

## Chapter 1

# Liberal government and techniques of the self

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Defining it in general as “the conduct of conduct”, Foucault presents government as a more or less methodical and rationally reflected “way of doing things”, or “art”, for acting on the actions of individuals, taken either singly or collectively, so as to shape, guide, correct and modify the ways in which they conduct themselves (Foucault 1988a).<sup>1</sup> Thus understood, the notion of government has a fairly wide sense and it may be helpful for what follows to pick out certain elements.<sup>2</sup>

First, government understood in this wide sense may refer to many different forms of “the conduct of conduct”, the particular objects, methods and scale of which will vary. For example, it may, as in the sixteenth century, refer to the government of oneself, to the government of souls and lives, to the government of a household, to the government of children, and to the government of the State by a prince (Foucault 1991). There may also be interconnections and continuities between these different forms of government and, in particular, between local and diverse forms of government existing at the level of interpersonal relations or institutions dispersed throughout society on the one hand, and political government as the exercise of a central, unified form of State sovereignty on the other, or between forms of government existing within micro-settings like the family or the school and the macropolitical activities of government directed towards individuals as members of a population, society or nation.

Secondly, the general idea of government is used by Foucault in a sense that is clearly in continuity with his analysis of power in *Discipline and punish* (Foucault 1977). On occasions Foucault refers to government as a way in which power is exercised over individuals. Government seems to be used as a synonym or preferred alternative for the use of power to identify a general field of analysis. Part of the word’s attractiveness to Foucault could well have been that it makes it more difficult to sustain a lurid “iron

“cage” type of interpretation of the analysis of disciplinary techniques. We may recall that government in general is understood as a way of acting to affect the way in which individuals *conduct themselves* (Foucault 1988a). All the same, Foucault’s analysis prior to the introduction of the idea of government does not sanction the illusion of what might be called “the all-powerfulness of power”. Part of the point of describing the disciplines as a technology of power is to distinguish them from the land of technologies that involve a simple and direct physical determination of their objects: as techniques of power, the disciplines presuppose the activity, agency or the freedom of those on whom they are exercised (Foucault 1982).

Government, though, is not merely a synonym that signals the extension of the analysis of power from the microphysical to the macropolitical or that corrects possible misunderstandings of an earlier use of the word power. For example, Foucault makes it clear that “technologies of domination”, like the disciplines, only ever constitute one side of the practical systems through which individuals are governed. Government, Foucault suggests, is a “contact point” where techniques of domination – or power – and *techniques of the self* “interact”, where “technologies of domination of individuals over one another have recourse to processes by which the individual acts upon himself and, conversely, . . . where techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion” (Foucault 1980).<sup>3</sup> We might say that whereas in *Discipline and punish* Foucault emphasized the subjectification of individuals through their subjection to techniques of power/domination, the perspective of government establishes an essential relationship between these and other techniques of the self in the subjectification of individuals.

I think that if one wants to analyze the genealogy of the subject in Western societies, one has to take into account not only techniques of domination, but also techniques of the self. Let’s say one has to take into account the interaction of these two types of techniques. (Foucault 1980)

Thus, within the perspective of government, the introduction of the idea of techniques of the self, of arts or aesthetics of existence, etc. seems to imply a loosening of the connection between subjectification and subjection. A loosening but not a severing of all connections, as should be clear from Foucault’s analysis of the relationships between particular practices of the self and relations of domination in ancient Greek and Roman societies (Foucault 1985, 1986).

Foucault speaks of the interactions of these two types of technique. There is no simple determination of techniques of the self (either of governed individuals or of those governing) by techniques of domination. Rather, in particular cases it may be that the latter are presupposed by, or are conditions for the possible existence of, the former. Moreover, the irreducibility of one to the other implies that their relationships and interactions are not necessarily always harmonious or mutually reinforcing. Hence, part at least of the interest in this field: if techniques of the self are more than the insubstantial complement or effect of technologies of domination, if they are not just another way of securing ends sought through technologies of domination, then the study of their interaction with these technologies would seem to be highly relevant to the ethical problems of *how* freedom can be practised.<sup>4</sup>

It is these interconnections, continuities and interactions between techniques of domination and techniques of the self that I want to begin to explore.

### Liberal government – old and new

Foucault adopts a distinctive approach towards the analysis of liberalism. This consists in analyzing it from the point of view of governmental reason, that is from the point of view of the rationality of political government as an activity rather than as an institution. On this view, liberalism is not a theory, an ideology, a juridical philosophy of individual freedom, or any particular set of policies adopted by a government. It is, says Foucault, a rationally reflected way of doing things that functions as the principle and method for the rationalization of governmental practices (Foucault 1989). Liberalism is described as a particular way in which the activity of government has been made both thinkable and practicable as an art. Above all, Foucault emphasizes the *critical* and *problematizing* character of liberalism. The point may be made clearer by crudely contrasting two different kinds of liberalism widely separated in time.

Foucault describes early, or “classical”, liberalism as emerging in relation to a problem of how a necessary market freedom can be reconciled with the unlimited exercise of a political sovereignty. This problem already implies a kind of criticism of a characteristic form of government in the early modern period – the “police state” associated with *raison d’état*. The assumption of *raison d’état* was that the State was able to have an adequate and detailed knowledge of what had to be governed – that is to

say, a knowledge of itself – on the basis of which it could act to direct and shape that reality in accordance with its, the State's, own interests; increasing its wealth and strength *vis-à-vis* other States, for example. According to Foucault, the decisive point of liberalism's critique of this view is its scepticism about the State and *its* reason, about the possibility of it, or of anyone, being able to know perfectly and in all its details the reality to be governed, and about its capacity to shape that reality at will on the basis on such a knowledge.

The Anglo-Scottish school of early liberalism sets limits to the State's capacity to know and act by situating it in relation to the reality of the market or of commercial exchanges, and more broadly of civil society, as quasi-natural domains with their own intrinsic dynamic and forms of self-regulation. On this view, interventions by the State in these domains are liable to produce effects that, as well as being different from those intended, are also likely to be positively harmful. Commercial exchanges will not produce the benefits demanded from them by the State unless the State secures the conditions necessary for them to be able to function freely and naturally to optimum effect. *Laissez-faire* is here both a limitation of the exercise of political sovereignty *vis-à-vis* the government of commercial exchanges, and a positive justification of market freedom on the grounds that the State will benefit more – will become richer and more powerful – by governing less.

Now for modern forms of liberalism – those generally referred to as neo-liberalism or as economic liberalism or economic rationalism – it is still a question of a critical reason concerning the limits of government in relation to the market. For the German school of *Ordoliberalen* that developed during and after the Second World War, and many of whose members played a significant role in the early years of the Federal German Republic, the problem is not one of how a space can be found within an existing State for a necessary market freedom, but of how to create a State on the basis of an economic freedom that will secure the State's legitimacy and self-limitation. The problem is especially marked by the experience of National Socialism. An essential part of the Ordo-liberal argument was historical and involved the claim that National Socialism was not some monstrous aberration but the quite inevitable outcome of a series of *anti-liberal* policies – national protectionism, the welfare policies of Bismarckian State socialism, wartime economic planning and management, and Keynesian interventionism. Each of these policies entails the other three in a vicious circle, the inevitable outcome of which is the kind of exorbitant growth in the State witnessed in National Socialist

Germany. In a sense, the Ordo-liberals argued somewhat like those who say that socialism has not failed because nowhere has it been truly practised. There has been, they suggest, a constant retreat from liberalism in the face of what were perceived to be its unpalatable consequences.

The Chicago school of economic liberalism, some of whom established strong contacts with members of the Ordo-liberal school just after the Second World War also functions as a criticism of the consequences of too much government. The historical references naturally differ from those of the Ordo-liberals, but in each case the general form of argument is very similar. What they have in common, putting it very crudely, is a question concerning the extent to which competitive, optimizing market relations and behaviour can serve as a principle not only for limiting governmental intervention, but also rationalizing government itself. Both are looking for a principle for rationalizing government by reference to an idea of the market. Where they differ from earlier forms of liberalism is that they do not regard the market as an existing quasi-natural reality situated in a kind of economic nature reserve space marked off, secured and supervised by the State. Rather, the market exists, and can only exist, under certain political, legal and institutional conditions that must be actively constructed by government.

This rough contrast between early and modern forms of liberalism can be continued in a related area that will return us to our main focus. Both forms of liberalism set out a schema of the relationship between government and the governed in which individuals are identified as, on the one hand, the *object* and target of governmental action and, on the other hand, as in some sense the necessary (voluntary) *partner* or accomplice of government.

For early liberalism, to govern properly involves pegging the principle for rationalizing governmental activity to the rationality of the free conduct of governed individuals themselves. That is to say, the rational conduct of government must be intrinsically linked to the natural, private-interest-motivated conduct of free, market exchanging individuals because the rationality of these individuals' conduct is, precisely, what enables the market to function optimally in accordance with its nature. Government cannot override the rational free conduct of governed individuals without destroying the basis of the effects it is seeking to produce (Burchell 1991). Of course, this is not the whole story and I will add to it below.

By contrast, for neo-liberalism, the rational principle for regulating and limiting governmental activity must be determined by reference to *artificially* arranged or contrived forms of the free, *entrepreneurial* and *competitive*

conduct of economic-rational individuals. Here again the rationality of government must be pegged to a form of the rational self-conduct of the governed themselves, but a form that is not so much a given of human nature as a consciously contrived style of conduct.

In neither case are we dealing with the simple application of a technical know-how of domination to individuals *qua* bodies with certain capacities, forces and aptitudes. In both cases the principle of government requires of the governed that they freely conduct themselves in a certain rational way, whether in the form of a “natural liberty”, as Adam Smith puts it (Smith 1976), or as a freedom that is an “artefact”, as Hayek puts it (Hayek 1979). In any case, it is a principle that requires the proper use of liberty. Individual freedom, in appropriate forms, is here a technical condition of rational government rather than the organizing value of a Utopian dream.

I must now expand on the very partial stories given in these two examples. For early liberalism, and here I am thinking especially of Anglo-Scottish early liberal thought, the individual to be governed is not only a rational, interest-motivated economic ego. He (and here the male pronoun is, for the most part, appropriate) is also, and equally naturally, a member of society and part of a biological population. Economic exchanges – private, individual, atomistic, egoistic – are seen as arising within a natural and historical milieu comprising a tissue of proximate, passionate ties, associations, affiliations, antagonisms, enmities and friendships, communitarian bonds and so on, which characterize *civil society* (or society, or the nation). Within this milieu a historical dynamic is identified that arises from, on the one hand, the fissiparous tendency of economic egoism that leads exchanging individuals to engage in an abstract form of activity involving relations with others that are indifferent to their membership of any particular society or nation and, on the other hand, the complex interplay of particular localized patterns of sociability, of allegiances and antagonisms. It is on the basis of this natural and historical dynamic society that there evolve spontaneous relationships of power, authority and subordination or, in other words, forms of the “self-government” of civil society.

It is in relation to this dynamic, historico-natural, both economic and non-economic domain that government as the exercise of nationally unified political sovereignty comes to define its tasks. Liberal governmental reason does not so much set out what in any particular case government policy should be, as define the essential problem-space of government, and define it in such a way as to make a definite art of government both

thinkable and practicable. Early liberalism determines the questions of *how* to govern in relation to an object-domain which is a kind of quasi-nature with its own specific self-regulating principles and dynamic. This natural domain is both what has to be governed and what government must produce or, at least, maintain in the optimum condition of what naturally it is. Civil society becomes at the same time both object and end of government.

Early liberalism, then, describes a problem-space of government. This problem-space is an open-ended space of real politico-technical invention, of a governmental constructivism. Liberalism sets limits to what government can know or do *vis-à-vis* a civil society that must none the less be governed even if, as in the most radical proposals, it is sometimes maintained that civil society or the nation is entirely capable of governing itself and does not require a State. Liberalism fixes the terms of the problem of how political sovereignty must be exercised: what relationship must political sovereignty establish with this quasi-natural reality over which it presides but with which it cannot do just what it likes? What is within and what outside of its competence? What techniques, what procedures, what regulations and laws enable this reality to function in accordance with its nature and to optimum effect in the production of wealth and the promotion of wellbeing? This general liberal problematic makes intelligible, as techniques of a liberal art of government, early liberal governmental experimentation, such as the legal instrumentalization and enframing by the State of diverse relations of authority-subordination that are considered to be naturally and spontaneously evolved forms of the self-government of civil society. It enables us to make sense of the construction of that characteristically hybrid domain the public and the private, of the utilization of private forms of power – the power of employers over the workplace and the conditions for efficient and well-ordered economic activity – for public ends – the good of society as a whole. It also helps us to make sense of the often privately conducted public campaigns aimed at the moralization and normalization of the population through practical systems situated at the interface of society and the State, private and public (medical, psychiatric, educational, philanthropic, social . . .).

Clearly, the assembled techniques that give shape to a distinctive liberal art of government are not reducible to the disciplines, although these may well be incorporated into the armoury of governmental techniques. In so far as these varied techniques are viewed from the point of view of a general liberal problematic, we can also see how they might interweave and link up with each other in mutually reinforcing series. In particular, they

frequently require and integrate within them ways in which individuals conduct themselves. That is to say, they involve governed individuals adopting particular practical relations to themselves in the exercise of their freedom in appropriate ways: the promotion in the governed population of specific techniques of the self around such questions as, for example, saving and providentialism, the acquisition of ways of performing roles like father or mother, the development of habits of cleanliness, sobriety, fidelity, self-improvement, responsibility and so on.

However, liberal government is far from being the perfect realization of an idea or doctrine called liberalism. The invention and assembly of particular techniques into an art of government might answer to the liberal definition of the problem of how to govern, but it takes place through particular attempts to resolve diverse local problems and difficulties, through the need to address unforeseen consequences or the effects of the "failure" of previous actions and under always uncertain conditions. It takes place in relation to problems the invented solutions to which may result in challenges to the liberal problematic itself. To that extent there is no necessarily adequate or perfect fit between the *form* of problematization characteristic of early liberalism, and the assemblage of governmental techniques and practices that construct the shape eventually taken by a *real* liberal art of government.

This lack of fit may take many forms. One seems frequently to recur and concerns the claim to superior competence made by real liberal governments. Liberal government is pre-eminently economic government in the dual sense of cheap government and government geared to securing the conditions for optimum economic performance. There is a sense in which the liberal rationality of government is necessarily pegged to the optimum performance of the economy at minimum economic and socio-political cost. And yet there are no universally agreed criteria for judging the success of government in this respect. This can give rise to what might seem to be a paradoxical situation where the conduct of government is rationalized and justified in terms of liberal principles of economic government, but where it is quite possible to argue that it is failing completely and causing poor economic performance at high socio-political cost. The paradox lies in the fact that this situation may not of itself result in a public rejection or disqualification of this style or art of government. It would seem that the relationship between governmental activities and the self-conduct of the governed takes hold within a space in which there can be considerable latitude *vis-à-vis* criteria for judging whether government has met the criteria advanced by itself for its capacity to govern.

Neo-liberalism similarly defines a general problematic or problem-space of governmental invention and experiment. Just as early liberalism did not mean that regulatory, legislative and creative governmental activity was rejected or abandoned, so too modern forms of neo-liberalism define positive tasks for a governmental activism. Here it becomes a question of constructing the legal, institutional and cultural conditions that will enable an artificial competitive game of entrepreneurial conduct to be played to best effect. For the Chicago economic liberals it is a question of extending a model of rational-economic conduct beyond the economy itself, of generalizing it as a principle for both limiting and rationalizing government activity. Government must work for the game of market competition and as a kind of enterprise itself, and new quasi-entrepreneurial and market models of action or practical systems must be invented for the conduct of individuals, groups and institutions within those areas of life hitherto seen as being either outside of or even antagonistic to the economic.

On the one hand, neo-liberalism argues that what we call society is the product of governmental intervention and has been given its modern shape by the system of social insurance, unemployment and welfare benefits, social work, State education and the whole panoply of "social" measures associated with the Welfare State. "Society", then, is an invention of government and, in the famous phrase, does not really exist. It further argues that this governmental apparatus has become an economically and socially costly obstacle to the economic performance upon which it depends and leads inexorably to an uncontrollable growth of the State. There is a clear sense in which neo-liberalism is anti-society just as it is opposed to excessive government. But, on the other hand, there is another sense in which one could describe neo-liberalism as promoting what might be called an autonomization of society through the invention and proliferation of new quasi-economic models of action for the independent conduct of its activities (Donzelot 1984, 1991a).

An example might clarify what I mean here. While the Conservative government in the UK is often presented as being engaged in a project of "rolling back the State", or as returning to a Victorian morality, it has none the less been very inventive in the models of action that it has constructed in different areas of social life, models of action that are based upon an idea of the (economic) "enterprise". In the area of education, for example, individual schools and other educational establishments are increasingly required to operate according to a kind of competitive "market" logic within an invented system of institutional forms and

practices. On the one hand, they function within a framework set by central government that involves, for example, the direct funding of schools by the State according to a national formula, a compulsory National Curriculum with the periodic testing of pupils, government approval of the system and conduct of school management that must conform to a complex body of legislation and ministerial orders, the compulsory publication of individual schools' examination results, and so forth. However, on the other hand, individual schools are required to function more and more as independently managed quasi-enterprises in competition with other schools. They are encouraged to strive to acquire a specific status or value within the "market" for school services. They have to promote themselves so as to attract more pupils of the right kind so that they can achieve better examination results so that they will continue to attract the right pupils from "parent-consumers" and so that they will obtain increased funding from the State and other private sources.

Now for a long time individual schools have had considerable autonomy in the UK system, but what we are seeing here is a new and different kind of autonomization according to a kind of economic or enterprise model of action that pursues a competitive logic. But this is still a technology of government. Here, as in other recent innovations in government, we can see again the formation of a shared problem-space in which different practical systems of government interconnect and link up with each other with a certain degree of consistency. One way in which this consistency might be described is, as I have suggested, the autonomization of society. Casual references to civil society are common today, often evoking a misplaced nostalgia. We should, I think, follow Foucault here and be a bit more nominalistic about terms like society or civil society or nation or community. Civil society was for early liberalism a kind of critical concept, an instrument of critique. It outlined the correlate or schema for a possible liberal art of government. During the course of the nineteenth century, and throughout the present century, it was fundamentally recast into what some call the social, or just society, by all those governmental techniques we associate with the Welfare State. Today, under the influence of what we are calling neo-liberalism, we are witnessing attempts to transform it again and to give it, if you like, the capacity to function autonomously by reshaping its characteristic model of action.

The neo-liberal problem-space describes a fertile but inherently uncertain and open-ended domain of politico-technical invention with different possible outcomes. One might want to say that the generalization of an

"enterprise form" to all forms of conduct – to the conduct of organizations hitherto seen as being non-economic, to the conduct of government and to the conduct of individuals themselves – constitutes the essential characteristic of this style of government: the promotion of an enterprise culture. But the concrete ways in which it is given a definite shape, both in and through governmental techniques, are extremely varied and uncertain as to their consequences and the forms of action they make possible on the part of both government and the governed. The forms of action constructed for schools, hospitals, general practitioners, housing estates, prisons and other social forms are new, invented, and clearly not a simple extension or reproduction of already existing economic forms of action. None the less, it does seem possible to detect a general consistency in these invented forms and in the style of government that has constructed them. Corresponding to this, it also seems to be the case that these forms encourage the governed to adopt a certain entrepreneurial form of practical relationship to themselves as a condition of their effectiveness and of the effectiveness of this form of government. A characteristic form of relationship that has developed throughout these new practical systems is what Jacques Donzelot (1991b) has called procedures of "contractual implication". This involves "offering" individuals and collectivities active involvement in action to resolve the kind of issues hitherto held to be the responsibility of authorized governmental agencies. However, the price of this involvement is that they must assume active responsibility for these activities, both for carrying them out and, of course, for their outcomes, and in so doing they are required to conduct themselves in accordance with the appropriate (or approved) model of action. This might be described as a new form of "responsibilization" corresponding to the new forms in which the governed are encouraged, freely and rationally, to conduct themselves.

As in the case of early liberalism, neo-liberalism seeks in its own ways the integration of the self-conduct of the governed into the practices of their government and the promotion of correspondingly appropriate forms of techniques of the self. Likewise, individuals may alter their relationship to themselves in their new relationships with government, without it being clear that the outcomes that are supposed to justify this rationality of government are in fact being achieved. And equally, they may not. Liberalism, particularly its modern versions, constructs a relationship between government and the governed that increasingly depends upon ways in which individuals are required to assume the status of being the subjects of their lives, upon the ways in which they fashion

themselves as certain kinds of subjects, upon the ways in which they practise their freedom. Government increasingly impinges upon individuals in their very individuality, in their practical relationships to themselves in the conduct of their lives; it concerns them at the very heart of themselves by making its rationality the condition of their active freedom. And to the extent that practices of the self are what give concrete shape to the exercise of freedom, that is to say, are what give a concrete form to *ethics*, there opens up a new, uncertain, often critical and unstable domain of relationships between politics and ethics, between the government of others and practices of the self.

### The ethics of intellectual work

I want now to suggest another type of continuity within Foucault's work that concerns the relationship between this kind of analysis and the ethics of intellectual work as a practice of self. There often appears to be a *motivating experience* for adopting the kind of approach that Foucault called the "history the present" that seems to me to involve the experience of not being a citizen of the community or republic of thought and action in which one nevertheless is unavoidably implicated or involved. It is an experience of being in a goldfish bowl in which one is obliged to live but in which it seems impossible to live, that is to think and act. An experience, then, in which what one is oneself is, precisely, in doubt. The experience is not at all just a matter of holding a different opinion from everyone else, but of finding oneself not knowing what or how to think. And this experience is one that involves, quite directly, the relations it is possible to enter into or maintain with others. And, of course, it involves the relations one has with practices of government.

This experience, I suggest, seems to call for a certain kind of criticism that, following Paul Veyne, might be called a *historico-transcendental criticism* (Veyne 1988). It calls, that is to say, for a kind of criticism by which our view from the inside of our goldfish bowl is made to appear as no more than the historically contingent effect of a kind of selective determination by a particular "outside" of practices. Foucault's work provides us with a number of splendid examples of "ways out" in relation to certain features of our goldfish bowl. His genealogies work in this way by revealing to us the (often quite recent) inventedness of our world. His descriptions enable us to discern the broken lines of the irregular contours of our goldfish bowl, of our present, taking shape in all their necessarily contingent

exteriority. We are witness through his works to a kind of operation of an "exteriorization" of the present "in" which we live, to a kind of operation that turns the present inside out. And afterwards we have to ask ourselves: where are we? who are we?

To understand this operation-experience, the notion of *problematization* might guide us. This notion refers to the historically conditioned emergence of new fields of experience. These new fields of experience involve new truth games, new ways of objectifying and speaking the truth about ourselves, and new ways in which we are able to be and required to be subjects in relation to new practices of government (Foucault 1988a, 1988b). But this notion also designates the activity of the historian of the present. The historian of the present *reproblematizes*, that is to say engages in an activity that dismantles the co-ordinates of his or her starting point and indicates the possibility of a different experience, of a change in his or her way of being a subject or in his or her relation to self – and so also, of a change of others' selves. This experience dictates that each particular work is an experiment the outcome of which cannot be known in advance, that it is an experience in which one risks oneself in the sense that one emerges from it transformed not only in what and how one thinks, but thereby in how one is or might possibly be.

What I am trying to suggest is that there is a continuity between the genealogical approach as a kind of historico-transcendental criticism of actuality and the ethic of intellectual work as a kind of *askesis*. Both involve a distinctive posture towards the present that I would characterize as *non-identitarian* and in which there is both an initial distance from ready-made identities or positions, and a subsequent effect of the undoing of these constituted standpoints. What I mean by this might be made clearer by consideration of two essentially connected aspects of the work of the historian of the present: a *concern for truth* and a *concern for existence*.

### The concern for truth

Notwithstanding some commentators' hasty conclusions drawn from Foucault's remark that his works are "fictions", it is safe to say that the historian of the present has too much concern for truth to endorse some kind of irrationalism or a sort of lazy peddling of alternative "narratives". Our rationality may well be associated with a number of intolerable and catastrophic realities, but this does not license a transfer of rights to irrationality. Precisely because nothing is more historical than truth, the historian of the present must have a concern for it, must be attentive to its different forms, must be curious about its real and possible

transformations, must be meticulous in describing the shapes it assumes, must be accurate in the accounts he or she gives of it and must be willing to be disturbed or even changed by it.

One way of approaching this concern for truth might be by way of the old question of value freedom. This theme implies that research must not be subservient to already-constituted value positions concerning what is good or bad. Previously held positions cannot dictate either the conclusions to be arrived at or the procedures of investigation adopted to determine what was or is the case. Of course, this does not mean that the genealogist does not have any values, nor that an ethical experience may not influence what is studied and the questions or problems addressed. But this ethical experience is determining to the extent that its *what* and its *how* are, precisely, problematic. Nor does value freedom mean that present ethical concerns do not influence the historian's themes (say, the historical forms of truth and subjectivity), perspectives (say, the point of view of *how* questions at the level of government and practices of the self), analytical procedures (say, the archaeology of forms of problematization and the genealogy of the practices that are the basis for problematizations) or domains of investigation (say, madness, health, criminality, sexuality, etc.).

Secondly, value freedom means, quite simply, respect for the usual demand of truthfulness, and conformity to the procedures and criteria for doing evidential adequacy, conceptual and argumentative coherence, descriptive accuracy, appropriateness of method to material and problem, consideration of the testimony and criticism of others, and so on. *But* this does not mean historians of the present are not free to invent or contrive new ways of saying the truth, to determine new kinds of evidence, to identify new relations between facts, to formulate new problems . . . in short, to introduce a new experience in relation to the truth. Indeed, recognition of the historicity of truth, of the historical contingency and arbitrariness of the ways in which we have spoken the truth about ourselves, would seem to oblige the historian of the present to formulate new problems, in new ways, with new methods, and in relation to new material.

The historian of the present's work disturbs existing ways of thinking and is relevant for contemporary concerns in a way that is *conditional upon its truth*. That is to say, its effect is an experience that involves an essential relation to truth. It produces – or invites – a modification of the historian's and others' relationship to truth through the problematization of what is given to us as necessary to think and do. It is at this level that it produces both its critical effect (making it more difficult for us to think and act

in accustomed ways) and its positive effect (clearing a space for the possibility of thinking and being otherwise, for a consideration of the conditions for a real transformation of what we are).

It is by modifying their own and others' relation to the present through a modification of their relation to truth that historians of the present “play their part”, reshaping the space of public debate, for example, by introducing a different way of asking questions and by inventing new rules for the game of truth in relation to which we conduct ourselves individually and collectively. This makes possible the introduction of new players into the game, the elaboration of new rules of the game, existing players finding new parts to play, new relationships between the players, and new stakes of the game. If democracy be thought of not as an essence but as an always modifiable practice of individual and collective self-constitution (as a practice of freedom as way of life), then the ethic here might be described as a democratic one.

### The concern for existence

Corresponding to the concern for truth there is also, I think, a concern for existence. As a historian of *truth*, the historian of the present knows that what at any given moment we are enjoined to think it is necessary to think, do and be, does not exhaust all the possibilities of existence or fix once and for all the limits of thought. Moreover, it is not a matter of indifference that, at any given moment, this, rather than some other form of existence prevails. After all, the historian's starting point is the non-necessity of what passes for necessary in our present. Historians of the present therefore have a concern for the *selectivity* of what exists as a covering over of what might exist. This gives genealogical analyses a kind of diagnostic value in the sense that, by plotting the historically contingent limits of present thought and action, attention is drawn to what might be called the costs of these limits: *what does it cost existence for its truth to be produced and affirmed in this way?* What is imposed on existence when our goldfish bowl is given this shape? What sorts of relationships with ourselves, others and the world does this way of speaking the truth presuppose, make possible and exclude? What other possibilities of existence are necessarily excluded, condemned, constrained, etc.?

Genealogical analyses do not enable us to fix a tariff of the costs of different modes of existence. But they do enable us to pose specific, concrete questions of evaluation. They make possible the elaboration of an ethics without any grounding in transcendent values. For example, at what cost is the truth of individuals spoken when, say, its condition and effect is their



efficient disciplinary subjection? Foucault's analysis of the disciplines shows how a way of speaking the truth of individuals was conditional upon practices that contributed to a significant increase in their real capacity to transform and produce things, acquire skills, develop forms of conduct or ways of acting, and so on. But it also shows how this was at the same time at the cost of an intensified and more efficient hold of power on their bodies and actions, of an intensification of relations of domination at the level of their individual existence. We do not need a tariff to ask whether an increase in our capabilities must necessarily be purchased at the price of our intensified subjection. Foucault's analysis enables us to ask questions about the necessity of the relation between capabilities and domination, and about the possibility of modifying this relation or of disengaging one from the other. And his analysis shows the complexity of the stakes involved in this question at the level of the reciprocal relations between truth, subjectivity, techniques of domination and techniques of the self.

I have said that this concern for truth and existence, along with the diagnostic notion of costs it makes possible, does not involve any final tariff. However, the questions raised here do have a normative orientation or mark out an ethical space. It seems to me that this kind of analysis does point in a certain direction: given that what exists does not exhaust the possibilities of existence, might not the cost of what exists be seen as a function of an assessment of the possibilities for individuals, either singly or collectively, to transform their goldfish bowls without falling back into another in which those possibilities are more narrowly and strictly constrained? Is not this, at least in part, what Foucault meant when he spoke of a permanent *agonism*: the endless task of finding different ways of establishing the play between regulation and openness, between constraint and possible transformation? Might not this concern for truth and existence be also a concern for freedom as requiring an endless exploration of the possibilities for the always-to-be-re-invented activity of individual and collective self-creation?

In conclusion, I would like to make just two remarks. First, it is obvious that histories of the present are not an adequate response to the challenges set to how we live by the development of a neo-liberal style in politics. Beyond an evaluation of the possible costs of neo-liberal government in the terms I have suggested, there is also the need to invent other possible practicable alternative forms of governing others and ourselves, the need for an equal effort of experimentation. Secondly, an interesting thing about some of the neo-liberal innovations in governmental methods is

that they are not all unambiguously "bad". Or, at least, it is by no means obvious that in every case they are clearly either better or worse than the methods they have replaced. We have not really begun to consider the complexity of the questions involved in the political evaluation of governmental techniques.

## Notes

1. This chapter combines material drawn from lectures given at the University of Technology Sydney, the University of Melbourne and Griffith University, Brisbane, and from an interview conducted by David Burchell (no relation) for *Australian Left Review*, while I was Visiting Scholar in the Faculty of Humanities at Griffith University from July to September 1992. The lecture and interview material has not been revised to any great extent. This accounts for the paucity of notes and detailed references. I would like to express my thanks to the Faculty of Humanities at Griffith, and in particular to Jeffrey Minson and Ian Hunter for providing such a welcoming and stimulating environment in which to work. I would also like to thank David McCallum, Paul Patton and Mitchell Dean for invaluable conversations and discussions and for insights and comments that would have improved the chapter if I had been able to incorporate them.
2. Much of the discussion in this chapter follows the lectures given by Foucault at the Collège de France in 1978 and 1979. Transcripts of the lectures have not yet been published, but cassette recordings can be consulted at the Bibliothèque du Saulchoir, Paris. Foucault's own course summaries have been published (Foucault 1989). A more detailed treatment of many of this chapter's themes can be found in Burchell (1991), Foucault (1991) and Gordon (1991).
3. I am not convinced that Foucault is always strictly consistent in his use of the words government and governmentality. Just as the introduction of the theme of government seems to produce a reconfiguring of the analysis of power, so too the introduction of the theme of techniques of the self seems to have a similar effect on the notion of government. Needless to say, it is not a question of the later analyses disqualifying the earlier but, as it were, of casting them in a new light.
4. Nikolas Rose (1993) is among the first to begin exploration of the domain of government and freedom in terms similar to those put forward here. My own thoughts are indebted to the stimulus given to them by his inaugural lecture at Goldsmiths College.

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## Chapter 2

# Governing “advanced” liberal democracies

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When feminists began to campaign under the slogan “the personal is the political”, they drew attention to fundamental flaws in modern political reason.<sup>1</sup> Politics had become identified, on the one hand, with the party and the programme and, on the other, with the question of who possesses power in the State, rather than the dynamics of power relations within the encounters that make up the everyday experience of individuals. One of the virtues of the analyses carried out by Michel Foucault and his co-workers has been to further problematize the forms of political reason that constituted this orthodoxy, to demonstrate the debility of the language that has captivated political philosophy and sociology for over a century, with its constitutive oppositions of State/civil society, domination/emancipation, public/private and the like. In the name of public and private security, life has been accorded a “social” dimension through a hybrid array of devices for the management of insecurity. In the name of national and individual prosperity, an “economic machine” has taken shape, which may have as its object an economy made up of enterprises competing in a market, but structures that domain through implanting modes of economic calculation, setting fiscal regimes and mandating techniques of financial regulation and accounting. In the name of public citizenship and private welfare, the family has been configured as a matrix for organizing domestic, conjugal and child-rearing arrangements and instrumentalizing wage labour and consumption. In the name of social and personal wellbeing, a complex apparatus of health and therapeutics has been assembled, concerned with the management of the individual and social body as a vital national resource, and the management of “problems of living”, made up of techniques of advice and guidance, medics, clinics, guides and counsellors.

The strategies of regulation that have made up our modern experience of “power” are thus assembled into complexes that connect up forces and