and new organization” of this once uniquely religious “individualizing power” (Foucault 2000f, 334). Where the initial aim of these individualizing processes was a religious one— aimed at assuring individual salvation in the afterlife, the modern concern with individualism shifted the pastoral government of individuals toward a sort of salvation in

the present, toward improving the lives of all free citizens in a liberal society. Beginning in the eighteenth century, a variety of institutional regimes with a distinct mode of rationality took over from the formerly religious methods of government. As my discussions of both disciplinary and bio-power (chapters 3 and 4 respectively) revealed, among these various “tactics” of individuating power was the discourse of psychiatry (Foucault 2000f, 335). Like pastoral expertise, the various “‘psy’ disciplines . . . seek a knowledge of the individual and his or her inner existence, and require that the individual practices a form of self-renunciation (Dean 1999, 75).<sup>98</sup> Also, much like Protestant asceticism, psychiatry is concerned with variations of human conduct and makes judgments that privilege some forms of conduct over others. However, these norms are no longer based on spiritual authority; instead “norms of conduct for the civilized are now disseminated by the independent experts . . . seeking to allay the problems, anxieties and uncertainties engendered by the seemingly so perplexing conditions of our present” (Rose 1999, 87).

As psychiatric practice became more and more medicalized, it further concealed its social functions. The rise of the “antipsychiatry,” for instance, rested its fundamental critique of clinical psychiatry on the claim that psychiatry’s role was one of social control rather than social medicine (Szasz 1974, 1978; Laing 1969,1970; Sedgewick, 1982). A variety of other critics have made similar claims, arguing that “‘mental illness’ is to a large extent socially caused, or even socially constructed and suggesting that the goal of treatment is more about the maintenance of social order, rather than the relief of

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<sup>98</sup> For a richer discussion of how these disciplines function in the production of the modern, autonomous individual see Nikolas Rose, *Inventing Ourselves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood* (1998a).

suffering” (Ingleby 1983, 143). In fact, psychological categories themselves are thought to be “linked intimately to political assumptions about each person’s place in the social order” (181). More recent practitioners, as well, are quite critical about psychiatry’s role in transmitting social values and maintaining social stability. Some claim quite specifically that “psychiatry is required to be the agent of society while purporting to be the agent of the individual; and its main function is not treatment but social control” (Johnson 2000, 219). Psychiatric diagnosis is, at best, the imperfect science shot through with social assumptions; therefore, “to give someone a psychiatric diagnosis is not to make an objective medical assessment, but to pass a concealed social judgment on their behavior at the request of lay members of their culture” (221).<sup>99</sup>

Much more time could be spent considering the debates over social values in psychiatric discourse; in some cases the concerns of critics seem quite valid, in others more speculative. However, my purpose is not to criticize psychiatry per se. The purpose of this chapter is to consider psychiatry’s role in the transmission of one specific set of social values: the relationship between work and responsibility. As Horatio Fabrega and

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<sup>99</sup> The accuracy of psychiatric diagnosis is often the site of prolonged criticism of psychiatry’s presumed social function. More dismissive critiques, of course, argue that diagnosis is nothing but the extension of social judgments into the medical realm. Critics of labeling theory, for instance, are quite suspicious of the implications diagnosis has for the lives of patients. As Thomas Scheff points out, psychiatric medicine has a long way to go to catch up to the reliability of physical medicine. Many “researchers in the area of mental illness speak with assurance about diagnostic entities such as schizophrenia,” but, in fact, “the scientific basis for these classifications remains obscure at best” (1975, 14). Less forceful critics also cast suspicion on the diagnostic accuracy of psychiatry. The diagnostic bible, *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), engenders heated debate even among those convinced in the utility of psychiatry. These criteria, the critics point out, are too imperfect to be entirely useful, and still rely too heavily on preexisting social values. Even in the most recent editions of this manual, many complain that important criteria, such as behavior that deviates from social norms, is left undefined, as if every individual practitioner knows what it means (Clark 2002). Furthermore, for some diagnoses, it relies heavily on indicators such as “‘odd and eccentric’ and ‘anxious and fearful’” (Nuckolls 1998, 167).

Barbara Miller point out, “all medical systems are creations of social system,” and because of this it should not be surprising that “the creation of knowledge structures, nosologies, [and] treatment rationalities” that reflect the values of that system. The medical system is one of the ways that the “society attempts to prevent, control, and eliminate the disorders” that it sees within its ranks (1995, 881).<sup>100</sup> The related values of work and responsibility are among the most fundamental values to modern liberal democracies. The economic system of capitalism demands a work ethic (even if the only work available is at low wages with little chance of advancement), as does the liberal rhetoric of individualism that predicates the possibility of freedom on the ability to be a responsible subject.

Psychiatry, in all of its various historical incarnations, has played a vital role in transmitting these values and in the contemporary “psychiatric society” (Castel, Castel, and Lovell 1982) these connections show no sign of loosening. In fact, some might suggest the implications of this ethos of work and responsibility is far more dangerous in contemporary life because psychiatric knowledge, unlike the religious forms of knowledge that preceded it, purports to be value neutral and scientifically objective and “symptoms” of mental illness become “empty of their possible moral, political, economic, or social meanings (U’Ren 1997, 5).

In a the psychiatric society, what once appeared as social values become individualized as matters of personal responsibility Psychiatry relies on the medical

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<sup>100</sup> Fabrega and Miller make this argument when considering the emerging field of adolescent psychology. Surveying a number of cases of diagnosed “disorders” among adolescents, the researchers conclude that the sub-discipline of adolescent psychiatry might, in fact, be a product of the demands of the capitalist economy, not the least of which are the values of “independence, and autonomy” (890).

model of diagnosis which “decontextualizes social problems, and, collaterally, puts them under medical control” (Conrad 1992, 224). For instance, when it comes to the politics of poverty, contemporary Americans are loath to consider social or structural causes. Instead, it is the individual that is responsible for his or her social position. There is something wrong with this individual; he or she seems incapable of accepting the social values that are inherent to the rest of us, and if they drift too far toward an alternative set of values, “too far from dominant mainstream orientations [one of which is the work ethic] . . . then the likelihood is greatly increased that the label ‘crazy’ or psychotic will be applied” (Judd 1995, 46). Psychiatry and the values of capitalism overlap considerably on this question of work and responsibility. In the same way that the capitalism advances a credo of individual success and personal responsibility through hard work, the psychiatrist looks to the individual as the source of mental illness, and in doing so “serves to reinforce the ideology of capitalism, that success or failure—in work, in emotional life—is largely an individual matter” (U’Ren 1997, 6).<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> In psychology itself, this connection has serious implications. In some cases, it seems, class stereotypes can work to influence individual diagnosis. For instance, Hope Landrine (1992) shows that in multiple studies the values of work and responsibility influence psychiatric conclusions. She reports that one’s class position is often reflected in the process of diagnosing and labeling their mental illness, and that diagnoses of personality disorder especially “reflect the roles and role stereotypes of the status groups who tend to exhibit them,” and some individuals might be labeled with a disorder for status reasons alone (85). From her body of research she concludes, rather forcefully, that “diagnostic categories on one hand, and status categories on the other, are one and the same.” In other words, psychiatric diagnosis are one way of calling the poor good-for-nothing scum . . . but they are ways of calling people these things that denies doing so” (181) because the label is couched in the discourse of medical science. There are cases of this logic of being taken to its extreme. In Australia, for instance, one study reports that “there is a trend to stigmatize unemployed people” as mentally unstable or having mental disorders (Beder 2000, 167) and the government is now imposing a system of psychiatric testing on the “long term” unemployed (168).

<sup>101</sup> Although I do not explicitly discuss psychoanalysis in this paper, Freud, at least, makes his thoughts on the subject rather clear. Freud thought the work ethic fundamental to the normally functioning psyche. Coming to terms with our external lives, he explains, is much easier for those who have learned to “heighten the yield of pleasure from the sources of psychological and intellectual work” (1961, 29). He goes further explaining that “[n]o other technique for the conduct of life attaches the individual so firmly to

***Work and Domination: Techniques of Intervention in the Twentieth Century***

As I explained in chapter 3, from Foucault's point of view psychiatry began its life through an engagement with work ethic, specifically, with the lack of such an ethic in the chronically unemployed and unemployable. But it is important to update the story and to consider whether this relationship between psychiatric discourse and the work ethic continues, and if so, how it functions as a contemporary technique of domination. Critics of modern psychiatry have, for sometime, argued the affirmative to both these questions. "Psychiatry," one of the more famous of these detractors has explained, "is a social institution, incorporating the values and demands of its surrounding society" (Sedgwick 1982, 25), and the problem of mental health in our society is more appropriately understood as "simply the crisis of the normal social order in relation to any of its members who lack the wage-based ticket of entry into its place of commodities" (239). As a form of modern power/knowledge, psychiatry is dependent on cultural values for its authority. The work ethic, it appears, is one of the modern cultural artifacts that contemporary psychiatric discourse has embraced whole-heartedly.<sup>102</sup>

**Psychiatric Intervention in the World of the Worker**

In the United States of the early twentieth century, psychiatry turned its attention not to the chronically unemployed, but to the working population as psychiatric

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reality as laying an emphasis on work." Work is effective at "displacing a large amount of libidinal component, whether narcissistic, aggressive, or even erotic . . ." (30, n5). In fact, at the heart of his argument in *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud argues that "Eros and Ananke [Love and Necessity]" are the "parents of civilization." The expression of the former is self-explanatory; the latter is expressed through "the compulsion to work" (55).

practitioners became fixtures in the post-second industrial revolution workplace. What many firms realized was that it was not enough for individuals to simply embrace the work ethic, they must embrace the particular work that they are doing, especially in an economy built on unsatisfying and tedious occupations. Psychiatric discourse found an important home in the factory where it aimed at assisting individual workers, especially those in the most mundane professions, in their life struggles at work and at home. These new forms of “industrial psychiatry” shared psychiatry’s general concern with “[d]efective individuals,” but it attempted to locate these individuals on a “more important terrain . . . one which would seek to optimize the mental health of all individuals in relation to their work (Miller and Rose 1990, 21).<sup>103</sup>

Emerging in the United States in the early twentieth century, the new fields of “industrial” and “occupational” psychiatry” concentrated on the assumption that unemployment and poverty were primary causes of mental illness and keeping the worker successfully employed was an important initial step in preventing psychological problems.<sup>104</sup> In 1927 the *American Journal of Psychiatry* provided its readers with the first overview of this field and explained its role in society. In this initial review, Mandel Sherman (1927) reported that the role of Industrial Psychiatry is “first, to find the cause of an individual’s inability to do satisfactory work,” and then “to develop a suitable set of interests and incentives in every worker to forestall maladjustment” (702). With this in mind, doctors and clinicians intervened directly in the workplace in an attempt to figure

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<sup>103</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the various forms taken by the “psychiatry of everyday life” see the Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose (1985).

<sup>104</sup> For a history of these early industrial psychiatric movements see McLean (1993).



out what made workers work effectively and what made them contribute to a host of “problems” in the workplace. Among the earliest of these interventions, V.V. Anderson built on the assumptions of both the early industrial psychiatry and mental hygiene movements in his study of the R.H. Macy department store in New York City. Serving as Macy’s “director of Medical Research, Anderson attempted to put his finger on the causes of what he called “work failures” (1977, 8). Anderson’s cases included a variety of maladjusted workers usually referred to him by upper management, and although some cases of severe mental illness are evident, most of the complaints of supervisors were about people who demonstrated some form of behavior thought to be detrimental to the production process. Usually the “work failures” cited were those that seemed evidence of a lack of proper work ethic, i.e., things such as a “bad attitude,” “poor attendance record,” “day dreamer” or someone who “wastes time” (46). Within this setting, Anderson argued, the role of the industrial psychiatrist was to provide a “descriptive account of an employee’s behavior at work and adjustment to his present job.” Doing this meant interpreting the “social history” of the worker’s life at work including:

leading the individual to give an account of his first regular job, his attitude toward his work, the salary he received, the length of time employed at it, the reasons for leaving, the period of idleness before his next job, what its nature was, his mental attitude toward the work . . . the length of time he was employed at it, etc, etc. (11)

The answers workers gave to these sorts of questions, Anderson supposes, allowed for an accurate “diagnosis of the human factors in a failure” (47). In true psychiatric form Anderson argues, an accurate diagnosis that is vital to the treatment and, hopefully, the “prevention of a ‘work failure’” (48)

Although it is usually considered among the most important works of industrial sociology, the Hawthorne Experiments conducted by Elton Mayo and his colleagues drew heavily on the psychiatric and psychological assumptions of industrial psychiatry and the nascent mental hygiene movement in the most thoroughgoing attempt to “develop a science of work” (Gillespie 1991, 36). Building on the early century’s fascination with scientific discovery, these researchers set out to discover what makes workers work and to investigate the industrial workplace as if it were a social organization (Mayo 1933, 133). In their conclusion, Mayo and his contemporaries thought they had discovered the hidden elements that make the productive organization possible; however, they conveniently ignore the fact that they had built their conclusions on a rather spurious set of assumptions. As precursors to the Parsonian “structural-functionalism” that was to follow, these experiments rested on the implicit assumption that it was not the enforcement of the work ethic itself that led to psychopathology in the work place, but rather the conditions under which this ethic was enforced. If the proper motivating factors could be applied, then the natural tendency of the individual to work could be maximized. A manager could not simply force the worker to produce more; he had to inculcate within that worker a sense of organizational solidarity and convince the worker that he or she also benefits from a productive workforce. The human relations movement that arose out of Hawthorne rested on these assumptions, as well as the assumptions that workers should be docile members of a productive workforce led by the creative class of managers who can interpret the worker’s real interests (Gillespie, 268).

World War II further revealed a need for psychiatric practice in the context of the workplace, especially with respect to the instillation of the work ethic in workers

“unprepared” for work. The problem of increased demands for production, a shrinking labor pool, and the need to employ workers “not usually considered employable in factory work” transformed workplace concerns into psychiatric rather than “human engineering” matters (Committee on Psychiatry in Industry 1994, viii). By the time industrial or occupational psychiatry evolves into a mature sub-field of psychiatric discourse, the socio-cultural emphasis on the work ethic had become an underlying assumption informing normal science. It also realizes, in the socio-cultural milieu of late-capitalism, human beings are all too often defined by their work. With this recognition, industrial psychiatrists argued that if psychiatry is going to be concerned with the “whole person,” then it must also be concerned with what that person does at work, how they function, and how they cope. Put simply, psychiatric intervention in the workplace is a socio-economic necessity: It is social to the extent that it is an essential battleground in the prevention of mental illness; it is economic to the extent that there is a clear “risk to industry if psychiatrists are not involved” in the working lives of their employees (American Psychiatric Association Council on National Affairs, xi).

As these work related psychiatric discourses have blossomed into full-fledge disciplines, they have penetrated even more deeply into the American psyche, turning their attention—as well as their assumptions about the work ethic—not only to the work place itself, but also to the worker as a living being. Vocational psychiatry, for instance, arose out of this belief that the individual lives of workers were as important as the organization of the workplace. The modern industrial worker was a worker living in a uniquely American reality that was “dominated by the Protestant work ethic” where “work was man’s, and women’s, most important activity on 5 or 6 days of the week”

(Super 1983, 6). The Protestant nature of the American work ethic aside, a host of researchers in this field set out to establish the importance of an ethic of work to variables such as morale, motivation, job satisfaction, commitment, and the willingness to work longer hours (Korman, Mahler, and Omran 1983, 185).<sup>105</sup> One particular study concludes that recent American history has witnessed an evolution in the work ethic. Suggesting that the work ethic is an adaptive constant in American life, Korman, Mahler, and Omran argue that the complex economic reality of modern life demands multiple work ethics because “many of the varied jobs that need to get done . . . might never get done if we all” adopted the same ethic of work (202). Underlying all of these techniques of intervention in the working lives of Americans is the assumption that the work ethic is a natural characteristic of the psychological normality. The mentally ill worker, whether suffering from personal, emotional, or behavioral problems, is a worker who is not embracing the work ethic as a vital part of his or her identity and because of this he or she poses a threat to the productivity of the company. Rarely is attention given to how work in late-modern capitalism might cause both minor and severe psychological disorders; instead, work and the ethic that embraces it are accepted as foundational aspects of late-modern life.<sup>106</sup> Psychological disorders are considered individual disorders, disorders that, no doubt, distract the individual from ready acceptance of the political rationality of

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<sup>105</sup> The authors also provide a succinct overview of some of the studies of “work ethics” conducted by psychologists (183).

<sup>106</sup> For one attempt to consider the relationship between the evolution of capitalism and schizophrenia see Barrett (1988). Judd (1995) takes it a step further arguing that there is little difference between the values held dear in late-modern American life and the definition of the psychological normal individual. He finds “capitalism, liberalism, and the Protestant work ethic” particularly important to this definition (44).

economic liberalism and hinder their ability to engage in the proper economic practices of freedom discussed in the previous chapter.

### **Psychiatric Reenters the World of the Idle**

The early to middle twentieth-century saw an important proliferation in the social role of psychiatric knowledge in the United States, and those who did not seem to embrace the American work ethic were often targets of this expertise. One movement, especially, contributed to the social significance of psychiatry in this period and allowed practitioners to gain access to communities of “at risk” individuals previously thought off-limits. Building on the mental hygiene movement of the early century, community psychiatry was quite explicit in its concern with mental health as a social good, and relied on the expertise of the professional social worker as it worked to achieve its professed goal—the prevention of mental illness in American society. This gave psychiatric knowledge a reinvigorated level of social authority and alarming new latitude as psychiatric medicine “was freed of its dependence on disease and fired with a new ambition to intervene in the lives of the healthy” (Castel, Castel, and Lovell 1982, 36). Put simply this new charge to prevent mental illness, rather than simply cure or control it, “extended the influence of psychiatry into areas from which it remained excluded so long as its practice was confined to impregnable institutions” (172). Psychiatry was no longer a form of knowledge brought to bear only on those who, voluntarily or not, ended up in the psychiatric institutions. It was now a validated form of social medicine that only saw its influence grow with the rise of the welfare state.

As a validated form of social medicine, the role of community psychiatry was to prevent outbreaks of mental illness before they started, and to accomplish this goal, practitioners had to accurately target “at risk” populations, those demographic or geographic groups determined to be most susceptible to mental health problems. It should come as little surprise that the presence or absence of the work ethic within a community was often an important marker for determining risk. Psychiatric professionals of this period saw a significant link between socio-economic position and mental illness and thought the best way to prevent the onset of mental illness was to bring mental health professionals into close contact with at risk individuals.<sup>107</sup> Poor communities were often targeted as the first line of defense against mental illness, and social welfare agencies who dealt most closely with these communities incorporated psychiatric knowledge into their practices. Social work and community treatment centers brought psychiatric truth into direct contact with poverty and often their mission was specifically to provide assistance to those members of society who, evidenced by their poverty or unemployment, could not muster a sense of independence. Assistance to the poor was translated into psychiatric terms and dependent populations were given psychiatric labels with the belief that “psycho-medical techniques could be applied directly to the treatment of moral deficiencies.” The problem of idleness, considered since the Reformation to be a “moral deficiency,” was now thought to be the product of ‘psychological maladjustment’ or ‘emotional instability’” and psychiatric knowledge was now an important aspect of treatment (Castel, Castel, and Lovell 1982, 43).

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<sup>107</sup> For examples of studies linking mental illness to social class see Hollingsworth and Redlich (1958) and Dohrenwend and Nell (1969). For a concise list of studies of this type see Howard Rome (1966).

One product of this socialization of psychiatric knowledge was a rather radical transformation in what it meant to be a practitioner. The result of the Kennedy/Johnson “war on poverty” was a proliferation in the numbers of people who were authorized to intervene in the lives of the poor and underclass, and this often meant those authorizing social workers to intervene psychiatrically. One of the conclusions reached by government and community agencies was that it was much easier to teach social workers and other community members to be conversant in psychiatric knowledge than to teach professionally trained psychiatrists to deal directly with the poor. Because of this, a large group of paraprofessionals were trained in the intricacies of psychiatric knowledge. They were taught how to assess an individual’s mental health and diagnose disease, procuring professional intervention when possible, taking charge of the cure themselves when not. The rise of these paraprofessionals further increased the social role of psychiatric knowledge and increased the members of the community authorized to use it. Ranging from trained social workers, to mothers, and students, the army of new psychiatrists grew sharply throughout the 1960, and by 1973 one survey reported that “collectively, non-professionals are doing virtually everything that professionals do; they are also involved in new activities not heretofore considered part of MH (mental health) services” (cited in Gariner 1981, 136). By targeting unemployed populations, however, these practitioners were using the medical truth of psychiatry to impose a traditional set of values on those who were deemed to lack them.

*Techniques of the Working Self in Contemporary Liberalism: From Therapeutics to Self-Help*

In contemporary life psychiatry provides an essential tool for developing the “techniques of the self” that Foucault thought so essential to government. Psychiatric (and psychological) practices “elaborate complex emotional, interpersonal, and organizational techniques by which the practices of everyday life can be organized according to the ethic of autonomous selfhood.” In relation to the first set of techniques, psychiatric disciplines “operate through reshaping the practices of those who have authority over others” in ways that direct individual aims in “the most appropriate and productive fashions.” In relation to the second, they provide the individual with the tools to govern themselves appropriately; they “promulgate new ways of planning life and approaching predicaments, and disseminate new procedures for understanding oneself and acting upon oneself to overcome dissatisfaction, realize one’s potential, gain happiness, and achieve autonomy”(Rose 1999, 90).

Considering the role of the work ethic in the therapeutic society discussed in Chapter 5 helps elucidate how self-technologies of government function in advanced liberal societies. If one’s goal is to know oneself, to understand one’s own needs and desires, and to act on this knowledge, directing desires in ways that (apparently) culminate in that final moment of self-actualization or self-fulfillment, much like Protestantism’s democratization of Christian pastoral authority, therapeutic techniques of the self open up the expert knowledge of psychiatry and psychology to the common knowledge of the lay person. Likewise, much the same way that Protestantism embraced the work ethic as a form of exomologesis, as affirmation of one’s duties before God,



therapeutics embrace the work ethic as an affirmation of one's quest for self-actualization. For instance, self-esteem and self-empowerment movements often position the working life as a primary site of self-reflection. Recognizing that modern humans spend an increasing amount of their lives at work, our working lives are up for therapeutic interpretation and analysis; we are asked to work on ourselves while we're at work. The psycho-politics of work no longer divides us into:

productive or unproductive bodies or even normal or maladjusted workers. We are 'people at work' and we bring to work all of our fears, emotions, and desires, our sexuality and our pathology.

The activity of labor has become "transformed into a matter of self-actualization" (Rose 2002, 91), and "the government of work now passes through the psychological strivings of each and every individual for fulfillment" (Miller and Rose 1990, 27).<sup>108</sup> Regardless of the form taken by the psychiatry of work, there is little doubt that it plays a fundamental role in the worker's self understanding. As Peter Miller (1985) explains it, "the individual's relationship to employment and unemployment is one of the principle 'surfaces of emergence' of the modernized psychiatry of everyday life" (144).

Of course, this isn't an entirely new development. The explicit forms of workplace psychiatry discussed above contained within them a component of this self-therapeutic logic. The practitioner came into the workplace to treat the maladjusted worker, but for the well-adjusted there was an important lesson here: Work on yourself at work, so the company shrink doesn't have to. More recently, however, this message

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<sup>108</sup> I was about to give a conference paper drawing from this chapter what I thought was the brilliant title "Chicken Soup for the Working Soul" when, browsing the library stacks, I realized that *Chicken Soup for the Working Soul* already exists.

about work and self-work has become more explicit the bookshelves have become overburdened with tomes bent on helping us help ourselves. As early as nineteen eighty-four books like Perry Pascarella's *The New Achievers* were making it clear that productivity is part of the human experience and experiencing humanity fully means "to grow, to fight for significance, to distinguish ourselves from others" (6). Work, Pascarella argues, is the terrain on which this fight is carried out, and the fight can be won if we accept her three primary propositions: First, we need to recognize that the work ethic is alive and well and should be embraced at every opportunity. Second, we need to recognize that work itself can be a place where "positive values" are nurtured. Third, we need to understand the relationship of work to the fulfillment of the human experience (10). More lessons for managers than for individual workers, the early works on work as self-fulfillment<sup>109</sup> encouraged a "humanistic management" style that "begins with nurturing people's self-esteem and aims toward self-actualization" (139) and proposed an actualized workplace environment where "suppressed workers and frustrated managers will *come alive* when they see themselves as multidimensional creatures with unlimited potential" (192, emphasis mine).

More recent entries into this genre take a much more head-on approach to work and self-actualization from the worker's perspective. For example, Rayman (2001) sets

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<sup>109</sup> Barry Stein (1983) wrote a "briefing" published by the American Management Association touting what he called the "Quality of Work Life" (QWL) approach to management. Ludeman (1989) takes it one step further proposing the "heart works" approach to recapturing the work ethic. She suggests a new "Work Ethic" that "promises a high level of employee job satisfaction and productivity with the emphasis on 'W.E.' [Work Ethic] rather than 'I'" (20). More recently, Tim Anstett (1999) has outlined the "honorable work" approach, which includes making a "covenant with our [working] selves" and comes with its own set of acronyms such as STRIVE (Success Training in Vocal Expression). For a psychological study of what makes a self-actualizing work place see Fischman, et. al. (2004).

out on a quest to recapture dignity in the workplace, because dignity is vital for the self-actualized human being. Instead of three propositions, she offers “three pillars” of the dignified worker: First, there is the recognition that work provides the means to live—the obvious. Second, there is the appeal to make the workplace a place where self-respect can be achieved. Third, work should be a place where we can “make a difference,” a place where we can be socially responsible (22). The second two of these “pillars” are the more interesting from the therapeutic perspective, because it is in our search for self-respect and sense of purpose that we take important steps toward self-actualization. Work, it seems, is a place where the modern individual can become the well-rounded person he or she has always wanted to be. Finding self-actualization, it seems, is as easy as finding a job that offers one a sense of self-worth and respect and allows one to make a contribution to the social world.

What is interesting about this approach is that it seems to correspond nicely with a recent trend in the service sector profession where everyone from car salespeople to retail workers rationalizes their rather mundane jobs as opportunities to serve the public. This rationalization can only make sense in the neo-liberal world of the citizen-as-consumer. Recalling the discussion of therapeutics in the previous chapter, it appears that our approach to work is an important facet of working on our selves: We are defined by what we do and how we do it, and a fulfilled life at work is a vital component of the fulfilled life per se. As Maylor et. al (1996) explain, work is an important site of the process they call “soul-crafting,” a process that recognizes that “we not only possess the ability to bestow meaning on our work, we have the responsibility to do so,” because “the responsibility for crafting our soul is inescapable” (208).

*Empowering the Work Ethic: Technologies of Government in the Advanced Liberal World*

For non-workers, there is an element of intervention in this therapeutic process; however, the nature of this intervention has changed dramatically from earlier forms: Intervention in the lives of the poor is now considered more an act of empowering, helping those who wish to help themselves. Like the sorts of active government endorsed by David Brooks that I discussed in Chapter 5, intervention in the lives of the poor and unemployed is often aimed at helping them help themselves—giving them a “hand up rather than a hand out.” Relying on what Barbara Cruikshank (1999) calls the “will to empower,” groups and agencies concerned with improving the lives of the poor engage in more subtle techniques of domination in order to teach the poor to engage in techniques of the self, techniques that, hopefully, provide the lessons necessary for changing their circumstances. Poverty must be known before it can be eradicated; therefore, seeking the knowledge about and constituting the subjectivity of poor people is vital if their interests are to be illuminated and acted upon. “Whether inspired by the market or by the promise of self-government and autonomy,” it is clear that “the object of empowerment is to act upon another’s interests and desires in order to conduct their actions toward an appropriate end” (69). These movements operate as a form of self-technology, what aimed at gaining “a specialized knowledge of how to esteem ourselves, how to estimate, calculate, measure, evaluate, discipline and judge ourselves” (89). Many of these technologies of self-esteem are specifically aimed at the lives of the “pathological.” In the eyes of welfare agents of empowerment, “welfare dependency, alcoholism, and teen pregnancy are pathologized and criminalized alongside violence, child abuse, and illegal

drug use.” Welfare recipients have not lived up to their obligations as responsible members of society and must be taught to conduct themselves in a socially appropriate manner. Once taught, however, success is then merely a product of self-discipline and self-empowerment, a constant bettering of the self. In the end, the possibility of maintaining this “state of self-esteem” is ultimately “founded upon the inner dialogue between the self and the self” (95).

Barbara Levy Simon (1994) describes this therapeutics of empowerment as fundamental to the evolution of social work in the twentieth-century United State: Since World War II, Simon explains, social workers have seen themselves as falling into one of four different roles—as nurturers, facilitators, mobilizers, or social reformers (153-85)—all of which are aimed at providing “customers” with the tools to “gain greater mastery over their everyday affairs” (153). Clients are also considered as agents of empowerment; “causal agents” who have the ability to empower themselves and determine “whether or not an issue in his or here life will be addressed, corrected, or resolved” (168). Also interpreted as “healers” of themselves or “survivors” of unforeseen circumstances with the power to activate their sense of self-determination, clients of social welfare program are increasingly being asked to take matters into their own hands and engage in the sorts of activities that will improve their situation (168-172).

This language of self-empowerment and personal responsibility has become increasingly important to the new language of citizenship that is presently dominating American political culture. Contemporary political life has become the domain of the actively engaged citizen—citizens as consumers of both public and private goods, citizens as free choosers, and citizens empowered by the acceptance of their obligations

under the social contract. No longer is the “political subject” a “social citizen with powers and obligations deriving from membership of a collective body” (Rose and Miller 1992, 201). Active citizenship is an act in which the individual becomes “an entrepreneur of him- or herself,” perceiving of the self as “a kind of enterprise, seeking to enhance and capitalize on existence itself through calculated act and investments” (Rose 2002, 164). In this version of citizenship, the only justification of government intervention in individual lives is to enhance the freedom of the individual by replacing passivity and dependency with activity and independence. A citizen’s public worth has become equivocated with his or her self-worth, and only the worthy are granted full access to the rewards of citizenship. The work ethic has always been an important attribute of the American citizen, but under this new logic of active, empowered citizenship, work takes on more significant meaning.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> See Judith Shklar (1991) *American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion*. The early American republic, Shklar points out, was unique in the sense that it expected its citizens to participate not only as “an equal member of the polity, a voter,” but also as an independent “‘earner,’ a free remunerated worker, one who is rewarded for the actual work he has done. Interestingly, Shklar considers the “Jacksonian” era as a turning point for the advancement of the “work ethic” version of American citizenship. Hard work was the proof that Americans were not like their aristocratic European counterparts. The work ethic was demanded of all citizens, it was incorporated into schoolhouse lessons, and “the link between work, democracy, and public education was forged into a coherent ideology, with its own history, policy, and sense of the future, 75.” David Rothman reveals that this period was also essential to the rise of a uniquely American version of psychiatric knowledge. For the Americans, confinement became invaluable to the establishment of the ideal society. These institutions “became the pride of the nation. A structure designed to join practicality to humanitarianism, reform the criminal, stabilize American society, and demonstrate how to improve the condition of mankind” that must be visible to society (79). Much like the European case that Foucault explains in *Madness and Civilization*, the American system of confinement marks a transformation in the approach to the new “economic” problem of poverty. In the eighteenth century, the American responses to the unfortunate members of the community were, for the most part, grounded in charity. In his examination of various approaches to early American poverty, Rothman concludes that “the colonial community typically cared for its dependents without disrupting their lives. Whenever possible, it supported members within their own families.” In fact, he claims, “only a handful of towns maintained an almshouse, and they used it as a last resort . . . workhouses were even less common in the colonies” (31). The antebellum approach was radically different: where the colonists accepted poverty as a normal fact of life, “their successors, perceiving dependency as abnormal, moved naturally and immediately to confront it.” Coupling their suspicion of poverty with the a “view that the poor were not full members of the

The work ethic is fundamental to this approach to citizenship: As Gale Miller (1991) explains, the willingness to work has become an important test of a person's qualification for social assistance. In her critical analysis of one of the Work Incentive Programs (which she referred to as WIN) that accompanied the erstwhile Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) welfare programs, Miller points out that the work ethic has an important role to play in every aspect of the work incentive process:

As it is expressed in WIN policies, the work ethic is based on the assumption that Otherwise morally worthy adults must sometimes turn to welfare to manage economic problems that are beyond their control. The policies portray such persons' welfare dependence as an unavoidable and short-term condition, not a freely chosen way of life. One purpose of WIN is to identify and eliminate clients who *have* chosen welfare dependence as a way of life. Thus, WIN policies also define morally worthy clients as persons who are committed to getting off of welfare and resuming their proper roles as the sole economic providers for themselves and their families. (36 emphasis mine)

In this approach to welfare, it is the presence of absence of the work ethic that determines a person's qualifications for assistance and, ultimately, for moral personhood itself, and this means that "local staff members are justified in withholding public aid to clients who are assessed as uncooperative," i.e., those whose lack of a work ethic reveals them as unworthy of the assistance provided to moral persons (37).

Nowhere was this new technology of citizenship more obvious than the welfare reform debates of the mid-nineteen nineties. Critics of the AFDC social insurance programs, for years, claimed that this system not only disempowered individuals by rewarding idleness, it also gave the poor a pass when it came to their obligations under

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community," the antebellum perspective on poverty "could not help breed distrust and suspicion," and, in the end, "he who had once been an accepted part of the community now became an odd and even menacing figure" who must confronted (161).

the social contract. Unlike the rest of us, the poor are not willing to pull their weight, and until they have changed their conduct, they should be denied rights of full citizenship.<sup>111</sup> This line of criticism became even more prevalent when the debate reached the halls of congress. Critics, in these debates, regularly employed a “contractual” definition of citizenship that relied heavily on defining the “workfare” alternative as a program aimed at empowering recipients to become active citizens. In simple terms, reformers argued, “if a poor person works for pay (or in the case of a woman, is supported by a man who works for pay) and behaves morally . . . then that person will be granted full rights of citizenship.” Conversely, “if a poor person does *not* work, or does *not* conform to the moral standard, then he or she will not be granted the respect or rights that the other citizens enjoy” (Sparks 2000, 190). Nowhere is this logic more on display than in the words of congress members themselves, as they conducted hearing after hearing aimed on revealing the failure of the AFDC system and the importance of work and responsibility to legitimate citizenship. Then Senator John Ashcroft, for instance, relied exclusively on this line of reasoning when he argued that welfare recipients utilized the benefits they received to “abdicate,” “run from” and “hide from,” their “responsibility as a citizen” (in Sparks 2000, 190). Welfare recipients were not active citizens because they were not active workers; work is the key to empowerment, to making one’s life better, to getting unruly government power off your back.

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<sup>111</sup> Some of the more contentious of these arguments are Lawrence Mead (1986) *Beyond Entitlement: The Social Obligations of Citizenship* and Charles Murray (1984) *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980*. Mead for instance, argues that the unique privileges of American citizenship come complete with a set of “common obligations” primary among which are “work in available jobs” and “learning enough in school to be employable” (242). Individuals who do not meet this competence test for citizenship, the argument goes, should be disqualified from receiving public assistance because, ultimately, “a substantial class of nonworking adults violates the American idea of equality” (240).



As these debates reveal, the language of work and the language of citizenship have become infused with the discourse of psychiatry; they are the categories of self-knowledge and self-interpretation, self-fulfillment and self-correction, that have, in recent years, culminated the “final dominance of psychological principle of work over the economic principle” (Miller 176). Work is no longer merely a productive activity, contributing to the wealth of the nation; instead, it is form of self –therapy helping to complete us, making us whole.<sup>112</sup> One of Phil Graham’s contributions to the welfare reform debate reflects this position: Echoing the perspective of Franklin, Bentham, and Malthus, Graham argues that AFDC programs only succeed in making poor people “more dependent,” on the state because they, ultimately, “take[s] away their initiative and denie[s] them access to the American dream.” Ultimately, “because, as people have turned more and more to Government to take care of them, to fix their every mistake, they have turned away from self-reliance, turned away from their family, and turned away from their faith in themselves” (141 Cong Rec S 11735 ). Getting rid of welfare, or at least demanding recipients to work for benefits, is not just a measure of fiscal responsibility, not just an insistence on “common obligations” of citizenship. A workfare approach to welfare reform also appears to be an important first step toward self-actualization. It is government intervention as individual therapy as “mental health as a goal for all has been welded together with work for all as an objective of society” (Miller 176). The role of government in contemporary society is to create the conditions of “equal opportunity” for all to act on their own empowerment, to provide citizens with the

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<sup>112</sup> For an overview of the interventionist role of counseling psychology after the implementation of TANF, see Edwards, Rachal, and Dixon 1999.

tools to conduct their own conduct “in the service of the maximization of a version of their happiness and fulfillment that they take to be their own.” Of course, this is a form of conduct that “entails a relation to authority at the very moment it pronounces itself to be an outcome of free choice” (Rose 1996, 58).

### *The Work Ethic and Advanced Liberal Governmentality*

This is the reality of advanced liberalism: The subject of liberal freedom is governed either through a therapeutic form of self-engagement or by forms of expert intervention whose aim is to teach subjects how to engage themselves properly. Not surprisingly, this focus on techniques of self-government corresponds quite well to neo-liberal economic rationality as well as the traditional liberal rhetoric of individualism. This contemporary rationality of government has commonalities with its ancestors as far as its reliance on the work ethic is concerned: it insists on an individual engagement with the work ethic as one of the foundation stones of liberal citizenship. However, it is unique in the ways that it uses the work ethic to determine a subject’s fitness for freedom. As I showed in Chapter 5, advanced liberal governmentality rests on a particular set of assumptions about what constitutes the realm of freedom, and it uses market-based, economic freedom as the final test; moreover, it believes this same market logic can be applied to all elements of social life. Practices of advanced liberal freedom are predicated on a subject’s ability to demonstrate his or her capacities and capabilities to act in an economically free manner—as an entrepreneur of him or herself. It should come as no surprise that in a society that is thought to operate analogous to the free market, the work ethic—which is so important to a functioning market— should play a

fundamental role in determining whether or not a particular individual is deemed qualified for freedom. Those who reveal their fitness for freedom through their willingness to work and their subsequent ability to turn this work ethic into a success story are the beneficiaries of advanced liberal social policies. Hard work and personal responsibility are the operative catch words of the advanced liberal age: Translated through the *lingua franca* of the psychiatric discourse of empowerment, these catch words provide the initial vocabulary with which contemporary Horatio Alger stories can be written.

So what happens to those who are unwilling or unable to embrace such an ethic or adopt the appropriate conduct and, therefore, remain unreachable? Contemporary liberal governmentality has given a label to these people: they are the “underclass”, that group of degenerates who continually demonstrate a “willingness to flout the traditional norms of what society considers acceptable behavior” (Kelso 1994, 25). Primary among the forms of behavior in question here is what is usually considered a conscious rejection of the work ethic and the sense of responsibility that comes with it. Jon Simon (1993) has argued quite persuasively that the rise of the concept of an “underclass” has marked a return to an earlier liberal mentality of government, one where a refusal to accept the responsibility for practicing freedom appropriately places the abject subject within the ranks of the contemporary version of the “dangerous classes” (253). The notion of an underclass has become a widely accepted fact of contemporary life now that the

combatants have been ordered off the battlefield of the war on poverty.<sup>113</sup> This term is especially prevalent in reference to the urban, black population and usually comes with some notion of dangerousness implied. As William Julius Williams (1987) put it, in the urban context the category usually applies to “a heterogeneous grouping of inner-city families and individuals whose behavior contrasts sharply with mainstream America” (7). But the concept of an unworthy underclass is not only applied to inner-city black populations. Poor, usually rural, whites are often thought to suffer from many of the same afflictions: intrinsic laziness, unwillingness to work, and a predisposition towards crime and promiscuity. Often labeled under the epithet “white trash,” this class of white Americans, like their urban, black counter-parts, are marked out as the “white other” (Newitz and Wray 1997b, 168) in a way that “helps solidify for the middle and upper classes a sense of cultural and intellectual superiority (Newitz and Wray 1997a, 1).

If the nineteen-seventies were a time where welfare liberalism embraced attempts, such as Michael Harrington’s, to make the underclass visible, then “advanced” liberalism rests on an equally forceful attempt to make the underclass invisible. The concept of the underclass, Herbert Ganz (1995) points out has become a forceful weapon of mass destruction in the “war against the poor.” It is a useful “codeword that places some of the poor *under* society and implies that they are not or should not be *in* society;” it is at its core an attempt to exclude and disqualify large portions of the population from the benefits of neo-liberal, economic freedom “without saying so” (59). From a policy perspective, this makes perfect sense. Excluding the underclass from the ranks of the

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<sup>113</sup> For an overview on the concept of the underclass and the people categorized under this label see Auletta (1982); Lawson (1992); and Katz (1983).

Americans who matter is perfectly in line with the advanced liberal rationality of government discussed in chapter 5. In the first place, disregarding a large segment of the poor by blaming them for their own situation releases both the state and the rest of society from the responsibility to do something about poverty and it gives the state further resources to expand the economic freedom available to the rest of us through a reduced tax burden. It also allows the governmental experts to prove their own theories about welfare dependency: First; writing millions of people off from the ranks of the officially unemployed has the effect of showing a decline in the unemployment rate (101); second, labeling the uncooperative as undeserving of public assistance reduces the need for such programs and demonstrates that we can, after all, do without them. Put more starkly:

It is as if a decision has been made to abandon the up to one-third of the population . . . the preferred course of action is the reduction of state services and resources to the barest minimum which then in turn are made more difficult (and humiliating) to access. However, if the poor should cause trouble to the mainstream when they leave their ghettoized neighborhood and estates, then the state is more prepared and tooled up to intervene, with prisons and the criminal justice system at the forefront. (Jones and Novak 1999, 107)

This approach to criminal justice is one that Simons (1993) has called “the waste management model,” where the concern is no longer about correction or reform, but of utilizing the technologies of surveillance and discipline in an attempt to control and contain “risky” and objectionable behavior in an attempt to stop its effects from contaminating the good society.

But more important than policy aims, this disregarding of a large, impoverished portion of the American population helps to perpetuate the myth of classlessness and reinforce, in our collective psyche, the notion that we are all part of a great big middle;

there are no margins if we refuse to see them—and if we do become aware of their presence we can rest assured that they do not matter because “‘they,’ the poor, are not like us” (Jetter, Orleck, and Taylor 1995, 105). Reassuring ourselves of our own fitness for freedom, too often, depends on our ability to disregard the undeserving other:

We define ourselves as responsible, hard-working, and morally righteous. The have-nots threaten the haves, depriving or cheating us out of everything from our hard-earned tax dollars to our sense of decency and well-being. The poor assault the social body both morally and financially: They rip off the system and add an enormous burden of welfare and health costs to already strained state and federal governments. (106)

As this discussion reveals, the threat posed here is not necessarily a physical one, but is a threat to our freedom nonetheless. In the advanced liberal world where freedom has become defined essentially in the terms of the market economy these populations pose a fundamental threat to normal subject’s ability to demonstrate his or here entrepreneurial prowess. Within this new political rationality, the government’s major role is to ensure conditions in which the qualified might excel and maximize their comparative advantages. A government preoccupied with the plight of the impoverished detracts from this role and threatens the conditions under which the qualified are allowed to excel. After all, think of the honest, hard-working Americans who consistently demonstrate their qualifications for free citizenship. Why should they suffer because of others’ refusal to do so? Of course, more often than not, the conduct that this other refuses to engage in is work; it is the presence or absence of the work ethic that, for most of us, reveals whether or not a particular individual should be qualified or disqualified for the benefits of American citizenship.

## Conclusion

### *The Work Ethic: Not Bad . . . But Dangerous*

Imagine a world without government. Radical libertarians and anarchists often do. But if we consider the nature of government through a more Foucauldian set of lenses, then a world without government seems impossible or, at the very least, undesirable. After all, even those folks who offer the most persuasive critiques of the modern state still insist that each of us develop the capacity to govern ourselves, either through religious or some other set of ethical-moral commandments. Take work for instance, could we build a world without some sort of work ethic, without some sort of longing to produce or create? Would that world be worth inhabiting? Self-determination—a value revered by liberals, communitarians, and postmoderns alike—is dependent on work. Without some sort of ethic of work and responsibility we are doomed to live in a world of other-determination and dependency. Locke understood this, so did Rousseau, and Marx, and Weber, and Freud; the list could go on.

It was work that produced this dissertation, and it was often hard work that resulted in its completion. Like my mother, I accept the responsibilities that come with the work that I do, I step up to the plate, and I get my work done. However, I don't always do it quietly. Much like my father, I am cognizant of a life governed by work; however, I am more fortunate than he is: For the most part, I like my work. My work offers me some control, some sense of efficacy, some financial (and job) security. But I am still governed by work— sometimes too much. I put work before family and forget birthdays and anniversaries because I'm so caught up in *my* work.

This dissertation was not meant to argue against work, nor was it meant to imply that the work ethic shouldn't be an important element of the American identity. It *is* an important element, and to make a persuasive argument otherwise would be far too much work! Instead, this dissertation was meant only as first step in a critical diagnosis of a culture in which work plays this constitutive role. In this sense, I imagine this dissertation fulfilling three important diagnostic functions: First, I hope to provide a descriptive analysis of the role the work ethic plays in contemporary American liberalism. As I suggested in the introduction to this thesis, the work ethic still defines who we are and where we fit into the world around us; however, we rarely consider how the work ethic performs this function. Work simply defines us; we spend very little time considering how. By undertaking a sort of Foucauldian genealogy of the American work ethic, I hope I have at least started to reveal some of the ways that work works as a technology of liberal government. If the political rhetoric of our time rests on a uniquely free individual that can exist without government interfering in his or her life, then my discussion of the way that the work ethic governs is an early attempt to dispel this myth, to challenge the popular conception of freedom as "free from" government with the notion that government sneaks back into our lives in the places we least expect it. In doing so, I also hope that I have troubled the assumed naturalness of the work ethic. We might still wish to allow work to govern us; however, we should also be aware of how such techniques of government are used, not only to provide meaning to our lives, but also to marginalize and exclude others.

This brings me to the second function of this dissertation: a normative analysis of the work ethic as a technique of liberal government. Techniques of government are not



bad, but they are always dangerous. In the complex political terrain of late-modernity, we don't always choose how we are governed; however the nature of disciplinary and bio-political power often leads us to assume we do—and assumptions can be dangerous things. As I have argued above, the set of assumptions one person makes about the nature of freedom and the techniques necessary for achieving it are not universal; they are products of a set of practices that operate under the name freedom, and these practices are often predicated on a set of contextual assumptions about what it means to be free. And when we use these assumptions as standards of normality with which to judge others, they are productive of something quite different: a form of oppression that looks a lot like domination. It is necessary to understand freedom before we call ourselves free, and to understand freedom we must understand the multiple ways in which we are governed as well as the ways we govern others. This, I think, gets at the heart of the political project that can be inherited from Foucault: to understand our limits, so we might think beyond them. The first step down this road, it seems, is to understand the ways that we are governed so that we might govern ourselves differently and so we might cognizant of the ways that we govern others. In this respect, I imagine this dissertation as having much in common with the liberal tradition (although it ostensibly seems to be a critique of liberalism): Revealing something as taken-for-granted as the American work ethic as merely yet another form of government challenges the rhetoric of neo-liberal governmentality on its own terms and broadens our understanding of what it means to be governed. This could be considered part of a larger project that seeks to recapture the spirit of liberal critique. Following in the wake of liberals such as J.S. Mill, John Dewey, John Rawls, Will Kymlicka, Richard Rorty, and William Connolly, this dissertation

might be read as an attempt to critically engage one of the ways in which modern life is governed—sometimes even too much—and reveal that any technique of government at the same time opens up some fields of possibility and forecloses others.

The final function of this dissertation brings my discussion full-circle and reintroduces the concern with American class-identity. By insisting that the work ethic is a fundamental part of the normal individual and naturalizing this belief through the medico-scientific discourse of psychiatry (or the metaphysical discourse of Christianity), our liberal governing rationality effectively aligns the interests of the working class with that of the bourgeoisie. After all, we are all workers, aren't we? In the advanced liberal world, embracing the attributes of normality is necessary if we are to enjoy the benefits of liberal freedom. Because of this, our solidarity is going to be with those other groups of normal, even if they reside in an exclusive zip code or higher tax bracket. The working class and the bourgeois are often united through the fact that we have a common enemy—the non-working idle who have proven, time and time again, that they are incapable of living up to the expectations of normal personhood. In fact, it might be the case that the very notion that we are a nation without class necessitates the production of the *othered* America. In their insightful essay on “white trash” America, Newitz and Wray (1997b) point out that the American middle class is dependent on the exclusion of groups that can be “discarded, expelled, and disposed of” (169). If these groups were not effectively marginalized the entire “American myth of classlessness” would be exploded (169).

The work ethic, it seems, provides the ultimate test of our class; we use it to divide ourselves into the working middle-class and the non-working, undeserving other—

a distinction that defies the traditional version of class analysis. When coupled with the psychiatric individualization of abnormality, the work ethic operates as a governmental technique that displaces class politics and individualizes social problems: It is individual failures not market failures that cause poverty and inequality. The work ethic gives us all the hope that we can rise out of the conditions that we were born into and live a full, active life—and in those who fail in market-logic society; if we look hard enough we can see that they refuse to embrace the work ethic that has allowed the rest of us to become successful. Let me be clear, I do not mean to imply that the work ethic is the only thing that displaces class consciousness in the United States. However, I do think it provides an important first cut into the problem posed by the perception of classlessness. Not surprisingly, Foucault (1996) also recognized that the distinction between working and idle often served to override class politics; he suggested two possible solutions: First, of course, we could inculcate the idle with those “unquestionably bourgeois” values of work and responsibility (91). Second, we could begin to reveal that “this system of values being inculcated” are “a system of power, and instrument of power” that serve particular rationality of politics and benefit those who, within this rationality, are fortunate enough to live up to particular standards of normality (92). By providing an analysis of the work ethic as a technique of liberal government, I hope that I have taken a step in the latter direction. Granted, such an intellectual enterprise falls far short of a revolutionary practice; however, it does provide an initial discussion on which class analyses and politics might be reconstituted.

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#### Education

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#### Academic Appointments

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Instructor, Penn State University, Summer 2002

Graduate Assistant, Penn State 2000-2002

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#### Research and Teaching Interests

Modern and Contemporary Social and Political Thought (Critical Theory,

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#### Honors/Awards

Faculty Appreciation Award for Outstanding Teaching

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